

All You Wanted to Know About Running a Teacher Workshop

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Abstract

This article provides suggestions for economics professors and other academic economists who may be interested in conducting economics workshops for K-12 teachers. The focus is on the mechanics of workshop planning, teacher recruitment, and workshop evaluation and follow-up. Suggestions about content and materials, format, location and refreshments, fees and stipends, sponsors, publicity, teacher recruitment strategies, and approaches to workshop evaluation are included.

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I. Introduction

Training the teachers who teach economics is an important mission. In 2011, 22 states required students to take an economics course as a high school graduation requirement (Council for Economic Education, 2011, p. 1). However, economics coursework requirements for precollege teachers vary greatly, and many teachers who are assigned to teach economics feel unprepared or underprepared to do so. This seemingly grim situation provides an opportunity for those with formal economics training, including economics professors and other academic economists, to help prepare K-12 teachers to better teach economics to their students. Because much teacher training takes place in workshops, this Educational Note addresses the mechanics of conducting workshops for economics teachers with a focus on workshop planning, recruiting, and evaluating.

II. Planning the Workshop

A. Content and Materials

Although it may seem that teachers should be interested in any aspect of economics presented by a knowledgeable person, bear in

mind that states have content standards and that teachers are often expected to teach content related to a prescribed curriculum. Teachers will be more likely to attend your workshop if they perceive that the content will help them to teach their courses(s). You can determine what content to include in an economics workshop for teachers by consulting the economics content standards for different courses in your state and by discussing content possibilities with a sample of prospective teachers or school district curriculum specialists.

Teachers will find your workshop more valuable if you give them lesson plans and other materials that will help them teach the required content. Actual demonstrations of lessons will help teachers see how the materials and content will work with their students. If you are not familiar with teaching materials that relate to your workshop content, exemplary teachers can likely help you identify relevant materials and also demonstrate sample lessons during the workshop. Teachers will be happy if they leave the workshop with new and exciting teaching ideas as well as with new knowledge. Be sure to give them time to share ideas and to interact with each other.

B. Format

Schedule your workshop eight to ten weeks in advance if possible. Consult school calendars to find dates and times convenient for teachers. Work with school district personnel, school principals, and classroom teachers to choose good dates and avoid conflicts. In some cases, if your workshop is sanctioned by a school district, you may be able to conduct it on an in-service day when teachers are released from school and earn district credit for attending. During the school year, if teachers cannot be released from classes for your workshop and depending on the amount of content you plan to deliver, you may wish to consider the following schedules:

- a half-day (3.5 hour) workshop on a Thursday evening from 3:30 to 7 PM, or
- a full-day (7-hour) workshop on a Saturday from 9 AM to 4 PM.

If you wish to offer your workshop during summer vacation, the first week after school lets out or the week before school starts often works well for teachers. To attract teachers who teach summer school, consider offering evening sessions (4–7 PM).

Teachers are often interested in receiving university credit for workshops, and you may want to look into this when planning the

workshop. Whether you can offer credit and how much may depend in part on the length of the workshop and the types of assignments and assessment you include. Frequently, 10 contact hours are required for one-quarter unit of university credit and 15 contact hours for one semester unit of credit. Set this up with the college or university well in advance. It can take time to get approval for offering course credit.

C. Location

In choosing a location, consider the driving time, availability of public transportation, and traveling distance for the teachers you would like to attend. A school site may be most convenient, although teachers may enjoy visiting a university. Sometimes local businesses or hotels will donate space as a public service gesture. In addition to space, consider whether you will be serving food and beverages and what equipment you need such as computers, projectors, and screens. Arrange to have a registration table and, if necessary, put up signs at building entrances directing teachers to the workshop room.

D. Charging Fees or Paying Stipends

There are different philosophies about charging registration fees for teacher workshops. If you need revenue to pay for materials and speakers, charging a fee may be necessary. Some workshop organizers charge a small fee (e.g., \$20) even if workshop expenses are covered by a grant or sponsor. Charging a fee may also connote value, because if something is free, there is the chance that it will not be considered worthwhile. Some workshop organizers have also found that charging a registration fee reduces the number of people who do not show up for the workshop after registering. Some experienced workshop organizers charge a registration fee but then return it to those who attend.

At the other end of the spectrum, if you have funds available to pay stipends to teachers to attend the workshop, this is likely to greatly increase attendance in evenings, on Saturdays, and during summer vacation. Although some may argue that your workshop should be so attractive that paying teachers to attend should not be necessary, paying even modest stipends of \$50 or \$100 can help to cover transportation expenses. This also shows teachers that you are respectful of the time commitment they are making outside of their regular work hours.

E. Sponsors

You may be able to find sponsors who can help pay for your workshop or make in-kind contributions. Consider looking for sponsors who may share an interest in your content focus. For example, banks may be interested in helping with workshops on financial literacy topics. Local businesses may be willing to contribute because of interests in promoting economic and financial literacy. Grants are sometimes available from organizations such as the Council for Economic Education for presenting specific materials. Government agencies sometimes offer grants that relate to teacher training. Local foundations, schools, and school districts may be able to make in-kind donations for the workshop. Restaurants may be willing to cater a breakfast or lunch.

F. Refreshments

Depending on the time of day of your workshop and on your venue, plan to serve appropriate refreshments. Workshop attendees appreciate being fed, and the refreshments need not be expensive. For a one-day workshop on a Saturday, for example, you may wish to schedule a continental breakfast, a morning coffee break, a box lunch, and an afternoon soda break. Casual buffets encourage teachers to mingle. If you have sponsorship from a hotel or restaurant, more formal meals may be served. It may also be possible to schedule a wine and cheese reception following an evening workshop.

G. Publicity

If you desire publicity for your workshop, consider inviting representatives from local newspapers or television stations to attend. Sending out a press release before the workshop describing why it will be newsworthy may encourage media attendance. If local businesses are sponsors, be sure to invite them to attend so they can see that their donations are making a difference.

III. Recruiting the Teachers

A. Who to Recruit

Your workshop content and materials will usually dictate which teachers you want to recruit. For example, if your content is related to the high school curriculum, then you want to focus on recruiting high school teachers, although middle school teachers sometimes

find high-school-level workshops valuable. Keep in mind that economics concepts are covered in social studies classes other than economics, such as history and government, so you probably do not want to limit your recruiting to economics teachers per se. Teachers of business education and family and consumer science are also often interested in economics workshops.

B. How to Recruit

If you have or can establish a relationship with school district personnel such as the social science coordinator, they may help you to advertise your workshop and to attract teachers. It is also relatively easy to develop email lists and mailing lists to invite teachers to attend directly. Using school websites, you may be able to target the names and email addresses of individual high school social studies teachers, for example. Contacting school principals and social studies department chairs and asking them to invite teachers may also be helpful. Sometimes local newspapers will run ads for you. If there is a local professional organization of, e.g., social studies teachers, it may be willing to contact teachers on your behalf.

C. Recruitment Flier

Developing an inviting and informative recruitment flier (to be sent by email, perhaps also via regular mail, and to be posted on a website) is critically important for both setting the tone for your workshop and for providing information. Will your workshop be fun, exciting, and active? Will it deliver current information from experts in the field and explain difficult-to-teach concepts? This is your chance to market your message. Depending on your recruitment strategy, try to send the flier at least six weeks in advance of the workshop and longer if possible, especially for workshops held during summer vacation. Sending a "save the date" notice in advance of the more detailed flier will also help teachers be able to plan to attend.

In terms of what to include on the flier, consider including the information listed below:

- Workshop title
- Targeted audience
- Date(s), location, and times
- Registration deadline (if any)

- Information about the instructor(s)
- Registration fee and how to pay (if applicable)
- Stipends and how they will be paid (if applicable)
- Course credit available and fee (if applicable)
- Benefits of attending
- Names of sponsoring organizations
- Registration form (to collect names, contact information, and teaching assignment)
- Information about where to return the registration form
- Information about travel and lodging arrangements (if applicable)
- Description of teaching materials to be distributed
- Description of content to be covered
- Workshop agenda including times

D. Registration Confirmation

Plan to acknowledge workshop registrations so that teachers know that a space is reserved for them. This confirmation can serve as a reminder to teachers of the date(s), times, and advantages of attending the workshop. It may also include maps, driving directions, and parking information. If spaces are still available, you could encourage those who have enrolled to invite their colleagues to enroll also.

IV. Evaluating the Workshop and After

Evaluating the effects of workshops is important. If you have outside sponsors, they will want a report on what was accomplished. Having evidence about the success of your workshop will help in planning future programs and in obtaining future funding. Standard workshop evaluation forms ask teachers to give an overall assessment of the workshop and to mention any strengths and suggestions for improvement. Reporting this information as well as the content covered, materials introduced, and attendance is informative. However, deeper questions involve changes in teacher knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as well as how these changes affect students.

Conducting a full study that involves pre- and post-testing of both teachers and students is desirable but often not possible. As a much simpler substitute, consider collecting pre- and post-workshop information from teachers. For example, say that you are conducting a workshop about teaching the role of government in a market

economy. As part of the on-site registration, ask teachers to rate their knowledge of relevant concepts before the workshop, as shown in the box below. The examples can easily be adapted to cover other concepts. By asking teachers to complete the rest of the evaluation form at the end of the workshop, you have some pre- and post-workshop data to show evaluators and supporters.

Workshop Evaluation Form		
Please rate your ability to teach about the following topics on a scale of 1–5 (with 1 being low and 5 being high).		
	Before today's workshop	After today's workshop
Property rights Economic functions of government Market failures Government failures Public goods		
What were the strengths or benefits of this workshop? How could this workshop have been improved? Would you recommend this workshop to other teachers? Any further suggestions or comments?		

As an experienced workshop organizer and presenter, my personal experience with evaluation forms such as the one above has been both informative and rewarding. Most teachers who choose to attend workshops do so to improve their ability to teach certain topics, and therefore the differences in recorded scores in the "before" and "after" columns are generally strong and positive, with an improvement of two numbers per topic being common. Even the few teachers who come to a workshop reporting that they are highly qualified to teach certain topics and, e.g., report a score of "4" in the "before" column will generally indicate improvement to a "5" after being introduced to new materials and lessons on relevant topics. Being able to show funders this evidence of the gains that teachers report can be most valuable if you plan to contact them again.

At the end of your workshop, offer each teacher a letter confirming their attendance that they may show to school district personnel. Teachers frequently request early confirmation of their workshop attendance if it will count for in-service or salary credit. An

easy way to address this is to have a supply of letters available that may then be signed and distributed at the workshop's conclusion. The letter may outline what was covered and accomplished, the number of contact hours, and credit earned (if applicable); it also can commend teachers for their work and dedication.

Your workshop can also provide an opportunity for teachers to network with one another in the future. Often there is only one economics teacher per school, so teachers are isolated from those with similar teaching assignments. Consider sending a joint email to workshop attendees after the workshop to facilitate the networking process. If media representatives do not attend the workshop and you would still like publicity, you may send out press releases after the workshop with pictures you have taken of participating teachers and presenters. Be sure to send thank-you notes to any sponsors or funders along with your evaluation report.

V. Closing Thoughts

Conducting a successful economics workshop can be a rewarding experience for both you and the teachers. As someone who has conducted many workshops for high school economics teachers who routinely ask for more workshops and report improvements on the evaluation forms, I believe that such workshops are time well spent. Making your workshop active, with a variety of materials and presenters, will keep teachers engaged and energized. If teachers leave with exciting new ideas ready for the classroom, they will find the workshop worthwhile and will be likely to sign up for your next workshop as well as to encourage their colleagues to do so also. Putting the effort into having a well-organized workshop with many benefits shows respect for teachers and for the hard work that they do. This, along with creating a positive, friendly environment, will set the background for getting across the important ideas in economics that you would like teachers to share with their students.

Reference

Council for Economic Education. 2012. *Survey of the States 2011: The State of Economic and Personal Finance Education in Our Nation's Schools*. <http://www.councilforeconed.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2011-Survey-of-the-States.pdf>.