

Creating a Training Coordinator Position

Bruce W. Kennedy, MS, RLATG

The critical need for high-quality staff training in laboratory animal facilities may lead to the creation of a separate staff position—that of training coordinator. The author offers a series of checklists for use in both defining and then filling such a position.

The management of a laboratory animal facility has become increasingly sophisticated from many perspectives. The responsibilities and obligations inherent in research procedures now place greater demands on the staff members, who require training to fulfill their many roles¹. In the past, training was just one more responsibility for members of the management staff. More recently, though, there has been a trend in laboratory animal facilities, whether large or small, to establish a specific position with the primary responsibility of conducting training activities. The individual in this position, here labeled “training coordinator,” works primarily with members of the staff who care for, use, and provide for the welfare of experimental animals, but in some instances may have duties related to the operations of the animal facility.

This article provides, in a checklist format, various sets of criteria to help in defining such a position. The lists can serve as tools for use by individuals in both laboratory animal management and human resources. Whether developing a position description for a new full-fledged training coordinator or revamping an existing position to have training incorporated as one of the job responsibilities, the user can adapt these tools as needed.

A good way to begin is to review recent job postings for training positions as seen in *Lab Animal*, *Contemporary Topics in Laboratory Animal Science*, and the LAWTE web page (<http://www.lawte.org>) to learn what other institutions are seeking. The individual, or individuals, in charge of filling the training coordinator position should also evaluate whether the aim is to select a member of existing staff to be the trainer—that is, taking advantage of the in-house talent of someone who possesses the animal skills but who needs teaching skills. Alternatively, will an experienced trainer be recruited and then taught about laboratory technology on the job? For those who are “figuring out which hat they wear”—that is, deciding whether to be a trainer, manager, or scientist—these assessments are critical in the creation of a training coordinator position. The role of training coordinator, as with other jobs in the industry, has thus far proved to be multifaceted and specific to the individual institution.

Evaluate and Identify Important Institution-Specific Criteria

It is important to determine whether there actually is a need to establish a training coordinator position.

Why is there a need to establish this training position? The answer should include—even go beyond—the institution’s requirements that are based on regulations and policies, humane care and use of laboratory animals, efficient and effective research efforts, production of valid data, and addressing the 3 Rs of Russel and Burch^{2,3} (*i.e.*, replacement, reduction, refinement).

- How many people in the institution need training?
- Are there enough trainees to justify the creation of a separate and distinct trainer position?
- Is there a need to centralize training efforts and records, and should this take place within the institution or across departments?

Kennedy is Facility Manager, Genetically Altered Mouse Facility, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125. Please send reprint requests to the author at the above address, or email: kennedyb@its.caltech.edu. This paper was originally presented as a workshop at the 4th conference of the Laboratory Animal Welfare and Training Exchange (LAWTE) held in St. Louis, MO, in August 2001.

- Will the training coordinator simply coordinate other training efforts or be actively involved in actually creating training modules and other materials?
- Would the training coordinator be considered to be a local “specialist” on laboratory animal issues and be available for that purpose?
- Would it be the the training coordinator’s responsibility to integrate new material and information pertaining to laboratory animal technology?

A Title for the Position

Many advertisements of positions in laboratory animal management specify training as one of the duties; for example, animal care supervisors and facility managers. These job titles, however, do not reveal clearly the training obligation and therefore could lead to a misunderstanding about job priorities. Thus, it is important to choose the position title with care, so as to leave no room for misunderstanding of its specific purpose and intent. As mentioned, this article will refer to the position to be created as “training coordinator.” Potentially more appropriate could be any of the following examples of titles used in recent job postings, each of which included training as an important component of the job description:

- Manager, Animal Welfare Unit and University Compliance
- IACUC Coordinator
- Compliance Officer
- Coordinator of Research Animal Standards and Staff Development
- Training Coordinator
- Safety and Training Coordinator
- Compliance/IACUC Coordinator
- Compliance Officer/Training Coordinator

Level of Institutional Support

Training is an investment. There are tangible costs to training in terms of salaries and materials, but a lack of training can be costly, as well, as seen when problems stemming from inadequate training arise. Thus, support for the training effort should come in the form of money, equipment, and time (for both trainer and trainee). The training may not measure up to its potential effectiveness if the following critical forms of support are lacking:

- A budget to fund training activities
- Ability to purchase training items (e.g., textbooks, workbooks, *in vitro* models, CD-ROMs)
- Training facilities (e.g., labs, audiovisual equipment, teaching rooms)
- Office and equipment space
- Time to attend and participate in training sessions
- Subscriptions to journals devoted to training and education
- Clerical assistance for tracking records, scheduling training sessions, processing paperwork, etc.
- Empowerment of the training coordinator in exercising

duties, particularly if those duties include aspects of safety or regulatory compliance

- Ability to provide feedback to management about additional training requirements

Supervisor of the Training Coordinator

Support for the training coordinator also comes from the individual or entity that supervises the position. In large part, the extent of independence and amount of direction the training coordinator receives will come from the supervisor. Listed next are some possible positions within the management scheme to whom the training coordinator might report:

- Facility manager
- Facility veterinarian
- Facility director
- Company CEO
- Faculty member or provost office in an academic setting
- Research director
- Department of instructional support
- Quality assurance unit
- Safety department
- Division or department chairperson (biology, comparative medicine, etc.)

Who Will Be Trained?

Training might be required only for those most directly involved in lab animal science, or it could extend to users and persons outside of the immediate realm of the facility. Thus, another important component of the training coordinator position description is identifying which individuals require training.

It is also important to remember that adults have different learning styles, compared to children^{4,5}. The term “andragogy” has been coined to address the adult learning process. Thus the position description should reflect the characteristics of those to be trained, such as educational background, level of responsibility, and motivation for learning (e.g., scientists with little time for traditional classroom training and entry-level animal care providers). Other personnel issues to address in training may be associated with the Americans with Disabilities Act or with English as a second language.

In sum, when creating a training coordinator position, users of these checklists should determine the scope of the audience to be trained. It may be helpful to review the following list of persons who could require training, and add any others:

- Animal care providers
- Cage-washing personnel
- Research technicians
- Veterinary and surgical technicians
- Students (undergraduates, MS and PhD students; veterinary or medical doctor candidates)
- Interns (especially undergraduate) and summer students
- Post-doctorates
- Visiting scientists

- Participants in internship programs
- IACUC members
- Administrative staff (*e.g.*, clerical, human resources)
- Physical plant personnel
- The general public through outreach programs

Responsibilities for the Training Coordinator

The choices made earlier will provide only a preliminary description of the training coordinator's job. Selections from the following list begin to provide the specific job requirements. In some instances, defining relative amounts of effort expected for each responsibility might be useful.

- Orienting new personnel
- Retraining existing personnel
- Identifying areas for training and developing appropriate curricula
- Developing educational items including computer network online modules, workshops, videos/CD-ROMs, and one-on-one training sessions
- Carrying out activities other than training in specific lab animal concerns such as safety, doing quality control checks, and approving animal study protocols
- Maintaining various kinds of animal records
- Maintaining individual and departmental training records, including those of renewal training and updating records
- IACUC-related duties, such as serving as the recording secretary
- Reviewing protocols, especially to evaluate and confirm whether those involved have had the appropriate training and experience
- Conducting compliance activities, such as carrying out inspections
- Functioning as liaison with regulatory agencies
- Troubleshooting processes and procedures resulting from training that is not effective
- Teaching classes as part of the academic setting, that is, as a regular instructor
- Arranging for seminars or workshops for the lab animal facility, researchers, or other entities
- Assisting in preparations for presentations at scientific meetings
- Contracting with outside groups to develop or provide training materials
- Building relationships with local institutions of higher education (*e.g.*, junior colleges, universities)
- Coordinating internships for students (*e.g.*, veterinary technology, biology, animal behavior) in the vivarium
- Using audiovisual aids and computers to present material
- Preparing course objectives and outlines, following curriculum guidelines set by various agencies and for various purposes
- Recruiting guest lecturers and presenters
- Preparing, administering, and correcting tests, and recording results
- Assigning lessons, correcting papers, and listening to oral presentations
- Teaching rules of conduct and maintaining a suitable learning environment in the classroom
- Evaluating student performance and discussing progress
- "Storyboarding" audiovisual training materials
- Keeping attendance records and preparing reports as required

Responsibilities Outside of the Realm of Lab Animal Training

Unless the hiring institution is fairly large, it is likely that the training coordinator could have job responsibilities that extend into other areas of the typical lab animal facility. This would be the case when the role of training coordinator is not a full-time endeavor. If so, the position description could include any of the following additional duties:

- Caring for animals
- Providing technical and research-oriented services
- Assisting with veterinary care
- Supervising others
- Serving in human resources issues including performance reviews and/or disciplinary actions
- Training on safety issues
- Conducting mock inspections and assessments

Experience Requirement

Experience for a position in laboratory animal training can embrace several disciplines. Among the criteria to consider are academic credentials, background in lab animal science, research experience, training and teaching skills, interpersonal skills, veterinary care, and exposure to various working environments. Management personnel may wish to add other criteria after evaluating the requirements, objectives, and expectations of their own institution.

As with any kind of position, there are pertinent areas of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are specifically associated with a training coordinator position. Many lie within the categories of personal achievements and the ability to work with personnel. This list summarizes many of those KSAs against which a potential training coordinator might be evaluated for having demonstrated background:

Number of years of related experience:

- Entry-level position
- Three to five years
- More than five years

Responsibilities Reflecting the Trainer Function

- Lecturing on academic subject matter (fact-based)
- Demonstrating techniques (hands-on)

Education and experience credentials:

- Nonscientific academic degree (BS, MS, or doctorate)
- Scientific degree (BS, MS, or doctorate)
- Coursework in education
- Teaching degree, such as a Masters in education
- Actual teaching credential
- Background in psychometrics (testing techniques)
- AALAS certification (at what level?)
- Veterinary health background (RVT, AHT, CHT, DVM/VMD)
- Animal background diversity (handling, species, techniques)

Work environment exposure:

- Academia (college or university)
- Government (state or federal)
- Military
- Industry and/or biotechnology, including Good Laboratory Practices or Good Manufacturing Processes
- Public or private firm

Training/teaching skills:

- Knowledge of instructional methods
- Knowledge of learning styles (verbal, aural, tactile), especially as applied to adult learners
- Capability to guide “students” in the learning process
- Ability to present subject matter effectively on a group or individual basis
- Possession of public contact (speaking) skills
- Familiarity with “classroom” management skills
- Ability to keep accurate records of the progress of each student, as necessary
- Ability to counsel and advise staff when they are students or trainees
- Possession of problem-solving skills specific to training

Communication experience:

- Demonstrated previous training and teaching experience
- Record of presentations before classrooms, seminars, workshops, professional meetings, etc.
- Speaking ability
- Writing ability
- Publications record
- Submission of samples of written and/or oral training presentations
- Computer literacy (software packages like Microsoft PowerPoint®, database management, web page development, personal computer or Apple platforms)
- Knowledge of computer-based training

Personal characteristics desirable in a teacher or trainer:

- Ability to read and follow instructions

- Interest in teaching or training others
- Ability to communicate with and relate well to people
- Good speech and hearing
- Ability to work with detail and check accuracy
- Ability to direct the activities of others
- Ability to influence or persuade others
- Ability to make judgments using knowledge or experience
- Ability to write effectively and legibly
- Ability to work under pressure
- Ability to work independently
- Problem-solving skills

Compensation and Salary

Human resources planners must also determine the critical issue of appropriate compensation for the position. Other issues related to compensation include the following:

- Money and salary structure, stock options
- Potential for growth (*i.e.*, salary increases, personal growth, increased responsibilities)
- Exempt or nonexempt position
- In an academic environment, whether this is a staff or faculty appointment
- Benefits, including typical vacation and sick leave and kinds of insurance (medical, life, disability)
- Other fringe-benefit considerations

Work Environment

The individual hiring the training coordinator should advise him/her about the working environment, describing such important elements as the following:

- Indoor resources including classrooms and biology/chemistry laboratories
- Outdoor teaching venues such as animal barns and field-work
- Hazards such as chemical/biological substances, heat, water, fumes
- Kinds of experimental animals to be used
- Various accrediting bodies—AAALAC, state veterinary (doctor and technician) boards, etc.—that would examine training activities
- Necessity to lift and carry heavy items (books, manuals, computers, animal models, etc.)
- The need to maintain a flexible work schedule that includes time for preparing, planning, and supervising training activities
- Independent and less supervised work environment (or more structured)
- Working with various members of staff, including administrators, office workers, and researchers
- Expectation for overtime; requirement for night and weekend training sessions

- Requirement for longer hours to prepare lessons and multimedia presentations

Miscellaneous Issues

The trainer must also receive training to remain current with changes in training techniques, newly developed tools (e.g., learning devices for the disabled and computer-based training), and methods of adult learning. Organizations such as the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and national and regional teachers' meetings, including the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), offer such opportunities. The American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) also offers variations of train-the-trainer (TTT) sessions to assist persons who conduct laboratory animal-based training.

Attendance at Courses and Professional Meetings

The laboratory animal training coordinator cannot be expected to know everything about laboratory animal technology. For example, suppose a laboratory animal facility has promoted a technician with demonstrated aptitude to be the institution's trainer. That newly appointed trainer may need to attend school or seminars for courses in educational psychology, human resources issues, or advanced science. Besides attending the typical laboratory animal meetings (e.g., AALAS, ARENA, and PRIM&R), the new training coordinator could benefit from attending the educational section of the American Physiological Society or annual meetings of ASTD and the NSTA.

Involvement with Professional Societies

It is crucial to emphasize the importance of networking through LAWTE on laboratory animal training. Contacts with colleagues at meetings, using the listserv to exchange ideas, and opportunities to be involved in activities with other training coordinators will help to improve training skills in laboratory animal science.

Volunteering with the educational and training activities of AALAS and regional biomedical societies is mutually beneficial for the trainer and the organization. Some institutions might even require such activities of a training coordinator.

Expectation for Travel

The training coordinator will probably have to travel as a responsibility of the job. An institution with multiple sites may require the trainer to visit each one to fulfill job responsibilities. Additionally, if work is contracted out to vendors, for example to develop training materials, the training coordinator may have to travel to their sites or meet with them at a conference site.

Training Employment

There are at least two websites that contain information pertinent to training. The website maintained by LAWTE (<http://www.lawte.org>) is excellent for laboratory animal science

training issues. For training issues in general (i.e., applicable to many disciplines), the American Society for Training and Development hosts the site <http://www.astd.org>. This site also includes a section called "career Q&A" for job-specific issues. Both sites provide the opportunity to search for ideas and approaches in training, to submit questions about careers in training, and to recruit trainers or offer one's own services.

Conclusion

The creation of a training position for a laboratory animal facility requires ultimately an evaluation of the purpose of the position within the institution. Each laboratory animal resource should take an inventory, decide what is needed, and then design its training position accordingly. Many issues will influence the nature and function of the position: specific job responsibilities, type(s) of animals used, persons employed, resources available for training, and research goals and objectives. The various aspects presented in these checklists are by no means complete but should facilitate the "creating" process by both the animal facility and human resources personnel and therefore more effectively define a position description for a training coordinator.

Acknowledgments

Much of the material for the original presentation and this article was gleaned from reviewing job announcement postings appearing in various laboratory animal publications (*Contemporary Topics* and *Lab Animal*) and on several listservs (CompMed, TECHlink, LAWTE, and the transgenic-list). The author thanks Lisa Franklin of the human resources department at Caltech for her suggestions and improvements to this article.

Received 3/4/02; accepted 3/20/02.

References

1. Kennedy, B.W. in *Management of Laboratory Animal Care and Use Programs* (eds Suckow, M.A., Douglas, F.A. & Weichbrod, R.H.) Ch. 2 (CRC Press, Boca Raton, 2002).
2. Russel, W.M.S. & Burch, R.L. *Principles of Humane Experimental Techniques* (Methuen and Co., London, 1959).
3. Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources, National Research Council. *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (National Academy Press, Washington, DC, 1996).
4. Silberstein, M. *101 Ways to Make Training Active* (Pfeiffer & Co., San Francisco, 1995).
5. Lee, C. The adult learner: neglected no more. *Training* 35, 47–52 (1998).