

Chapter 5: Survey Results--School Food Service Directors' Professional Development Format and Delivery Mode Preferences

In addition to requesting information on directors' need for professional development in certain content areas, the instrument asked respondents to rate certain professional development formats and delivery modes. This information can be used in planning sessions that offer the training environments preferred by directors.

In addition to the tables described in this section, all of which present format and delivery mode results in terms of percentages, additional tables on professional development formats and delivery modes are included in Appendix D (p. 41; format preference response frequencies; items sorted by preference index), Appendix E (p. 43; format preference response frequencies and percentages; items sorted by item number), Appendix F (p. 46; delivery mode preference response frequencies; items sorted by preference index), and Appendix G (p. 48; delivery mode preference response frequencies and percentages; items sorted by item number).

Professional Development Formats

The formats most preferred were "Hands-on workshops" and "Use of demonstrations ('how-to' sessions)," both of which were highly preferred by 52% of the respondents. (See Table 2, p. 19a, which lists all preferred topics, formats, and delivery modes.) The other formats preferred by respondents were "Focus on timely topics," "Inclusion of practical information in the session," "Use of printed handout materials," "Active involvement in the sessions by participants," and "Use of live speakers who are experts in a relevant field." All of these formats received a preference index of 2.01 or higher.

As shown in Table 5 (p. 22a), the formats assigned the lowest preference index values were "Use of teleconferences that allow questioning," "Large rooms for break-out sessions," and "In-depth explanations of theories behind practices." Of these, the use of teleconferences was not preferred by 54% of respondents. This was the only format for which more than half of the respondents expressed a lack of preference.

Professional Development Delivery Mode Preferences

The most preferred delivery modes were as follows, in order of preference: "State agency sponsored conferences/workshops," "Theme-based seminars allowing for discussions with other directors," "State school food service association conferences," "Sessions sponsored by the food service industry," "American School Food Service Association conferences," and "Video-based instruction." (See Table 1, p. 12b.) The first four modes were preferred by at least 80% of the respondents.

Table 5. School Food Service Directors' Preferences for Professional Development Formats: Percent and Format Preference Index (Sorted by Format Preference Index)

Item	Professional Development Format	% Highly preferred	% Preferred	% Not preferred	Format preference index (high = preferred)
57	Hands-on workshops	52%	35%	13%	2.39
58	Use of demonstrations ("how-to" sessions)	52%	35%	13%	2.38
59	Focus on timely topics (e.g., new temperatures for meats and poultry)	42%	42%	16%	2.26
61	Inclusion of practical information in the session	43%	35%	22%	2.21
56	Use of printed handout materials	37%	45%	18%	2.19
55	Active involvement in the sessions by participants	31%	47%	22%	2.08
52	Use of live speakers who are experts in a relevant field	38%	26%	36%	2.01
54	Use of other directors as session leaders	23%	48%	30%	1.93
62	In-depth explanations of theories behind practices	20%	43%	38%	1.82
60	Large rooms for break-out sessions	16%	42%	42%	1.75
53	Use of teleconferences that allow questioning	12%	35%	54%	1.58

The least preferred delivery modes (Table 6, p. 23a) were "Interactive teleconferences," "Instruction delivered via the Internet/World Wide Web," "Courses offered by colleges/universities," and "Computer-based instruction (CD-ROM or disk)." Of these, interactive teleconferences were not preferred by 61% of the respondents. This was the only delivery mode for which more than half of the respondents expressed a lack of preference.

Low ratings assigned to teleconferences as a format and delivery mode should be considered in light of this medium's unusually high potential for providing information to large audiences at a relatively low cost per trainee. The study described in this report did not evaluate cost-benefit ratios associated with teleconferences or other training delivery modes.

Table 6 . School Food Service Directors' Preferences for Professional Development Delivery Modes: Percent and Delivery Mode Preference Index (Sorted by Delivery Mode Preference Index)

Item	Professional Development Delivery Mode	% Highly preferred	% Preferred	% Not preferred	Delivery mode preference index (high = preferred)
69	State agency sponsored conferences / workshops	49%	38%	13%	2.36
66	Theme-based seminars allowing for discussions with other directors	43%	37%	20%	2.23
71	State school food service association conferences	41%	39%	20%	2.21
67	Sessions sponsored by the food service industry	35%	45%	20%	2.15
70	American School Food Service Association conferences	35%	37%	29%	2.06
64	Video-based instruction	25%	51%	24%	2.01
63	Computer-based instruction (CD-ROM or disk)	28%	36%	36%	1.93
72	Courses offered by colleges / universities	24%	37%	40%	1.84
65	Instruction delivered via the Internet/World Wide Web	17%	35%	48%	1.69
68	Interactive teleconferences	9%	30%	61%	1.48

Chapter 6: Recommendations—Professional Development Plan for School Food Service Directors

The results of this survey indicate that the professional development needs of food service directors might best be met by relevant theme-based seminar programs which allow directors to meet, network, and gain new insights and perspectives from experts in various fields. NFSMI could play an important role by developing a set of theme-based seminars that focus on the professional development needs that seemed most important to the respondents in this study. More specifically, these theme-based seminars might focus on the following issues:

- (1) **Computer as a Management Tool (Content).** Practical training should be provided in the functional use of computers to enable directors to perform specific tasks that are computer-reliant. Directors have indicated that they wish to learn to use computers for management tasks such as ordering, inventory control, and financial management. In addition, the need for managing budget issues such as cost control and forecasting could be addressed through computer training as one way of meeting this need. Further, directors have expressed a preference for training in using the Internet as an information access tool. In effect, most professional development topics in which directors are interested could be addressed, at least in part, through training in the use of various software packages and/or in the access of particular Internet sites related to the area of need.

- (2) **Computer as a Management Tool (Format and Delivery).** Based on preferred formats and delivery modes, it is recommended that computer training be offered through hands-on sessions conducted in a computer lab with the appropriate software being used. Directors should have access to detailed user manuals for each software package that they will be using. In addition, training sessions should focus on specific applications of the software to meet the needs of directors. For example, desktop publishing software might be used to train directors to develop brochures directed toward nutrition awareness and education and toward marketing and promoting the food service program. Internet sites for accessing the most recent government regulations and even for gaining assistance with meal planning and calorie calculation are also possible avenues for helping directors gain this information.

- (3) **Promoting Nutrition Awareness.** Directors appear to be developing an increasingly greater role in promoting nutrition awareness and education among students, parents and teachers. Training in this area may be accomplished through the use of hands-on workshops, with active involvement in the sessions by all participants. Through these workshops, participants should learn to develop materials and conduct lessons directed toward teaching nutrition awareness. Such workshops could be held at the state, regional, and/or national level and could involve sponsorship by the food service industry.
- (4) **Awareness of Government Regulations.** A relatively high priority among directors is keeping up-to-date with government regulations. This may be accomplished through workshops in which an expert presents new information and discusses its practical implications with workshop participants. In keeping with directors' preferences, handout materials would be useful as references to be kept by the participants.
- (5) **Financial Management.** Professional development in the area of managing budget issues, including cost control and forecasting, presents an excellent opportunity for the use of experts in the field of financial management, more particularly in the food service industry. Here it would be important for participants in this professional development seminar to have an opportunity to solve realistic problems related to budgeting and to discuss the advantages and disadvantages to various approaches. This avenue would meet the preference of survey respondents for practical, hands-on sessions using experts in a relevant field.
- (6) **Marketing and Promoting the Food Service Program.** Professional development that assists directors with marketing and promoting their food service program offers rich opportunities for using a variety of formats and delivery modes. Marketing specialists may prove valuable for this purpose. As in all areas, it will be important for directors to be given information about how to measure gains in student participation so that they may evaluate their marketing strategies and make any necessary changes in response to their evaluation.
- (7) **Planning to Enhance Operations.** Most respondents expressed a need for professional development in planning effectively to enhance program operations. In this area, directors would likely derive much benefit from state, regional, and national conferences that focus on this topic. Interaction with other directors would provide an excellent means for gaining ideas that have proven effective for others. Ways of implementing effective programs in various settings should be explored.

- (8) **Broadening Food Choices.** The need to offer adequate food choices, including low-calorie meals, and the need to maintain variety in the food served, are concerns reported by respondents. Professional development in these areas may involve hands-on workshops in which participants are directed in the planning of menus. In addition, professional chefs and nutritionists may be used to deliver expert advice in meal planning.

- (9) **New Equipment and Food Production Efficiency.** Survey respondents expressed a need for professional development in utilizing advances in equipment to increase food production efficiency. In this area, vendors for certain equipment may be invited to demonstrate their products and to discuss optimal use of the equipment. As with all professional development sessions, primary focus should be on the presentation of practical, applicable information.

- (10) **Training Staff on High-Priority Topics.** There were a number of areas in which respondents desired training for their staff. In response to this need, avenues should be provided for training food service site managers in effective teaching techniques for use with their employees. Directors should then be informed of these training avenues so that they can refer their site managers to them.