

A Program Coordinators Guide to Training Watercraft Inspection Stewards

The goal of New Steward Orientation is to provide watercraft inspection stewards with the necessary tools and information to confidently and accurately complete their duties. The length and breadth of training varies among existing steward programs responsible for watercraft inspections from one day to week or longer. Standard training, or the initial orientation for stewards, consists of 1-2 days (depending on number of stewards and launch sites).

Some training is done in the classroom while other components (watercraft inspection demonstration) is done in the field at launch sites.

In addition to initial orientation, watercraft inspection staff and volunteers may require additional training throughout the season. For example, follow-up aquatic invasive species (AIS) identification training in the field is recommended once aquatic plants are visible.

Please note: The following are recommendations and each program may vary in training needs and methods. The following orientation recommendations aligns with the New York State Watercraft Inspection Steward Handbook, particularly Sections 5 and 6. Please note, some of these steps will happen simultaneously or in a different order based on individual program's needs.

Six Steps to planning your New Steward Orientation:

1. Determine Orientation Date/s and Location/s
2. Develop Orientation Agenda
3. Orientation Logistics
4. Develop and Prepare Materials for Steward Orientation and Season
5. Tips for Conducting a Successful Orientation
6. Evaluations and Follow-up

Step #1: Determine Orientation Date/s and Location/s

Determine orientation location/s

- Some suggested locations for hosting your orientation include your organization's office, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation facilities, Cornell Cooperative Extensions, and/or local universities. Venue fees vary.

Determine orientation date/s

- Orientation typically occurs the week prior to stewards being stationed at launches. Many programs plan around Memorial Day weekend as the inspection start date, and Labor Day to close out the season. These dates may vary for your program contingent upon funding.

Step #2: Develop Orientation Agenda

Based on your program needs, identify key training topics and experts to present this information. Determine who will be presenting each topic, whether they are partners, outside organizations or employed within your organization. It is best to contact them as early as possible. New York Sea Grant has provided a [customizable orientation agenda template](#).

Be sure to collect presentations from presenters and save them on a jump drive to avoid technologic issues and maintain smooth transitions between presentations.

Standard training topics include:

- Organizational Orientation
 - It is important for stewards to know about your organization. Topics may include your organizational mission, history, function, general scope of work the stewards will be performing, location of organization, chain of command, human resource information, etc. Be sure that your stewards can properly answer questions about your organization, or know who to forward questions to.
- Geographic Orientation
 - Some areas to cover regarding the region are natural resources, partners/local contacts, relationship with law enforcement, and issues of concern.
- Professionalism
 - It is important that stewards understand the need to maintain a professional appearance and demeanor. Stewards' actions are a reflection of themselves, your program, the supervising organization and program partners, and all watercraft inspection programs, and can impact how the Clean, Drain, Dry message is received by boaters.
- Boater engagement and interpretation techniques
 - Many programs follow the 3:30:3 rule of inspections (3 seconds, 30 seconds and 3 minutes), communicating professionally, establishing credibility, framing the message to inform boaters, conducting inspections (approach, delivery and exit) and steward expectations.
 - NYSG has developed a series of instructional videos that covers approaching/exiting an interview with a boater, dispelling common myths, and how to conduct a watercraft inspection. These can be used as part of your training protocol. Videos can be accessed at: <http://nyis.info/watercraft-inspection-steward-training-videos>
- Safety
 - Steward safety is something that should be covered during orientation and throughout the season. Possible threats to safety include situations with boaters and/or the public, weather, animals, etc. Should a steward's safety be compromised, for any reason, it is recommended that vacate their site and contact their supervisor immediately.
- AIS identification and data collection protocol
 - Identifying aquatic plants and animals are common watercraft inspection steward duties. Potential training topics include the ecology and transport of invasive species (identification of threats, spread prevention, regional and state priority species). Additional training on species (priority species, AIS and native lookalikes) identification and specimen collection protocol is often done in the field once plants are visible.
 - *Regional invasive species priority lists can be found on PRISM websites, which may serve as a guide to which species to focus on.*
 - Stewards should become familiar with your organization's data collection protocol. Training stewards on using data collection systems (hard copy paper forms, paperless collection with hand-held device or a combination of both) and collection/entry frequency expectations should also be established during steward orientation. Some programs collect additional data based on needs, local issues and funding sources.
 - It is recommended that this is clearly described in your [Quality Assurance/Quality Control](#) document.
 - It is recommended that identification training be repeated later in season, after the plants are visible in the aquatic environment.
- Launch site visits
 - As part of your initial orientation, it is recommended that you familiarize your stewards with the launches they will be stationed at. This allows the stewards to

be more comfortable before they start staffing their launch. Topics to discuss at launch sites include proper location at setup for their station, parking and facility amenities. Stewards should also be alerted about safety concerns and possible solutions at launches.

Step #3: Orientation Logistics

Breaks and Meals: Steward orientation is content heavy for both those conducting and the stewards attending the training. It is recommended that you build in time for the stewards to process what they've been learning as well as allowing for team-building. This is typically done during break and meal time. If providing food during break and lunch times, it is best to inquire about food restrictions. Whether you are providing refreshments, or the stewards are responsible for their own food/drink, sufficient break and meal times foster a comfortable setting which creates a productive learning environment.

Travel: Preferably a week before your event, provide presenters and stewards with your [orientation agenda](#) (including date, location and time) so they can plan accordingly. You might also use this opportunity to share parking instructions, and information about reimbursable travel expenses.

Lodging: If overnight accommodations are necessary, provide adequate time for stewards and presenters to make travel plans. You might offer suggestions lodging suggestions and prearrange a group rate.

Step #4: Develop and Prepare Materials for Steward Orientation and Season

This step take time. Allow yourself adequate time to prepare/print orientation materials and purchase/organize steward supplies that will be distributed at orientation.

Typical training materials include:

- Steward Orientation Agenda
 - [Watercraft Inspection New Steward Orientation Agenda and Schedule \(NYSG Template\)](#)
- New hire documents & procedures
 - Contact your Human Resources department for instructions about required documentation.
- Role playing instructions
 - You might consider developing scenarios and/or rules for role play.
 - Boater engagement and interpretation techniques
 - Many programs follow the 3:30:3 rule of inspections (3 seconds, 30 seconds and 3 minutes), communicating professionally, establishing credibility, framing the message to inform boaters, conducting inspections (approach, delivery and exit) and steward expectations.
 - NYSG has developed a series of instructional videos that covers approaching/exiting an interview with a boater, dispelling common myths, and how to conduct a watercraft inspection. These can be used as part of your training protocol. Videos can be accessed at: <http://nyis.info/watercraft-inspection-steward-training-videos>
- Develop an orientation evaluation. NYSG has provided a [customizable template](#) for consideration.
- Presentations for training topics
 - NYSG has provided the following presentation templates:
 - [Watercraft Inspection Introduction & Training \(NYSG Template\)](#)
 - [Clean-Drain-Dry Legislation and Regulations \(NYSG Template\)](#)
 - [Aquatic Invasive Species, Fighting the Frontlines to Prevent the Spread \(NYSG Template\)](#)
- Standard Steward Supplies
 - These supplies will be loaned to the steward for the duration of the season. A standard steward supplies list can be found in the [NYS Watercraft Inspection Steward Program Handbook, Section 6:10.](#)

- Examples include: chair, small folding table, uniform, and resource kit (see below).
- Steward Resource Kit: Some programs utilize plastic file boxes to organize pertinent information for their stewards that can be used as an informational resource for the steward as well as a place to hold materials they will be distributing to the boaters they are interacting with. Examples of items include Clean, Drain, Dry rack card, AIS fact sheets, maps of the area, and specimen sample collection protocol.

Step #5: Tips for Conducting a Successful Orientation

Take the opportunity to get to know the new staff members. Some reminders:

- Use NYS Watercraft Inspection Steward Program handbook to organize your orientation and program.
 - Standardize your protocol when possible.
- When possible allow for interactive sessions or times that stewards are encouraged get out of their seats and move around the room
 - For example, ice breakers and watercraft inspection role playing.
- Document orientation: Take photos or videos, as they may be useful for reporting, media, reporting, blogging, etc.
- Call on partners for guidance and topical expertise as needed.
- A comfortable setting creates a good learning environment.
- Frequently check with the trainees to see how they are handling the content. They will be asked to learn a lot of information, which may be new to them, in a short time. Tailor your event based on their questions, reactions, and feedback.

Step #6: Evaluations and Follow up

At the end of your event, provide stewards with short orientation evaluation. Anonymous evaluations (not collecting name etc.) may entice more honest responses to questions. NYSG has provided a customizable orientation [evaluation template](#) for consideration.