



Information Collection Team Protocols September 2008

I. Introduction

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center serves as a resource for the entire wildland fire community. We perform our work by identifying, collecting and disseminating knowledge that might otherwise remain isolated to individuals or small groups. Valuable processes, practices that work, lessons that have been learned, and ideas that have been put to the test are available everywhere, if we look for them and ask about them. Through our work, we can help people avoid reinventing the wheel, working unsafely or inefficiently, and help the wildland fire community recognize those people that have already created the knowledge. One way in which the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center gathers and disseminates knowledge is by sending Information Collection Teams (ICT) to the field.

II. Information Collection Teams

Each Information Collection Team includes two to six members, including a team leader. Information Collection Teams gather data and make observations regarding issues identified by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center. Issues may pertain to policies, processes, tactics, techniques and procedures, and the Center uses the data collected by the ICT to inform and update agency administrators, incident commanders, incident management teams, and other fire management personnel via various knowledge products. The Center also shares information with training managers, developers and instructors to help assure that agency training reflects the current reality of practices and conditions in the field.

An Information Collection Plan, sometimes supplemented by a Statement of Work, will guide the team's assignment and conduct. Information Collection Teams are not dispatched to evaluate, review or assess performance. ICT members observe field operations and interview field personnel to collect information that may be of value to others, with the intent of helping fire management personnel avoid recurrent mistakes and reproduce success. The information collected by the Team or the knowledge products developed by the Center may become a catalyst for policy change. However, identifying

lessons learned, effective practices, innovative ways of overcoming challenges, and knowledge gaps must remain the sole focus of an Information Collection Team.

III. Organizing the Information Collection Team Assignment

In preparation for an ICT assignment, the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center Manager or Assistant Center Manager will make all the formal contacts to appropriate personnel. The agency administrator, incident commander, state fire manager, area commander (if applicable) and GACC operations manager will all be contacted to make sure they approve of the team assignment and logistics. ICT team members who are agency personnel are ordered through the NICC ordering system as technical specialists (THSP). If a consultant is used as a Team member they generally go as a contractor. ICT contracts using a consultant are typically funded by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center. A consultant may go as an AD employee if a contract cannot be set up in sufficient time.

It is important to take care in selecting ICT members. Select team members who want to be there, possess sufficient flexibility, and have the personality and skills necessary to effectively observe people and interview them about their work. Information Collection Teams will be formed from a pool of personnel who are familiar with fire management; are self-starters; have the ability to adapt, improvise and overcome and are known to possess the interviewing and observation skills necessary to perform the responsibilities of an ICT member.

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center will prepare, in advance, an Information Collection Plan for each ICT assignment including a Statement of Work. The Information Collection Plan and Statement of Work provide the purpose of the Team's assignment and guide the Team's conduct. The Information Collection Plan will identify issues and sub-issues, and identify the focus of those issues and sub-issues. The plan will also identify targeted personnel and/or operations, and will provide guidance for interviews and observation. When particular policies, standards or procedures need to be addressed, the Center will include the appropriate agency handbook or other policy statement(s) as an adjunct to the Information Collection Plan.

Experience shows that Information Collection Teams succeed when the hosting team and organization are somewhat familiar with the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center and Information Collection Teams, know what to expect, and have communicated those expectations to the people the ICT will contact in the field.

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center will prepare a briefing sheet and brief statement of work and send it to the hosting agency prior to the Information Collection Team's arrival, enabling the agency personnel assigned the responsibility to prepare the way for the ICT. Advance materials will include information on the members of the ICT, their tentative schedule, the issues and sub-issues of interest to the ICT, the types of operations and/or personnel ICT members would like to observe and interview, and examples of the types of questions team members might ask. The Center will also

provide the hosting agency with information regarding the Information Collection Team's needs and expectations for local liaison.

When the host has an information officer, ask them to prepare an internal news release for distribution to incident personnel. Ask them to make the people working on their location aware of the Team's presence and purpose and to give personnel with Internet access a chance to access the Center's web sites (<http://www.wildfirelessons.net/> , <http://myfirecommunity.net/> , <http://www.IMTcenter.net> and <http://www.MyFireVideos.net>). Information Officers may also help set-up the ICT with contact information for team members, agency administrators, and local contacts.

IV. Information Collection Team Field Protocols

Forming the Team

ICT members should arrive on location in the same time frame, on the same day and preferably within a few hours of one another, whenever possible. When this is not possible, the team leader will make contact with the team members in advance to establish a plan, not only for hooking-up on location, but for team members' responsibilities prior to assembly of the complete team. This plan will vary according to circumstances including team make-up, familiarity among team members, travel needs, accommodations, incident location, and the quality of preparation accomplished prior to the Team's arrival.

Generally, it is best for all team members to arrive around the same time, and begin the assignment, form the team, develop a plan, and initiate the plan together. When people hit the ground ahead of the rest of the team and formulate an initial plan, extra effort needs to be put forth to make sure the plan is communicated and adjusted when others arrive.

Team members, who arrive on location prior to the full team, should seek out their fellow team members and become acquainted while waiting for other team members to arrive.

Once the entire team has arrived on location, the team leader will assemble its members to form the Team and conduct an initial briefing. The Center assembles Information Collection Teams from a mix of its interagency and private sector resources, and teams will be diverse by design. Team members may not know each other well. Consequently, it is important that team members come together, get acquainted, and make an effort to quickly form a team before diving too deeply into the Team's work. Organized introductions and a social opportunity, such as lunch or dinner together, provide an opportunity for people to get to know one another.

The initial briefing will include a review of the Team's purpose, objectives, and information collection plan; roles, responsibilities and expectations; team member safety; and individual and/or team assignments. It is important that team members understand, not only the purpose of the ICT, but the intent of their assignment so that they may

operate autonomously and still bring back the information needed by the Center. This intent should be reflected in the Information Collection Plan. It is the responsibility of the team leader to assure that this intent is clearly communicated and that team members remain focused on it.

Flexibility

The activities of an Information Collection Team are dependent on the cooperation of the host team or organization, fire conditions, the weather, transportation, politics, and any number of other external factors. Consequently, flexibility is key. Not only must ICT members remain flexible and exercise patience, they must be prepared to shift their work activities to take advantage of opportunities and remain productive when plans change unexpectedly.

Ideally, local liaison will be arranged and the liaison will have prepared a list of contacts and made some initial contacts, notifying others of the team's arrival and purpose by the time the Team arrives. However, preparations to facilitate success on location may not always be complete. Members may arrive on location and find that local liaisons are unavailable or have delegated their responsibilities to others who are not fully aware of the purpose of the ICT or their responsibilities or have other priorities. The ICT may have to search out opportunities and develop local contacts.

Distributing Work

An ICT must be flexible and ready to seize opportunities as they present themselves. However, the Information Collection Plan should drive the Team's priorities for determining which operations or what types of operations team members should observe and/or the personnel they should interview.

Whenever possible, the Team should take stock of the personnel available to observe and interview, and divide the work among team members as equitably as possible. When available, team members can use the incident action plan (IAP) to identify targets of opportunity and talk about which people each team member or team will try to interview. Team members should also solicit additional opportunities by asking, "Who else should we try to talk to while we are here?"

Given the choice between quantity and quality, the Information Collection Team should focus on quality contacts with personnel who best meet the intent of the Information Collection Plan, and who can best address the issues identified there.

Information Collection Teams need to make a diligent effort to ensure balance between agencies represented and organizational levels or positions in the organization. The ICT should maintain a list enabling them to track people who the team has interviewed and operations they have observed, and potential contacts that have not yet been made. ICT members will periodically refer to that list during the assignment to prevent an unbalanced final report. The ICT needs to identify underrepresented people or operations

as early as possible and allow time to balance the data sample by redistributing assignments as necessary and identifying and filling gaps. The ICT can also use this process to gain a sense of any themes they see developing in the information they are gathering.

Information Collection Teams should take advantage of the background, knowledge, skills and abilities of individual team members when allocating work assignments and contacts. Teams should also take advantage of existing acquaintances between ICT members and people to be contacted to capitalize on existing relationships and trust already having been established.

Sub-Teams

Whenever practical, Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center Information Collection Team members will divide into teams of two as the primary means of collecting information. Previous experience suggests that two-person teams offer some advantages, including:

Interviewing is mentally exhausting work. In addition, ICT assignments can require a team member to employ a variety of skills and abilities. It can be difficult to sustain the required pace over several days working alone.

A two-person team can share driving duties, or have one person drive while the other navigates on unfamiliar roads, and makes and answers cell phone calls to set-up and confirm appointments.

Information Collection Teams sometimes send a “scout” ahead of the team to provide reconnaissance, make initial contacts, identify targets of opportunity, and make arrangements. This can increase the Team’s effectiveness when effective preparation and organization was not possible before the team’s arrival. When using a scout, a driver assigned to this person allows the scout to focus on phone calls, notes and other responsibilities while the other person focuses on the driving.

Though two-person teams will remain the principle method of collecting information, two-person teams are not always possible, practical or the most effective configuration for the assignment. Information Collection Team members will also work alone when necessary. Circumstances where ICT members might choose to work alone might include:

- A team member has an existing relationship with the intended contact or special expertise that will facilitate the contact.
- Multiple key contacts can be made if team members work separately that might not be made if the ICT remains configured in two-person teams.
- Team members are reporting to the fireline by helicopter, or to a small workspace, or other circumstance where additional personnel would be inappropriate.

- A team member can continue observing and interviewing while another types notes.

A given ICT may have some personnel working alone while others work in teams and team configurations may vary depending on the requirements of the assignment.

Information Collection Methods

Information Collection Teams dispatched by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center employ a mix of two methods of data collection, inquiry and observation. Inquiry essentially involves formal interviews of incident personnel. The process of observation blends observation by ICT members, with follow-up to observations by asking questions of incident personnel and seeking feedback on the team member's impressions.

ICT members must listen actively, seek to understand the person(s) being interviewed or observed and afford each person contacted the same degree of attention, even when the ICT member is hearing information reported from previous interviews or seeing similar events.

ICT members are dispassionate observers, not reviewers or evaluators, critics or cheerleaders. Our job is to identify lessons learned, effective practices that might constitute a best practice, innovative ways of overcoming challenges, and knowledge gaps.

ICT interviewers take written notes during interviews. Because ICT members take written notes as standard operating procedure, some interviewers prefer to ask questions while a second interviewer takes notes. This arrangement can improve the interviewer's ability to maintain a dedicated focus on the party being interviewed and maintain a more conversational style while asking questions. We have not, as normal course, used voice recorders, video cameras or record our notes directly on a laptop computer on ICTs. These devices can inject an air of impersonality and serve to distance the interviewer from the party being interviewed. We are beginning to introduce the use of digital voice recorders. This is only done if permission to record is obtained from the interviewee at the beginning of the interview.

Confidentiality

The conversations that we have with interviewees are *strictly confidential*. ICT members will inform anyone we contact of our commitment to confidentiality, and respect the privacy of the individuals we contact. We do not identify people by name, unit or other identifier in final notes, and the combined and condensed final report will be made available with the names of individuals and their units removed. We are interested in the "what," not the "who." ICT members will not repeat individual comments, attributable to the person interviewed, to others outside of our team, not even to supervisors or managers. Inform interviewees of these protections early in the interview process.

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center does not release interview notes to others outside of our team, including other teams, supervisors or managers. ICT members are to treat all notes as being for internal, Center use only, not to be released to anyone. Questions relating to this restriction should be directed to the ICT Leader or the Manager of the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center.

Team Member Dress and Introductory Materials

The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center will issue apparel and other materials to each ICT member to help them identify themselves as a member of the ICT. Whenever possible, identifying materials will include Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center shirts and hat, a nametag, business cards, and brochures provided by the Center. During working hours, an ICT member will be expected to wear clothing identifying him or herself as a representative of the Center, except when they are wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) made necessary by their duties or required by the incident.

Safety of Team Members

The Information Collection Team's initial briefing will address safety issues unique to the assignment including, but not limited to personal security issues, driving safety, fatigue, environmental factors, and fireline safety. ICT members operating in the fireline environment will wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) and should attend the daily safety briefings of the host organization. The team should address any team safety issues on a daily basis during the ICT's AAR.

After Action Reviews

Information Collection Teams will conduct an After Action Review (AAR) of each day's events at a time and location agreed to by the ICT members. Information Collection Team's will also conduct an AAR of the entire assignment at its completion. The Wildland Fire Center for Lessons Learned employs a standard AAR format employing the following four questions and associated sub-questions.

1. What did we set out to do?
2. What actually happened?
3. Why did it happen?
4. What are we going to do next time?
 - Sustain
 - Improve

Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center Outreach Materials

Information Collection Teams will bring examples of Wildland Fire Lessons Learned products, including the *Scratchline* and *Learning Curve* newsletters, and reports resulting from previous ICT assignments for distribution on location.

We like to thank and recognize people for their cooperation, and ICT members will be supplied with small tokens of appreciation including Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center lapel pins and other small items. These are to be distributed at the discretion of the individual ICT member based on guidance provided by the team leader.

Field Notes

Each ICT member is expected to come to the assignment equipped with a laptop computer to type their field notes. Completed field notes will be transmitted to a designated person within a time frame specified in the Information Collection Plan. Experience has shown that, when ICT members return home to type their field notes, they are often delayed in completing this task. Consequently, it is the intent that team members will complete their typed field notes prior to completion of the ICT assignment. This will require that the individual team members and team leader budget adequate time in the workdays and assignment to complete this task without unnecessarily fatiguing the team. From time-to-time, other arrangements may be made for completing field notes. However, in all cases it will remain important that ICT members complete and transmit their notes within the prescribed time frame.

IV. Information Collections Team Knowledge Products

The information collected from the ICT assignment is organized and analyzed by a consulting SME in cooperation with the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center. This process takes approximately 30 days depending on the length and complexity of the assignment. The knowledge products that come from an ICT assignment may include an Initial Impressions Report, *Scratchline* or *Learning Curve* newsletter or other publication. The knowledge products are posted on the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center Web site and email notification is made to the wildland fire community.

ICT MEMBER TOOL KIT CHECKLIST

Cellular Telephone

Laptop Computer

Fireline PPE (if Required)

Fire Camp Camping Gear (if Required)

Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG)

LLC Logo Polo or Tee Shirt(s) and Hat (if Available)

Name Tag (if Available)

LLC Briefing Sheet

Information Collection Team Briefing Sheet

LLC Business Cards (if Available)

LLC Brochures

Samples of LLC Products (*Scratchline, Learning Curve, etc.*)

LLC Pins and/or Other Tokens of Appreciation

AAR Tips Sheet

AAR Rollup example copies

Information Collection Plan/Statement of Work for the Assignment

Notebooks or Notepads

Clip Board

Pens and/or Pencils