Training Session Feedback Form-Accompanying Guide

The **training session feedback form** is designed to be a resource from the AZA Behavior SAG, to support its mission of supplying tools to enhance and support institutional training programs. Zoos and aquariums may utilize and/or adapt this form in any way that supports their institutional needs.

This feedback form will allow training session observers to provide positive feedback and constructive science-based evaluation of trainers at all skill levels. An additional goal of this form is to generate discussion on best practices in animal training. This form can be used across multiple training sessions and previous forms can provide information for future sessions.

This **accompanying guide** will provide examples and details of each bullet point found on the form. Please feel free to contact the Behavior SAG via the network if you have questions or would like further clarification.

Session Preparedness	Notes for Guide
Demonstrated knowledge of individual history and species requirements	Understanding key pieces of information about an animal's natural history can help trainers better arrange the training environment to help individuals learn behaviors comfortably and efficiently. *For example:* *To accommodate the tamarins arboreal nature a trainer sets up training areas in elevated areas where the animal has multiple escape routes instead of on the ground.* *A hornbill comes to the zoo with a history of being nervous around men, so men are not the first trainers to work with the animal. However, a plan is put in place to counter-condition the fear response to men.* *The trainer followed group hierarchy when choosing which chimpanzee to train first*
Communicated clear goals/plan for the session as well as any roles/responsibilities of assisting trainers if applicable	Prior to beginning a training session, a trainer should have a clear idea of what behaviors they will be working on during the session including the approximations. If others will be assisting in the session, they should have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as any safety precautions. Pre-session discussions, and/or reading through training notes, are a good way to ensure everyone is on the same page prior to standing in front of the animal(s).

	For Example:
	Veterinarian staff has been given clear directions of when an injection will be administered. *2 trainers discuss what each is working on during the session clearly and if they anticipate any challenges during the session.*
Thoughtfully arranged environmental conditions to set the animal up for success prior to the session	Good trainers make the right behavior easy! Prior to the session, are there any changes you can make to the training environment that will increase the likelihood of the animal meeting criteria? *For example:* *If a trainer is teaching an elephant to move between points A and B quickly, in the early approximations of this behavior, they might make sure they remove anything the animal may find distracting between those points, like enrichment items or browse.*
All necessary training tools were prepared and brought to the session (prompts, reinforcers, equipment)	Trainers should ensure that they have all necessary equipment prepared and in place, prior to starting a training session. This will ensure that they are immediately ready to reinforce any approximations the animal makes toward the behavioral goal and reduce the risk of confusing or frustrating the animal by leaving or turning away mid- session. *For Example:* *The trainer tested and cleaned the whistle prior to the session so as to prevent lack of sound during session.* *The trainer considered the preparation and placement of reinforcers, target stick, medical/safety equipment, leashes, harnesses, props before approaching the training area.*
Cues	
Clear and consistent presentation of cues	The trainer presents cues as trained, in a way that is consistent with other trainers in the area. The cues presented in a way that the animal could clearly see/hear/detect the cue (hand signals presented at correct location for perception, audible cues said at a detectable volume based on background noise).
Ensured the animal was ready to receive the cues	The animal was orientated toward the trainer, and in a position that cues could be perceived, at the time the cue was given.

	For example:
	• *The langur has finished eating before the next cue is given*
	• *The trainer waits until the giraffe has finished engaging in distracting social behavior before presenting the cue.*
	• *The trainer gives the cue when the goat looks to the trainer for information.*
Prompts were used and faded when performance of the behavior allows	Prompts are additional information given to assist with the completion of the behavior. These can be body movements, verbal support, or visual stimuli that encourage the animal to complete a behavior being shaped. Prompts are helpful tools, but need to be faded as soon as the behavior allows to avoid a dependency on the prompt or the prompt becoming a cue. Fading the prompt also allows the animal to focus on criteria for behavior in response to the cue. *For example:*
	• *The trainer directed the lion into the chute with verbal encouragement, walking in front of the lion, and showing a bit of food. Over the next six repetitions the trainer was standing in front of the chute and the lion walked in with none of those prompts.*
	• *The trainer encouraged the skunk to circle by showing the food hand in a circular motion over its head. After five repetitions the trainer could hold her hands in front of her and the skunk would circle.*
	• *There is a plan to fade prompts in all training sessions.*
Bridging/Behavioral Criteria	
Precise/accurate bridge timing	The bridging stimulus is delivered at the precise moment the behavior reached specific, desired criteria. A good bridge is short/sharp and clearly identifies a precise moment in time. *For example:*
	• *The trainer bridges at the exact moment the tiger's paw touches the target*
	• *The trainer bridges at the exact moment a dolphin reaches the highest point of a high jump behavior*

Criteria for reinforcement was clear and consistent	The animal responds quickly and intentionally toward the next approximation in the shaping plan. Ability to fade prompts quickly and the animal's quick and consistent progress are indicators of clear criteria while superstitious behavior can indicate criteria that might be unclear to the animal. For example: • The session began with a trainer crouching down to elicit a lay down behavior with a cheetah and by the end of the session the trainer could stand upright. • The trainer notices the bear sticking his tongue out whilst performing a mouth open behavior, so the trainer ensures they only reinforce repetitions when the tongue is kept in the mouth.
Trainer adjusted criteria appropriately throughout the session based on behavioral feedback from the animal	Trainer increased or decreased criteria for reinforcement based on the animal's performance and body language. *For example:* • *When the tapir was slow to complete the behavior, the trainer assessed the environment (including reinforcers and punishers) to determine if lowering criteria is appropriate.* • *When the wolf showed hesitation to move to station, the trainer backed away from the station making a more comfortable distance between trainer and the animal.* • *When the orangutan performed behavior without hesitation the trainer increased difficulty of behavior by moving to the next approximation*
Trainer follows the bridge with an established primary or secondary reinforcer	After each correct performance of a behavior, if the bridging stimulus is presented it should be followed by a well-established back-up reinforcer. *For Example:* • When the rhino is bridged for an open mouth behavior, he is given a handful of hay. • When the search and rescue dog is bridged for finding an item, then he gets a tug toy for a long play session.

Reinforcers	
Quantity and value of the reinforcers were effective to maintain /increase desired behavior	Reinforcers may lose value over time. A trainer should have a variety of reinforcers to choose from to be less predictable to the animal. Depending on the species, if one item is rejected a trainer can continue with the session or at least offer another reinforcer. *For Example:* • If the cassowary discontinues or decreases touching the target during a session, the intended reinforcer may not have enough reinforcement value or may be losing its reinforcement value.
Understands and applies schedules of reinforcement as appropriate	All trainers should understand their reinforcement schedule. A 1:1 ratio, or continuous schedule, is when a correct response is reinforced with an effective primary or secondary reinforcer each time it occurs. A continuous schedule is the clearest communication between trainer and animal. Advanced trainers may find applications for intermittent reinforcement schedules (i.e. variable ratio, variable interval, fixed ratio, fixed interval) in certain training situations. *For example:* • The gibbon is asked for "hand" and then is bridged and reinforced. The gibbon is then asked for "foot" and then is bridged and reinforced. This is an example of a 1:1 ratio. • Duration behaviors, like holding still for a cardiac ultrasound, can be a good time to use an intermittent schedule of reinforcement so the animal continues the behavior until bridged/reinforced.
Reinforcement was delivered contingent on desired behavior and without delay	A good trainer will have set up the antecedents to be able to effectively deliver the reinforcer. Trainers should be aware of reinforcing too fast or too slow and reinforcement should be delivered in a calm, safe manner. Depending on the desired behavior, the reinforcer should be timely to effectively increase behavior. *For example:* • Reinforcing too fast might look like a trainer asking a lion to sit and bridging before rear end touches the floor when the intention was to have the completed behavior of sitting.

	• Having the meat ball prepared and ready to be delivered is an example of setting up the antecedents to be able to deliver reinforcement timely.
Problem Solving /Other	
Trainer reacted appropriately if animal did not meet criteria (lessened criteria, asked for different behavior, altered antecedent conditions, ended session etc.).	If an animal did not meet criteria the trainer can keep communication open by cuing another behavior, cuing the behavior again, reinforcing calm attentive behavior, lessening criteria or going back an approximation. Trainer is skilled at altering antecedent conditions as appropriate to gain success with behavior and demonstrates the use of different techniques such as redirecting the animal to another behavior. *For example:* • The sea lion did not respond to the lay down cue, so the trainer asked for, received and reinforced, target, open mouth, and vocal, before repeating the lay the down cue.
Animal remained predominantly engaged in the session, exhibiting calm, attentive and approach behaviors	The animal was motivated to participate in the session i.e. remained focused on trainer, showed readiness for cues, body language was engaged *For Example*: • The goat stayed on station for the duration of the session despite a hay truck driving by. • The rabbit approaches handler when the handler steps up to open the enclosure.
Trainer demonstrates an ability to replace undesirable behavior with desired behavior	Trainer is familiar with the animal's behavioral repertoire and avoided opportunities for the animal to rehearse undesired behavior *For Example:* • If the lion is pawing at the mesh, trainer reinforces paws on the ground. • If gorilla displaces youngster when he sees trainer approach, trainer reinforces gorilla for stationing at start of session before he has an opportunity to displace.
Trainer gives animals control by interpreting and responding appropriately to body language	If the animal shows nervous or avoidance behavior the trainer may relax criteria, raise the rate of reinforcement, make smaller approximations, or

	adjust antecedents to promote calm behavior in the animal. Additionally, the trainer should respond to the animal's body language in ways that give the animal a "voice" and move forward only when invited by the animal. *For example:* • Goat backed away from target pole when presented for the first time, so trainer placed target pole on other side of enclosure and reinforced approach behavior toward the target • Muntjac returned to station after receiving a carrot for target which indicates their readiness for the next cue. • When closing door to crate, if crow looks toward door, the trainer opens it. • The zebra leans into the syringe on the injection behavior while on habitat rather than being in a chute where it is confined and the trainer can give the injection without the animal moving away
Notes – weather, other keeper or vet participation etc:	Anything that may have impacted the behavior of the trainer and/or the animals