

Indiana SHIP Training and Certification Program

Initial Training

The Indiana SHIP provides its new volunteers with a 5-day, 30-hour initial training. The training is usually scheduled for one or two days per week. Volunteers receive their first SHIP manual prior to the training, along with a welcome letter and training agenda. The Indiana SHIP has found that new volunteers really appreciate having the SHIP manual in advance. It allows them to become a little familiar with the material and relieves a lot of their nervousness. Volunteers also really like the way the manual is written. The Indiana SHIP created its manual so that volunteers can read from it like a script, if they ever need to. The manual covers Medicare, Supplemental Insurance, Long Term Care Financing, Prescription Coverage, Low-income Assistance and many other topics.

Update Training

Volunteers attend update training in the spring and fall of each year. Additionally, the Indiana SHIP recently began offering an optional computer class. Due to a huge interest from volunteers, the SHIP is holding 20 sessions to teach them how to use the computer, create an email account, search the Internet, and navigate important websites (e.g. Medicare, SSA, and SHIPtalk). The Indiana SHIP holds the sessions in computer labs, for free, through a partnership with the State's community colleges.

Competency "Testing"

Volunteers take a 115 question competency "test" on the last day of their initial training. After everyone has completed the test, the class discusses the questions and identifies the correct answers. This helps volunteers immediately see how well they did and prevents them from leaving the training with misinformation. If a new volunteer doesn't do well on a particular Medicare-related topic, his or her Area Manager will provide more assistance and training. However, if a new volunteer does very poorly on the test, he or she will not be certified and will need to re-take the initial training.

Mentoring

After the initial training, new volunteers are mentored for 45 days by an experienced volunteer or staff member. Mentors teach new volunteers about the counseling process, address their questions, and help them gain confidence to counsel on their own. Indiana's mentoring program is new and is not yet part its volunteer certification process. It was created in response to feedback from new volunteers who sometimes felt "left out on their own" after the initial training (especially in rural areas). So far, new volunteers have found that mentoring helps them increase their skills and confidence and also build relationships.

Exercises

Indiana SHIP volunteers love activities and exercises! Previously, Trainers incorporate a short quiz at the end of each update training to review the material and stimulate discussion. Now, volunteers really want case studies and role-playing. The Indiana SHIP Trainers are in the process of developing case studies for every section of the training manual.

Advice from the Indiana SHIP

The hardest part of certification is actually de-certification. It's when you know that a counselor is not well-suited to counsel or that they just can't do it anymore, they've aged out. If you're lucky, the counselor will realize it and step down. If you're not lucky, the counselor may not see things the same way. It's very hard to ask volunteers not to be SHIP counselors anymore, especially when they are so committed to the program. But, it puts SHIP at risk and can greatly affect your reputation. It's something you need to plan for.