The ND Electric Utility Workshop – Providing Electric Utility Personnel Training for 30 Years

The Situation
In 1986, the now defunct ND Power Use Council decided electric utility personnel needed more local training opportunities. Safety was the primary concern so a committee was formed to organize a meter school. The committee was composed of representatives from both investor owned and rural electric cooperatives (REC’s). The object of the workshop was to provide both classroom and hands-on meter training. However, classes on other topics such as transformers, stray voltage, regulators and reclosers were soon included. After 30 years, the Electric Utility Workshop is still going strong and providing hands-on training to electric utility workers. The workshop is held in the Tech Center at NDSCS in Wahpeton.

Extension Response
Since its formation, NDSU Extension has provided non-biased leadership to the workshop committee. Due to Extension involvement, classes offered during the workshop some years included training on generational differences in communication, tree trimming, power quality, underground fault locating, etc. At the urging of the chair, an endowment was created to support the Electric Technology program at NDSCS and annually awards a $500 scholarship. The committee, to benefit both the workshop and NDSCS, has purchased training equipment and improved testing facilities.

Impacts
Since 1987, over 2000 utility personnel have received 16 hours of intensive training on a wide variety of topics. This has increased the skill level of many utility personnel, especially within the REC’s and Municipal utilities since they often cannot afford (both money or time) to send their people to out-of-state training. Attendees in each class fill out an evaluation form and rank both the class and instructor. The classes and instructors of often rated above 5 out of 6.

Feedback
Every year, workshop attendees are asked to evaluate the class and instructor plus offer suggestions. Here are some quotes:

“In this type of field, it is a very good thing to educate or refresh.”
“Very well taught class! I enjoyed learning more about 3-phase banks.”

Public Value Statement
During the past 5 years, the retirement of experienced linemen and superintendents has been significant and training of new employees contributes to better service from utilities.

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Transformer class with functional models.

Non-Extension Collaborators
Workforce training personnel at the ND State College of Science, NODAK Electric Cooperative, Ottertail Power Co and Dakota Valley Electric Coop, McKenzie Electric Coop, Roughrider Electric Coop and recently, the ND Association of REC’s.