

Selecting a Provider of High-Quality Workplace Adult Basic Education or English for Speakers of Other Languages

A Guide for Employers and Others Interested in Improving the Basic Skills Levels of Workers*

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Shared Investment,
Mutual Opportunity

*Adapted by Robert Vitello from material developed by the Commonwealth Corporation
and the Boston Private Industry Council.

This guide, “Selecting a Provider of High-Quality Workplace Adult Basic Education or English for Speakers of Other Languages,” is designed to help employers, unions, labor-management partnerships and other organizations assess the basic skills and English language needs of their frontline staff, and then select the education provider and program that best fit their particular needs. Workplace ABE/ESOL is part of the field of workplace literacy, which broadly defined, encompasses the basic, functional elements of reading, writing, communication and math - that might be required to succeed in a particular workplace.

Since over the past decade the nature of work and work requirements continue to change with focuses on quality, standard operating procedures, and streamlined operations, the demands for workplace basic skills are also continuously changing. Workplace education should attempt to equip worker participants with the basic skills needed to function in and adapt to a changing workplace. This is a tall order and should be seen as long-term commitment. Workplace education could include English language instruction, reading, writing, math, computer literacy, oral communication, GED, with contextualized curriculum using workplace material, etc. This guide is designed for employers, unions, labor-management partnerships or other organizations that are concerned about improving the basic skill level of their workers. This guide will also be valuable to workplace education providers in helping them structure their workplace educational and instructional services to ensure they are offering high quality programs.

In many circumstances, it may be of value to consider more than one provider as you develop your workplace education program. The guide is framed around a set of seven (7) questions, or themes, to pursue with prospective educational providers. It provides the questions, suggested “probes” or secondary questions, and a chart you can use for tracking your interviews with potential providers. Alternatively this guide could be used as a questionnaire to be completed by an educational provider.

PART 1: Suggested Questions

When you first sit down with a training provider or give this to them as a questionnaire, you will probably start by stating your needs, or the challenges you want to address, and then asking the provider to recommend potential solutions. During the discussion that follows, you will want to determine the provider’s ability to develop and deliver a high-quality ABE/ESOL program targeted at meeting your company’s specific needs. If considering multiple potential providers, you can compare their responses to the following questions:

1. **Business Objectives:** How will you develop an employee basic skills training program that is tied to my company’s business objectives?
2. **Workplace Requirements:** How will you develop an employee basic skills training program that reflects my workplace and its requirements?
3. **Employee Needs:** How will you craft an employee basic skills training program tailored to our employees’ needs? How will you determine those needs?
4. **Employee Assessments:** How will you ensure that the employee skill assessments you use will be appropriate and high quality?
5. **Qualified Staff:** How will you ensure that staff members involved in the development and delivery of programs are highly qualified?
6. **Evaluation:** How will you use evaluations to ensure educational training quality?
7. **Budget:** What is the total proposed cost for this education program?

Selecting a Provider of High-Quality Workplace Adult Basic Education or English for Speakers of Other Languages Questionnaire

Ask all these questions or the ones that are most pertinent to your situation.

1. **Business Objectives:** How will you develop an employee basic skills training program that is tied to my company's business objectives?

Probes:

- a) Please describe your experience delivering workplace education or training programs for employees in the (insert name of) sector.
- b) What services are you proposing to deliver, i.e. ESOL, pre-GED/ABE, GED, Workplace Math, Workplace Reading and Writing, other?
- c) What is your approach to designing and delivering workplace education and training and how will you involve management, supervisors, employees and unions (where applicable) in its development?
- d) Please provide a reference from a business (employer) that can speak to the quality of your instructional services.

2. **Workplace Requirements:** How will you develop an employee basic skills training program that reflects my workplace and its requirements?

Probes:

- a) How will you align curriculum to my company's structure and culture?
- b) What is your process for determining the learning needs at a workplace? What assistance or materials, if any, will you need from us (the employer/union) in designing the program, i.e. will you need to interview supervisors or potential participants, get samples of work documents, or observe work processes?
- c) What assistance, if any will you need from us (the employer/union) in delivering the program, i.e. will you need our staff to participate in any instructional activities?
- d) How many instructional hours do you propose for each class?
- e) What is the proposed intensity (hours per week) and length (number of weeks) for each class? Will employees need to be released from their work duties in order to attend class?
- f) Will participants be required to do course work outside of the scheduled class time?
- g) How will you offer instruction coverage for all shifts and multiple locations, if needed?
- h) What would be the classroom/facilities requirements?

3. **Employee Needs:** How will you craft an employee basic skills training program tailored to our employees' needs?

Probes:

- a) Please describe your experience in developing customized curricula for programs serving employees in the (insert name of) sector?
- b) How will you use instructional methods appropriate to different levels of participants?

- c) How will you accommodate individuals with different-paced learning and different learning styles?
 - d) How will you determine if training for other employees, i.e. supervisors, may be needed to support the basic skills training?
 - e) How many weeks of lead-time would you need before you could begin delivering instructional services?
4. **Employee Assessments:** How will you ensure that the employee assessments you use will be appropriate and high quality?

Probes:

- a) How do you propose to assess the current academic or basic skills level of participants?
 - b) Describe the assessment process and include any assessment tools or instruments and how much time per participant you will require.
 - c) How will you explain outcomes and assessment methods to employees, and provide them with on-going feedback?
 - d) How will you assess employees at program completion to measure program success?
 - e) How will you encourage employees to practice what they're learning in class?
5. **Qualified Staff:** How will you ensure that staff members involved in the development and delivery of programs are highly qualified?

Probes:

- a) Please describe the qualifications you have for your instructional staff, including education and experience requirements.
 - b) How are you planning to staff this project, i.e. will you assign current instructors or will you need to hire new staff? What role would we (the employer/union) have in selecting/approving instructional staff assigned to this project?
 - c) How do you provide support and supervision for your staff who are providing instructional services offsite (at our business location)?
 - d) Who will assume overall responsibility for this project (name, title, qualifications) and how much time (average hours per week) will they spend on this project?
 - e) How will you apply adult learning principles to instructional design and delivery?
6. **Evaluation:** How will you use evaluations to ensure program quality?

Probes:

- a) Please describe your previous experience in establishing and tracking outcome measures for a workplace education training program, i.e. what outcome measures did you use and how did you assess progress towards accomplishing the outcomes?
- b) How will you involve management, supervisors, employees and unions in developing and conducting a project evaluation?
- c) How will you incorporate feedback from evaluations into training on an ongoing basis?

7. **Budget:** What is the total proposed cost for this education program?

Probes:

Please provide costs for each of the following categories:

Total Cost	\$
Instruction	\$
Curriculum design	\$
Assessment	\$
Instructional materials	\$
Other costs (please specify)	\$
Other costs (please specify)	\$

PART II: Provider Comparison Chart

Instructions: Put the names of each of the providers you interview in the blank boxes across the top of the chart. Use the notes from your interview worksheets with these providers to place a check mark in the boxes corresponding to the points the different providers made. Add up the number of points covered by each provider. Also note whether the providers' corporate resumes, staff resumes, and references demonstrate quality and experience, and note the providers' costs, whether you can address the points not covered by a provider, whether the providers' materials demonstrate quality and relevant experience.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS				
1. Business Objectives				
a) Previous experience delivering workplace education/training				
b) Range of services proposed to meet employer/employee need				
c) Approach to design and delivery; involves managers supervisors, employees and union (if applicable)				
d) Business reference provided				
2. Workplace Requirements				
a) Aligns training with company processes				
b) Process for determining the learning needs				
c) Assistance from employer in delivering program				
d) Proposed instructional hours of program				
e) Proposed intensity of program/ employee released time				
f) Course work outside of scheduled class time				
g) Provides instruction on all shifts and at multiple sites				
h) Classroom/facilities requirements				
3. Employee Needs				
a) Experience developing customized curricula				
b) Uses appropriate instructional methods				
c) Allows for different-paced learning and learning styles				
d) Other training needed for other employees				
e) Lead time required				
4. Employee Assessments				
a) Assessment plan				
b) Assessment process and tool; assessment time required				
c) Develops individualized training plans				
d) Explain assessment to employees; provides feedback				
e) Assesses employees at program completion				
5. Qualified Staff				
a) Qualifications of instructional staff				
b) Supervision of instructional staff				
c) Program coordination				
e) Apply adult learning principles				
6. Evaluations				
a) Previous experience in outcomes measures				
b) Involves managers, supervisors and employees				
c) Incorporates feedback on an on-going basis				
7. Budget				
a) Breakdown of program costs				
TOTAL POINTS				
MATERIALS DEMONSTRATE EXPERIENCE AND QUALITY				
Corporate resumes				
Staff resumes				
Resources				
COST				