

GUIDE TO WORKPLACE LITERACY



“KNOWLEDGE UNDER CONSTRUCTION”

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS OF THE NEW RIVER VALLEY

MATT HART, WORKPLACE LITERACY COORDINATOR

Contents

Page 2.....	FAQs (Frequently asked Questions) about Workplace Literacy
Page 3.....	Reasons to consider implementing a program in your area
Page 3.....	Reasons to consider why you shouldn't
Page 4.....	Developing a program
Page 5.....	Readiness checklist
Page 6.....	Identifying resources
Page 6.....	Workplace advisory board
Page 7.....	Pre-education and training
Page 7.....	Identifying potential worksites
Page 7.....	Making contact
Page 8.....	Getting a foot in the door
Page 8.....	Presentations
Page 9.....	Contracts
Page 9.....	Service Delivery
Page 10...	Evaluation
Page 11...	Workplace Literacy Vocabulary
Page 12...	Workplace Literacy Vocabulary (continued)
Page 13...	Business Vocabulary
Page 14...	Resources
Page 15...	Afterward

FAQs about Workplace Literacy

Q: What is Workplace Literacy?

A: In its simplest terms, Workplace Literacy refers to the skill set and training necessary for an individual employee to do his or her job. For Workplace Literacy providers, it is the range of services provided to employers and employees at a particular worksite.

Q: Why is Workplace Education necessary?

A: According to the Department of Labor, approximately one in five workers lacks basic literacy skills. The National Association of Manufacturers surveyed its members and found that over half of the companies find their workers have serious shortcomings in basic math, writing and reading comprehension skills.

Q: So why can't employers just hire better trained employees to replace the ones with low-level capabilities?

A: Replacing employees is not only increasingly more difficult, hiring and training new workers typically costs more money than training an existing workforce. Also, the pool of available employees is shrinking.

Q: What's the bottom line to industry?

A: Some experts estimate that illiteracy costs the American economy 225 billion a year in lost productivity.

Q: How does this affect a company on the local level?

A: Regardless of size, low basic skills among employees reduce the ability of any size company to implement new technology and production techniques.

Q: Times are tough...how can a company afford to retrain workers and still stay in business?

A: Companies can't afford not to train workers in tough economic times. In fact, rather than training programs being a drain on available funds, investing in employees is a great use of resources. An employee education can pay for itself in terms of economic benefits to the employer such as employee retention, waste reduction, and increased morale. This is especially true when interest rates and traditional investments are not paying high dividends. Employee education is recession proof in its rewards.

Q: Why should your agency offer workplace education programming?

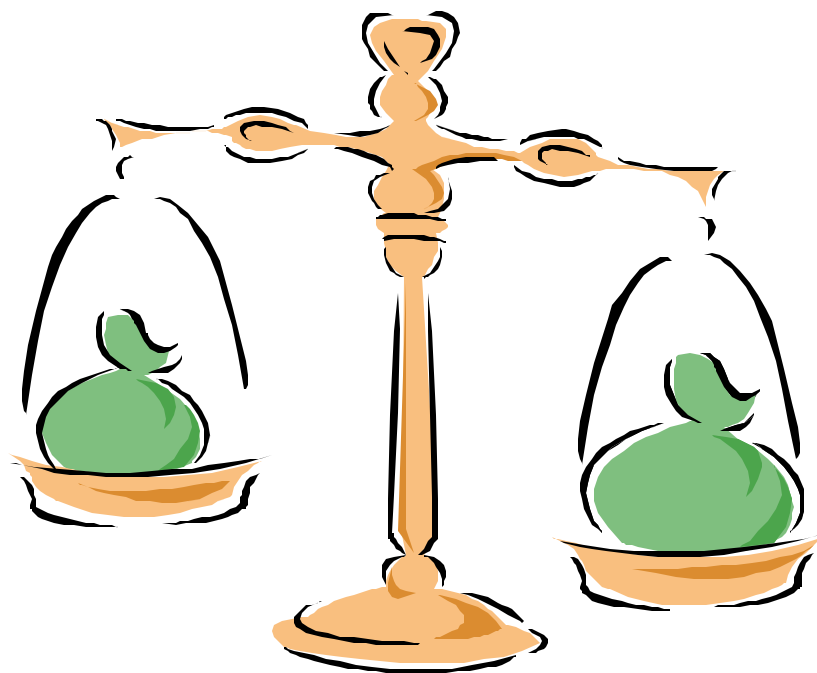
A: Because you are the best agency for the job. If you're not one hundred percent (100%) convinced of this, you'll never convince anyone else. All of the other reasons (additional income for your agency, increased awareness of literacy and education, as well as changing the lives of others) are tangential.

Why you should consider implementing a Workplace Literacy program in your area.

1. **There is a need for this program.**
2. **You are the best person for the job.**
3. **Your agency is the best agency for the job.**
4. **No other agency offers this service.**
5. **This service will enhance and complement existing programs in your agency.**

Why you shouldn't.

1. **There are no businesses or industries that need services in your area.**
2. **You are not convinced of your skill or effectiveness.**
3. **You are not convinced of the skill and effectiveness of your agency.**
4. **Other agencies already offering the same level and type of services.**
5. **There are no similar services that exist within your agency.**



Developing a Workplace Literacy Program

So, you're considering developing a workplace literacy program in your area? Here are some important things you'll want to think about.

What services are already in place in your area?
(You don't want to duplicate efforts.)

What services will you offer?

Range of services:

- ?? Adult literacy and basic skills services**
- ?? GED**
- ?? Conversational English**
- ?? Upgrading basic skills of adult workers for changes in workplace technology**
- ?? Improving adult worker competencies in speaking, listening, reading, computing, reasoning and problem solving.**

What are your agency and individual strengths?

- ?? What does your agency do better than anything else?**
- ?? What do you do better than anyone else?**

How will your program be unique?

- ?? No two areas are identical. (This does not mean that you won't want to borrow ideas from other successful programs – why reinvent the wheel?)**
- ?? Needs are constantly changing – your program must be flexible and change according to the needs of the workplace and work environment.**
- ?? Collaboration with other agencies, if done effectively can benefit all stakeholders.**
- ?? Make your program “mesh” with others in the area.**
- ?? The training demands, values, culture and resources of your program will also be unique to your organization.**

Readiness Checklist

- _____ **We are the best agency for the job.**
- _____ **We fill a niche - no other agency already serves this target population.**
- _____ **There is a need for workplace education in this area.**
- _____ **My agency currently serves people with this particular need.**
- _____ **My agency currently serves people with a similar need.**

As previously stated, you must be convinced of the effectiveness of your agency to get the job done. Your program should seek to fill a need that is not currently being addressed. Duplication of efforts in this area should be avoided. Collaboration, rather than competition, is the best way to accomplish your goals. All areas that have businesses and industries have the need for workplace education. There is no substitute for prior experience when setting up a program. You can always build on your foundation of knowledge and experience when setting up new programs and services.

Identify Resources

What are sources of personal education and strength? Please fill in the blanks and feel free to add more to the list.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What are sources of agency education and strength? Please fill in the blanks and feel free to add more to the list.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Other sources:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

These are the beginning resources that you will use to develop your program. Remember to always build from a source of strength.

Workplace Advisory Board

?? Another source of input and strength is a Workplace Advisory Board, composed of interested professionals/stakeholders in your area.

Be sure to invite agency board members, economic development directors, directors of the local chamber of commerce, business leaders and professionals to serve on your board. Make the meetings brief and productive. Don't just have a meeting in order to socialize. While contacts are important, be sure to have an agenda and make sure that work gets done. No one needs to come to an unproductive meeting.

Don't Underestimate the Power of Pre-Program Education and Training

It is essential to educate yourself about Workplace Literacy/Workplace Education. The Workplace Improvement Network is a great place to begin!

Decide what your program's niche or specialty will be and develop informational materials about your services. You will also want to develop an informational presentation utilizing visual aids such as a Power Point presentation. Rehearse your presentation until you feel comfortable delivering it.

Also develop the ability to tailor your presentation to audience, situation and time constraints. If a potential workplace needs you to adapt your 30-minute presentation to 15 minutes or even 5 minutes, you should be able to do this on the spot.

Develop your own skills and talents. Become a Workforce Improvement Network Certified Program Developer, Curriculum Designer and/or Instructor.

Identify Potential Worksites

- ?? Brainstorm with co-workers or your WL Advisory Board.**
- ?? The local economic development council and chamber(s) of commerce may also provide a list of businesses/industries.**
- ?? Check the Yellow Pages and business listings in the phone directory.**
- ?? Network among people you know and with people they know.**

Making Contact

Remember that nothing is a substitute for personal face-to-face contact.

- ?? Networking and cold calls are a method to achieve personal, face-to-face contact with the person or persons who can hire you to do the job.**
- ?? Phone calls, letters, e-mail are all tools in your tool belt, but the most important thing is getting your foot in the door and getting an interview/meeting with the right person. (The right person is the one who can make the deal with you and contract for your services.)**

- ?? **Be nice to everyone within the company regardless of his or her position. Often it is the receptionist or administrative assistant who can direct you to the right person within the company. Also the comments and actions of support staff members may have positive or negative impact on your sales ability. The right (or wrong) word from someone within the company may reach the ear of the highest executive.**

Getting a Foot In the Door

- ?? **Once you have made contact with the person who can award you the contract, you must be able to sell yourself and your product. This may be the hardest part of your job because it is the one over which you have the least control.**
- ?? **Remember not to take any of the sales process personally. “No,” and “no thanks” are all part of the process. You haven’t really been personally rejected or rebuffed.**
- ?? **Just because your product (your service) is not wanted or perceived of as a good fit today does not mean that it won’t be wanted or appropriate tomorrow. Following-up is an essential part of the sales process. Remember to be persistent and tenacious, but avoid being a pest.**

Presentations

Sales Pitch

Once you have your foot in the door, so to speak, you will want to deliver your sales pitch. Remember to be flexible. If the person meeting with you says he or she only has five minutes, be able to sum up your program briefly but thoroughly in less than five minutes and ask if the person has any questions. Remember that other business professionals are typically pushed for time and you don’t want to be perceived as wasting a second of it.

Negotiations

- ?? **Don’t be afraid to negotiate for your services. Remember that your time and services are also valuable. You and your agency deserve to be compensated.**
- ?? **Going into any situation in which you will be negotiating, have three things in mind: what you want, what you are willing to accept, and what you will walk away from.**

- **What you want:** this is the ideal, the highest end price and delivery that is the most beneficial to you and your agency.
- **What you will accept:** this is the minimum that you can accept for services delivered. Be sure to have conducted a costs benefits analysis to determine actual program costs and factor in your minimum profit margin.
- **What you will walk away from:** any offer that is ridiculously low – be sure to make a counter-offer; any request that is illegal – simply state that you can't do that for legal reasons; anything that is unrealistic and you know you can't deliver.

Contracts

Prior to entering into a service agreement, be sure to have a contract signed by legal representatives from both parties.

Contracts should include:

- ?? **Terms of service**
- ?? **Beginning and end dates**
- ?? **Method of evaluation**
 - **Pre and post assessment of participants**
- ?? **Payment and payment schedule**

Your agency attorney or legal counsel may provide you with advice on contract wording. Be sure to get these forms reviewed by counsel prior to signing or submitting them to the worksite.

Service Delivery

Each program will be different; however, the terms of service and service delivery should be set forth in the contract. Deviating from these terms could negate the contract. Never promise more than you or your agency can deliver.

Stakeholders

Be sure to involve the various stakeholders (management, supervisors, participants, etc.) involved in your planning and delivery. If the worksite is amenable, have a committee of stakeholders.

Literacy Audit

- ?? **Conducting a literacy audit may provide you with valuable information. Included in your audit should be a site visit (or multiple visits) to assess the skills needed for each position that will be participating in your program.**

- ?? **Also be sure to include job descriptions so that you may familiarize yourself, lead teachers, etc. with the type of work that the participants do and what skill sets are needed.**
- ?? **Interview participants to see what skills they perceive that they need.**
- ?? **Interview supervisors to see what skills they perceive are needed.**
- ?? **Interview managers to see what skills they perceive are needed.**
- ?? **Collect literacy related jobsite materials (e.g. memos, signs, safety warnings, Material Safety Data Sheets, etc.) for use in curriculum planning.**

Evaluation

Each program should have methods for pre-and post assessment. Use methods that you and your agency are familiar with and are comfortable administering to measure the progress of your participants.

Don't underestimate the value of anecdotal evidence. Surveying stakeholders within the worksite may provide you and your program with invaluable feedback.

Workplace Literacy Vocabulary

Basic (educational) skills – The term basic skills (such as reading writing, math and communication) refers to the broad range of competencies necessary to function effectively within or without the workplace.

Competencies - Adequate performance of a task either at work or outside the workplace.

Context-based education – Skills taught within the context of job tasks; knowledge; vocabulary needed to perform the skill or job. Also known as contextualized learning, occupational-focused instruction or customized instruction.

ESL/ESOL/ELL – “English as a Second Language” “English for Speakers of other Languages” “English Language Learners” – regardless of the acronym, this involves an instructional approach developed to teach people for whom English is not the native language.

Foundation Skills – The basis for the development of competencies, foundation skills consist of basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening and math concepts), thinking skills (reasoning, thinking creatively, problem solving, making decisions, visualization and learning to learn), personal qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity and honesty).

High Performance Organization – An organization or business whose characteristics include participatory decision making, a focus on customers and quality, upgrading technology, ongoing learning utilizing previous experience and a commitment to improving employee skills.

In-House Program – Instruction takes place at the worksite.

Literacy Audit - Procedure to identify specific literacy characteristics of each job task, also referred to as a “literacy task analysis.”

Literacy Task Analysis – Procedure to identify specific literacy characteristics of each job task, also referred to as a “literacy audit.”

Outside Organization – Partner (not the business) in workplace education with whom the affiliate has signed a letter of agreement or contract.

Task Analysis – Procedure to identify specific characteristics of each task, including physical demands, working conditions, tools, equipment and literacy skills.

Technology-based Instruction - Use of computers, multimedia and/or video in the instructional process.

VESL or Vocational English as a Second Language – An approach toward teaching English which is centered on vocational needs.

Vocational training – Teaching technical skills required for a job (welding, typing, etc.). Literacy skills are typically not the focus of vocational education.

Workforce Education – Development of skills among the nation's workforce.

Workplace Education – A program in which employees of a particular company, business or industry participate in a basic skills enhancement program to improve job performance. Such programs are often custom designed (either wholly or in part) and conducted on-site.

Business Vocabulary

It is important to be able to “talk the talk” with the workplaces in your area. These are just some key terms to get you started. You’ll add more as you go along. Understanding basic and advanced business terms and concepts can only help your program.

CBA/CBR - Acronyms for “cost/benefit analysis” and “cost/benefit ratio.”

As its name suggests, to use the technique simply add up the value of the benefits of a course of action, and subtract the costs associated with it. In its simple form, cost/benefit analysis is carried out using only financial costs and financial benefits. A more sophisticated approach to cost/benefit analysis is to try to put a financial value on these intangible costs and benefits.

ISO 9000 – May also refer to ISO 9001, ISO 9002, ISO 9003, ISO 9004, ISO 10011, ISO 10013. Refers to the International Organization of Standardization of Geneva Switzerland. ISO first published its quality assurance and quality management standards in 1987 and then republished an updated version in 1994. These quality standards are referred to as the "ISO 9000 Standards". ISO's purpose was to facilitate international commerce by providing a single set of standards that people everywhere would recognize and respect. These standards are for all types of products and processes.

JIT – acronym for “just in time.” Refers to a type of manufacturing process in which inventory is kept low (in order to keep costs down) and the product is made as it is ordered and delivered “just in time.”

Waste rate – the rate at which waste is generated. Waste rate is a measure of efficiency and cost effectiveness. The lower the waste rate, the more efficient and cost effective the manufacturing process and the greater the profit margin.

Resources

Internal

- ?? Professionals within your agency
- ?? Volunteers, if applicable

External

?? Literacy Volunteers of the New River Valley

195 West Main Street
 Christiansburg, VA 24073
 (540) 382-7262
 Matt Hart, Workplace Literacy Coordinator
 (540) 449-8977 cell
 E-mail: wmatthewhart@aol.com

?? Workforce Improvement Network

Web address: <http://cep.jmu.edu/workforce/>

WIN at James Madison University
 Blue Ridge Hall - MSC 9003
 Harrisonburg, VA 22807
 540-568-8797
 Email: brownpg@jmu.edu

WIN at the Virginia Literacy Foundation
 700 E Main Street Suite 1620
 Richmond, VA 23219
 800-261-9397
 Email: winvliv@earthlink.net

?? Virginia Adult Education Resource Center

Literacy Support Center
 A project of the Virginia Literacy Foundation,
 VA Adult Learning Resource Center, and Virginia Commonwealth
 University
 1-800-237-0178
 FAX: 804-828-7539
<http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb/>

- ?? Local community college
- ?? Local Economic Development Council
- ?? Local Chamber of Commerce

Afterward

Bear in mind that this document, like any workplace literacy program, is a work in progress. Certain elements will continue to be tweaked and refined. Also, one of the best models any WL coordinator can provide is that of lifelong learner.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. If I don't know the answer, I will try to refer you to someone who does. As you build your program, you will develop a network of contacts and resources to provide you with additional answers and solutions. Challenges always present us with opportunities for learning and growth.

Virginia is lucky to have many fine resources at the state level. Be sure to access and use these resources as well. Answers are always there, it is up to us to find and utilize information and thereby overcome any challenges.

Good luck and I hope this manual helps! If you have any comments, suggestions for change or improvement to this manual, please let me know.

Thank you,

**Matt Hart
Workplace Literacy Coordinator
Literacy Volunteers of the New River Valley
195 West Main Street
Christiansburg, VA 24073
(540) 449-8977
(540) 382-7262
E-mail: wmatthewhart@aol.com**