Human Resources and
Social Development Canada

Ressources humaines et
Développement social Canada

People • Partnerships • Knowledge

Skills and Employment

Office of Literacy and Essential Skills

TAKING ACTION

An Introduction

Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace

This guide is designed to help employers and practitioners develop Essential Skills training for the workplace. It contains seven steps which provide an overview of the process, from conducting a needs assessment to performing a program evaluation. A more comprehensive tool, *Taking Action: A Guide - Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace,* is available on the Essential Skills website (**hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills**).

Canada

Overview

Essential Skills are the skills that people need for work, learning and life. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change. There are nine Essential Skills:
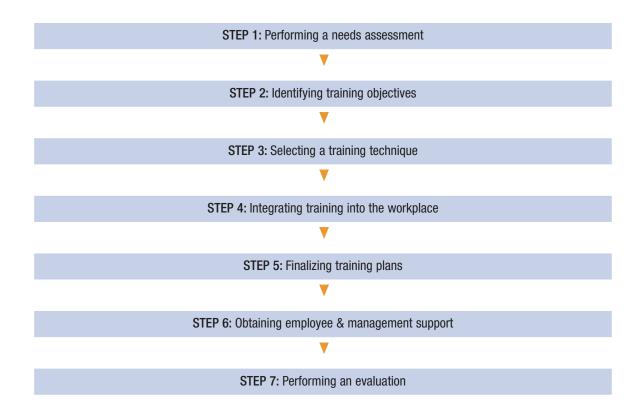
▪ Reading	▪ Writing	▪ Thinking
▪ Document Use	▪ Oral Communication	▪ Computer Use
▪ Numeracy	▪ Working with Others	▪ Continuous Learning

Investing in Essential Skills can lead to many benefits, including increased productivity, and improved employee morale and safety. Essential Skills training can positively impact your organization as a whole, as well as the individuals involved.

Essential Skills training doesn't have to be time consuming or complicated. It can be comprehensive or quick and targeted, depending on your organization's requirements.

The Process

The following is the process for developing and integrating Essential Skills training in the workplace. If you have already started to address Essential Skills in your workplace, skip ahead to the section that addresses your current needs.

STEP 1: Performing a needs assessment

▼

STEP 2: Identifying training objectives

▼

STEP 3: Selecting a training technique

▼

STEP 4: Integrating training into the workplace

▼

STEP 5: Finalizing training plans

▼

STEP 6: Obtaining employee & management support

▼

STEP 7: Performing an evaluation

Step 1: Performing a needs assessment

Performing a needs assessment allows you to identify any current or impending skill gaps in your organization. Use the results to identify training objectives and to select an appropriate strategy to address skills issues.

There are various ways of performing a needs assessment. Consider the best strategy for your organization. (**Note:** Using a mix of several strategies can lead to better results.)

- ❑ Assessment by in-house Human Resources or Training department
- ❑ Assessment by front-line management
- ❑ Observation of operations
- ❑ Prior knowledge of employee skill sets
- ❑ Peer assessments
- ❑ Performance reviews
- ❑ Employee surveys
- ❑ Professional services
- ❑ Review of industry or media reports
- ❑ Essential Skills tools and resources (**hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills**)

Once you have completed the needs assessment, determine which skills are a training priority for your organization.

IDENTIFIED ISSUE	SKILL(S) INVOLVED	INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP AFFECTED	TRAINING REQUIRED? YES/NO	DATE
EXAMPLE: Employees cannot understand company memos.	Reading	All employees	Yes	02/2008

Step 2: Identifying training objectives

Consider what you would like to achieve through Essential Skills training.

❑ Improve productivity

❑ Reduce errors

❑ Improve customer service

❑ Empower employees

❑ Improve communication and/or teamwork

❑ Improve safety

❑ Reduce absenteeism and/or turnover

❑ Improve succession planning

❑ Improve ability to implement change in the workplace

❑ Other: _____

Establish a deadline to realize your training objective(s): _____

Step 3: Selecting a training technique

Once you have completed your needs assessment and identified your training objectives, consider the best workplace learning strategy for your employees. Formal training often involves structured activities that have specific learning objectives. Informal training is less structured and often occurs through on the job experience/training. (**Note:** Using a mix of several strategies can lead to better results.)

❑ Classroom training

❑ E-learning

❑ On-the-job training

❑ Mentoring

❑ Self-study

❑ Other: _____

Step 4: Integrating training into the workplace

Essential Skills training can be integrated into the workplace using in-house resources or by seeking external expertise. If your workplace has limited internal training capacity or your training needs are more complex, you might need to hire external trainers. If you have sufficient internal training capacity or your training needs are not complex, you could develop and deliver Essential Skills training on your own.

There are a number of sources of information on Essential Skills training.

- ❑ Your local high school board of education, college or university
- ❑ Your local employment centre or library
- ❑ Your telephone directory (search under 'education' or 'learning')
- ❑ Online (search under 'training consultant',' instructional' or 'adult learning')
- ❑ Your organization's industry alliance
- ❑ The Alliance of Sector Councils (**www.councils.org**)
- ❑ The Ministry responsible for education and training in your province or territory
- ❑ Not-for-profit organizations, such as literacy associations
- ❑ Highly-skilled individuals in your organization, networks or professional associations, who could provide personalized tutoring
- ❑ Other: _____

If you decide to hire an external trainer, the questions below contain some important considerations as you conduct your research.

- ❑ Where is the training offered?

  _____
  _____

- ❑ What is the training schedule?

  _____
  _____

- ❑ How much does the training cost?

  _____
  _____

❑ How is participants' progress tracked and evaluated?

_____

_____

❑ How is participants' personal information kept confidential?

_____

_____

If you decide to develop and deliver training in-house, follow these steps to develop a customized Essential Skills activity.

❑ Make a list of the occupations in your organization.

❑ Identify the occupational groups that require Essential Skills training.

❑ Find the corresponding Essential Skills Profile (**hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills**) or job description for the chosen occupation(s). If you cannot find a Profile for a specific occupation, use a Profile for a similar occupation.

❑ Review the Profile and/or job description to identify the tasks and complexity levels that employees are expected to perform in that occupation.

❑ Develop training activities that help employees practice these tasks.

❑ Select relevant workplace materials (e.g. manuals, policy documents, charts, etc.) to support the training activity.

Step 5: Finalizing training plans

Approval

Determine the approval process required to proceed with Essential Skills training in your organization.

_____

_____

Participation

Determine whether participation in training will be:

- ❑ Voluntary for all employees
- ❑ Mandatory for all employees
- ❑ Mandatory for certain employees
- ❑ Recommended to certain employees but voluntary
- ❑ Voluntary, with successful completion tied to opportunities for advancement

Time

Consider the amount of time away from work you are willing to provide to employees completing training:

- ❑ Several weeks of full-time training for up to _____ weeks
- ❑ _____ day(s) per week for up to _____ weeks
- ❑ _____ ½ day(s) per week for up to _____ weeks
- ❑ _____ hour(s) per week for up to _____ weeks
- ❑ Lunch time for up to _____ weeks

Costs

Consider whether you are willing to reimburse employees for training fees, time off from work, and transportation expenses:

- ❑ Reimburse _____ % of training fees
- ❑ Reimburse _____ % of employees' salary during training
- ❑ Reimburse _____ % of transportation expenses
- ❑ Fully fund training

Will you incur any temporary staffing or other costs while participants are on training?
Does any action need to be taken? (e.g. apply for increase in budget; hire temporary staff)

_____

_____

_____

Estimate the overall cost of training: $ _____

Step 6: Obtaining employee & management support

Obtaining buy-in and communicating regularly with stakeholders are key success factors when designing effective training plans. During the planning process, allow for meaningful contribution by stakeholders. This helps ensure that there is a common vision for the Essential Skills training.

Ensure that the following groups are supportive of the training (where applicable):

❑ Employees

❑ Management

❑ Union

❑ Trainers

❑ Other stakeholders: _____

The following tips will help you gain *management* support for your training plans:

❑ Educate management about Essential Skills and the benefits of skills upgrading.
Visit **hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills** to access background material on Essential Skills.

❑ Present a business case for investing in training.

❑ Communicate regularly with management as you implement training in the organization.

❑ Track the results of training and share successes with management.

The following tips will help you gain *employee* support for your training plans:

❑ Demonstrate management commitment to training.

❑ Educate employees about Essential Skills and the benefits of skills upgrading.
Visit **hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills** to access background material on Essential Skills.

❑ Explain the benefits of skills upgrading from both an organizational and a personal perspective.

❑ Communicate to employees the confidential nature of training information.

❑ Include Essential Skills training activities in employees' learning plans.

❑ Help employees track their progress.

❑ Recognize employee skill gains.

❑ Communicate with employees face-to-face whenever possible.

❑ Use clear, respectful, and positive messaging.

❑ Allow employees to provide feedback or ask questions.

Step 7: Performing an evaluation

Conducting a formal evaluation at the end of training provides valuable information that can guide future program development by helping determine whether training was relevant, useful and personalized. Positive feedback helps justify continued investment in workplace skills training.

Use information from the evaluation to complete the following checklist.

❑ The training fully addressed the objectives identified in Step 2.

❑ The training material and level of difficulty were appropriate.

❑ The training provider was effective and engaging.

❑ Employees have been able to apply what they learned during training on the job.

Conclusion

By completing this guide, you have accomplished an important step towards the development of an Essential Skills training strategy. After implementing Essential Skills training, you will likely start to experience gradual improvements in your organization's performance.

Since implementing training in your organization, have you experienced any of the following:

❑ Improved motivation?

❑ Higher productivity?

❑ Lower turnover?

❑ Employees who embrace change?

❑ Fewer on-the-job accidents?

❑ An easier time meeting business goals?

❑ Other: _____

We hope that this guide has helped you take action on Essential Skills in your workplace. You are encouraged to continue monitoring Essential Skills to ensure employees are well equipped to succeed. This is especially important if your workplace experiences change (e.g. technological, organizational, etc.), which could affect the Essential Skills required in your workplace. Additional assessments or training could be necessary to help ensure employees can effectively adapt and function in the workplace. Visit the Essential Skills website (**hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills**) for additional resources.