

Creating a Workplace ELL Program

1. The Need for Workplace English Language Learning (ELL)

The lack of English ability has a direct impact on the future success of industries employing high levels of foreign-born workers. The U.S. Department of Labor projects there will be a shortage of 10 million skilled workers in the next five years.¹ Immigrant labor is the key to filling the impending gap, but business and labor alike will only be able to adapt to this change if foreign-born workers learn English, develop relevant vocational skills and integrate into the businesses and communities where they work by becoming U.S. citizens.

A large number of these LEP workers want to learn English. Yet in a survey of adults whose primary language was other than English, 27.7% of those surveyed reported that they are prevented from studying English because of barriers to accessing classes,² including lengthy waiting lists resulting from a shortage of federal and state ELL funding.

The Department of Education reports that ELL instruction is the fastest growing area of adult education.³ Funding to support adult English instruction is severely limited across the country compared to the need.⁴ Waiting times are greatest for professionally instructed English classes and can range from several weeks to two years.⁵

Many of these LEP individuals also wish to become U.S. citizens but are prevented from doing so because they cannot meet the English and civics requirements of the U.S. citizenship test.

The issue of English language literacy among the foreign-born is a shared concern among many institutions and groups, including: schools and universities; employers; civic groups; elected officials; law enforcement; faith communities and houses of worship; immigration advocates and literacy promoters. Lack of English proficiency poses significant barriers to employment and naturalization, especially for recently arriving immigrants, who are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to be well-educated in their native countries or to speak English than immigrants who came before them.⁶

¹ Elizabeth Rice in *Workplace Education: Twenty State Perspectives* (accessed December 10, 2007); available from <http://www.nationalcommissionadulthoodliteracy.org/content/parkerpolicybrief.pdf>.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, "Adult Education for Limited English Proficient Adults," in *The ELL Logjam: Waiting Times for Adult ELL Classes and the Impact on English Learners*, Dr. James Thomas Tucker (Los Angeles, CA: The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, 2006), 6.

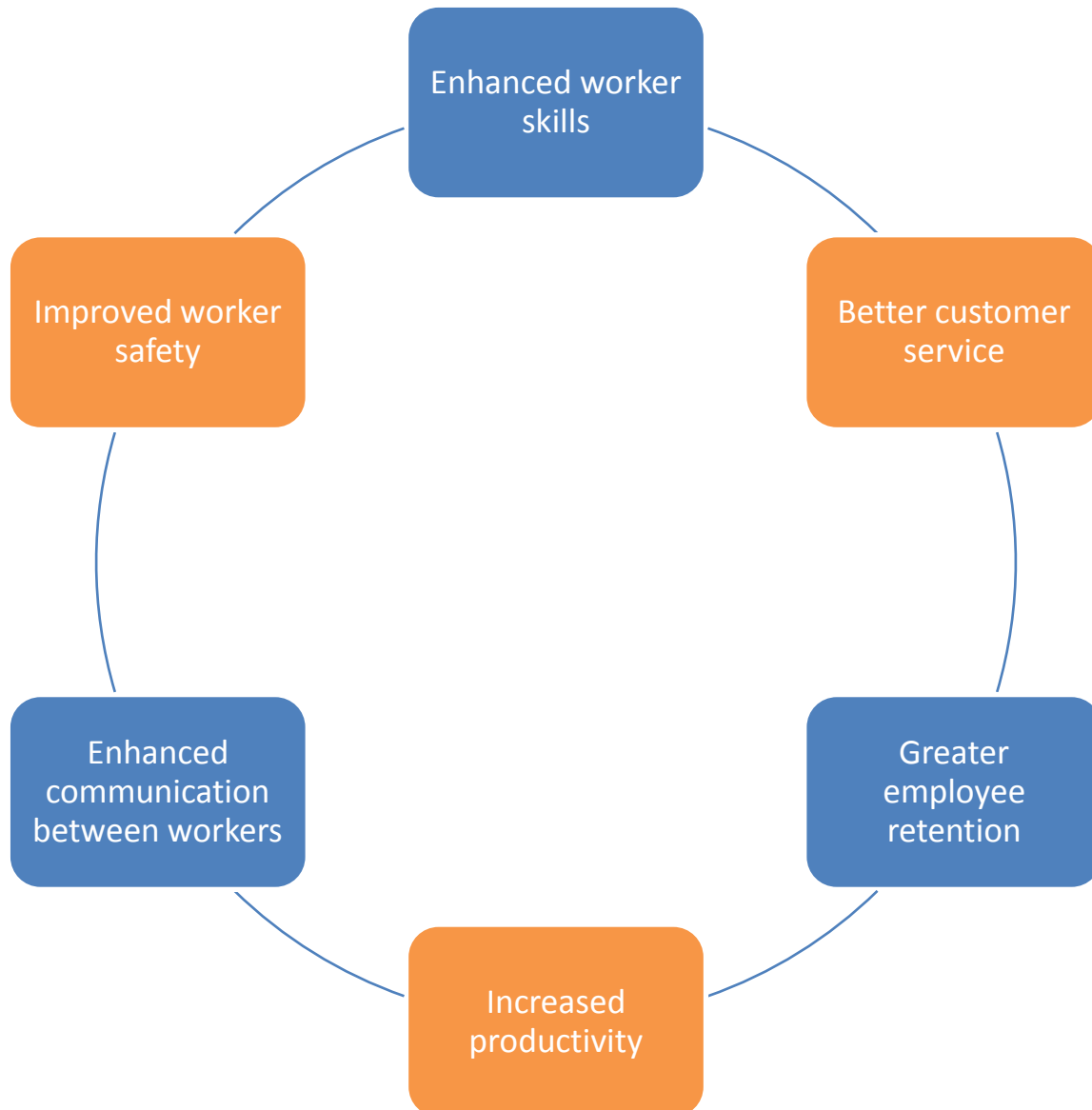
³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, available at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/9499hinvest.html>.

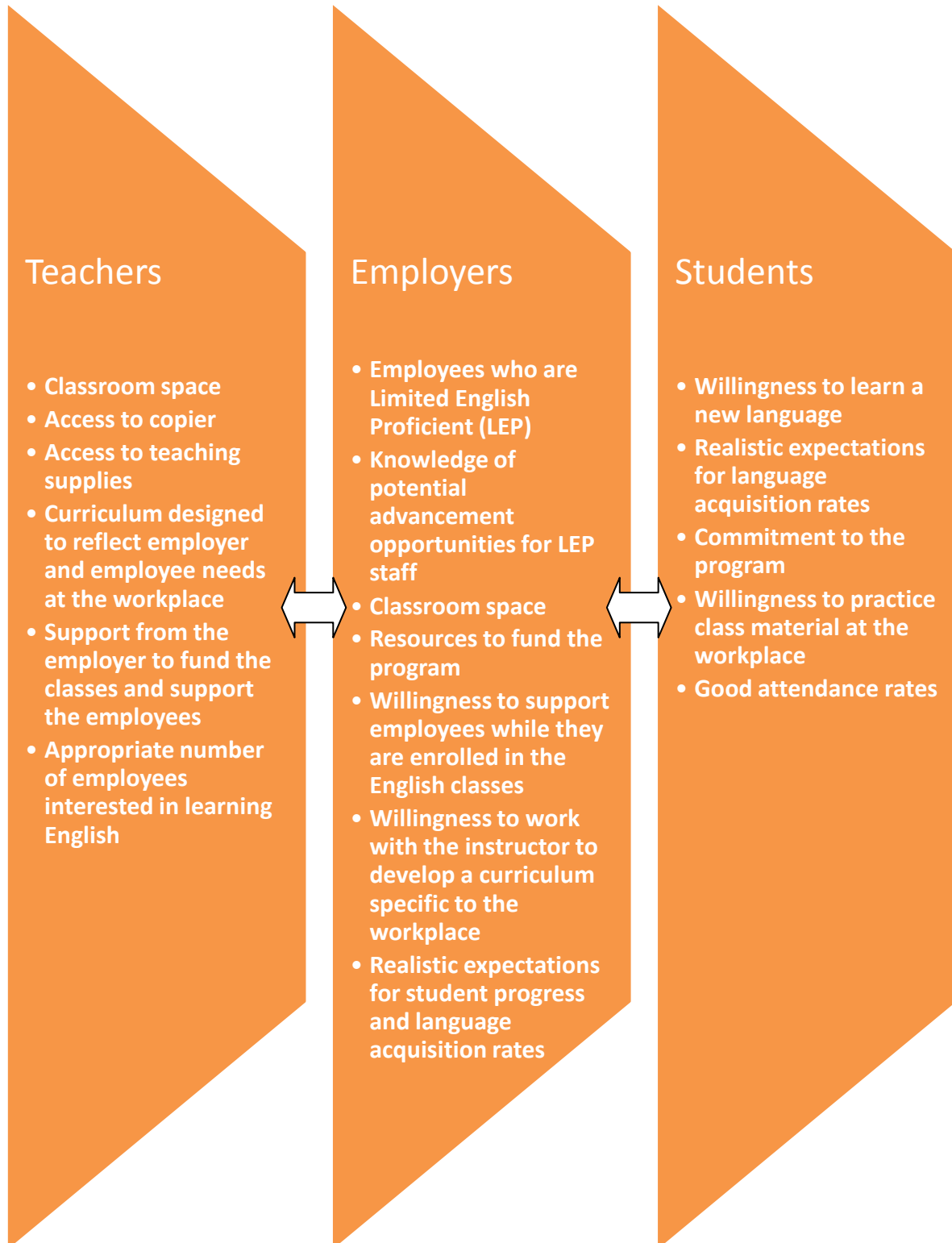
⁴ Asian American Justice Center, *Adult Literacy Education In Immigrant Communities* (2007), p. ix.

⁵ Tucker, J. T. *Waiting Times for Adult ELL Classes and the Impact on English Language Learners*. (Los Angeles, CA: National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, June 2006), p. 3.

⁶ Jeff Chenoweth and Laura Burdick, *A More Perfect Union: A National Citizenship Plan* (Washington, DC: Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., 2007), 59-60.

What benefits should an employer expect when offering a workplace ELL program?





IV. Planning for Your Workplace ELL Program

Inputs Resources, contributions, investments that go into the program	Outputs Activities, services, events and products that reach people who participate or who are targeted		Outcomes – Impact Results or changes for individuals, groups, organizations, communities, or systems		
	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Short</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Long</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching staff • Willing Employers • Time • Money • Research base • Materials • Equipment • Technology • Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine knowledge and skills needed by employees • Design workplace – specific curriculum and materials • Market legal and language services • Assess language level and place students accordingly • Hold classes • Gauge customer satisfaction • Gauge employee language advancements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community businesses • Agency leadership • Community teachers • Workplace employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased client knowledge of workplace vocabulary • Increased employee ability to interact with native English speakers • Increased employer awareness of LEP employee needs • Awareness of best practices • Increased motivation to improve program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job advancement for employees • Additional employees enrolling in courses • Better informed agency decision-making • Revised and improved curricula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased English Language proficiency • Increased upward job mobility and job stability • Workplace ELL program is institutionalized into business structure

Assumptions

1. Are there enough affordable and accessible classes in your area?
2. Would your program address a need? How?
3. Do you see increasing numbers of immigrants struggling with job advancement opportunities?
4. Are employers interested in addressing the needs of LEP employees?

External Factors

1. Is your program situated within a supportive community?
2. Are there potential partners that would support this initiative?
3. Is there enough need to create a new program?

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V. Sample Workplace ELL Program Model

Immigrant Integration Agency (IIA) drafted a list of three employers to approach for possible partnership on a workplace ELL program. During the meetings with the employers, IIA described the program, outlined its goals, and explained the benefits and advantages of employer participation. IIA also explained the employer's responsibilities: provide a designated class space, advertise the class to employees, provide financial support to sustain the program, and ensure that employees will be encouraged and allowed to attend.

IIA chose an employer to host the classes and set to work advertising for and hiring an ELL teacher. After a few weeks, IIA hired an instructor who was qualified to teach workplace ELL. IIA helped the teacher set up a meeting with the employer to discuss what topics the employer wanted the employees to learn in the ELL class. The instructor also learned where and when the class would take place, what materials would be available, and information about the employer's limited English proficient employees.

Using the information provided by the employer, the teacher designed a 12-week curriculum with realistic goals and objectives related to work activities. This curriculum was approved by IIA's project manager. The teacher provided an information session for interested students, who then enrolled in the course by letting their employer know of their interest. The employer sent a list of students (course roster) to the teacher.

The teacher began the 12-week session, meeting with students for a total of four hours each week (two, 2-hour classes). The teacher gave students a pre-test at the beginning of the session in order to gauge their current knowledge and a post-test at the end of the session to determine what they learned. This data was provided to the employer. At the end of the 12-week session, the teacher gave the employer a link to a brief, online survey to obtain feedback on the workplace ELL project experience, and encouraged the employer to complete it. The teacher also gave the students a survey to determine student satisfaction.

Now, the teacher is preparing for the second 12-week session of classes. The employer is funding the cost of the teacher, the materials, and the staff time spent in class. The same students are enrolling in the course, and the teacher will meet with the employer to decide what, if any, changes need to be made to the curriculum.

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VI. Examples of Workplace ELL Programs

Marriott began the Sed De Saber (Thirst for Knowledge) campaign in 2006, offering hand-held educational devices to Spanish-speaking employees who were interested in learning the English language. In 2008, Marriott expanded its workplace language learning program to include the Global Language Learning program, which partners with Rosetta Stone to offer language learning programs in over 30 languages in Marriott locations all over the world. Marriott also expanded the Sed de Saber program to include portable educational devices for English-speaking employees who seek to learn Spanish.

McDonald's offers employees the English Under the Arches program, a nationally recognized workplace ELL program that provides English language instruction using a combination of technology and in-person instruction. McDonald's developed the program after realizing that many staff members held great potential for workplace advancement yet lacked the language skills to fully compete for the positions. English Under the Arches provides training on vocabulary and skills specific to the job requirements of the employees. The classes are free and are paid for by individual franchises. English Under the Arches has received national recognition for its innovative workplace ELL program.

In Northern Virginia, the **Fairfax County Office of Adult and Community Education** has contracted with area employers, including restaurants, hotels, banks, construction companies, and landscapers to set up worksite English classes since the mid-1980s. The classes, which meet twice a week for 12 weeks, are customized for each employer's needs and focus on vocabulary required for the job. Employers pay the county for the classes, purchase any necessary books, and pay their employees to attend. Approximately 25 to 30 employers participate in the program each year. Employers who have participated have reported better employee morale, improved safety, and better communication skills on the part of employees.

Trifinity Manufacturing, a company that makes air fresheners in Baltimore, MD, offers on-site English classes in partnership with Baltimore City Community College (BCCC). The company, formerly known as Medo, has sponsored this program since the early 1990s. BCCC pays for the instructors through a grant, and Trifinity pays employees half time to attend the classes. The classes are scheduled over an afternoon shift change so that employees can attend either at the beginning or end of their shifts. In past years, the company encouraged its employees to become citizens by offering citizenship preparation classes, reimbursing them for the cost of a naturalization application successfully completed, and honoring new citizen employees with a party. Over 30 employees successfully naturalized in this way. The company feels that the English and citizenship programs have paid for themselves many times over in terms of money saved on employee turnover. As a result of these programs, the company has an employee retention rate in the high 90s, loyal employees, and excellent morale.

Wegmans Food Markets, a chain based in Rochester, NY with locations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, and Maryland, began offering English classes to its employees in 1999. The classes are

conducted two times per week, and employees are paid to attend. The company decided to offer the English classes in response to the shortage of convenient, affordable classes in local communities and a desire to improve employee retention through better advancement opportunities. Wegmans found that it retains 80 percent of English class graduates. In addition, employees who complete the English classes are more comfortable interacting with customers. Wegmans views the English program as a worthwhile investment that greatly benefits the company as well as the employees. As a result of the company's education programs and other employee benefits, Wegmans was ranked number two on *Fortune* magazine's list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" in 2006.



7 TIPS FOR APPROACHING A PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER

1. Research your targeted employer

Learn about your employer through their website, trade publications, newspaper coverage, and other related sources. Talk to other professionals in the field about the employer and industry trends. Include relevant information in your pitch, such as if a company is expanding or experiencing increased sales. Demonstrate your initiative and that your program is tuned into their needs.

“When I initially meet the employer I bring up what I’ve recently read about their company, e.g. “huge increase in profits, expanding company, hiring 2000 more employees in coming years, etc.” as a means to break into the company hiring dept.” *Refugee Job Developer, New Jersey*

2. Meet prospective partners in person

Send an informational packet about your agency in advance and follow up by scheduling a meeting at a convenient time. During the meeting, be concise and informed. If possible, designate one person to follow up and handle future communication.

“We find a multi-visit approach helps. First, I see the receptionist and leave a card. Second, I call to set up the appointment with HR, and third to actually meet with someone. This isn’t very creative, but persistence is probably the best thing we can suggest.” *Refugee Job Developer, World Relief – Moline*

3. Talk to the right person

Deliver your pitch to someone with the authority to hire. If your contact seems hesitant to hire immigrants, reach out to another person in the business if appropriate. Be persistent. You may need to make your pitch several times. It might take a couple of contacts to connect with the right person.

“Walk in ten doors and one will open.” *Refugee Job Developer, Catholic Charities, Cleveland, Ohio*

4. Offer solutions

Businesses want to hear about how you are going to help them, not how they can help your clients. Highlight your agency's experience providing services, especially your experience with English language training (ELT) and workplace-based classes.

"The initial pitch means a lot. I've learned that many employers are not able to distinguish between the free services that we provide and the for-profit services of a temp/recruiting agency. So I've learned to pitch the IRC employment team in a way that explains right away that we are free and our services are unique." *Refugee Job Developer, International Rescue Committee, Baltimore, MD*

5. Don't give up if the employer is resistant at first

Take the time to understand why an employer is resistant and if possible make appropriate adjustments to your services. It may be something as simple as adapting the classes. Ask satisfied employers to share their success stories. Don't take complications personally or immediately assume that they reflect deeper biases against your client.

"In the past, we have had some companies refuse certain groups, but not our program as a whole. In this case, we would identify what the issue was with the group as a whole, and provide more in-depth services." *Refugee Job Developer, Catholic Charities Phoenix, Arizona*

6. Don't make promises you can't keep.

Highlight what you can provide to the business and be clear about what is beyond your scope. Not being able to follow through on promises often causes more damage. Reassure the employer that you are just as invested in your client's success at work as he or she is.

"When I first started as a job developer, I got into the bad habit of making promises I couldn't keep. I often just said "yes" to the employer because I knew that's what they wanted to hear instead of being honest and saying "I'm sorry I don't think that's possible.'" *Refugee Job Developer, Cleveland, Ohio*

7. Know when to call it quits

In most instances, providing basic information about newcomers and their legal status breaks through employer resistance. However, if a company does not seem to value or promote diversity in their workplace, trying to set up workplace ELT classes is counterproductive.

"I carefully watch the interaction of the employees that already work at the company as I walk through with their owner or supervisor. I can discern the feelings that are there and what their work culture is like. I take more care in determining if the company is a company that cares about the future of their employees. *Refugee Job Developer, Catholic Social Service, North Carolina*



Tackling Employer Concerns

Manufacturing firms identified lack of English proficiency among immigrant workers and the poor communication resulting from workers' lack of English proficiency as their primary challenges to maintain and advancing an immigrant workforce. The firms also identified this as the main arena in which they would be interested in receiving assistance with regard to raising the productivity of their immigrant employees."

- *Improving Workplace Opportunities For Limited English-Speaking Workers*, National Association of Manufacturing, 2006

EMPLOYER: How will you ensure that the workplace literacy training program you develop will be tied to my company's business objectives, and will reflect my company's employee's and customer's needs?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Align the program with company objectives, practices and job requirement.
- Involve management, supervisors, employees, and unions in development.
- Address employee needs and provide value to employees.
- Develop a long-term company human resource strategy.

EMPLOYER: How will you ensure that the workplace literacy training curricula, structure, and delivery methods you develop will reflect my workplace and its requirements?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Address skills needed to perform work on the job and link with technical training as needed.
- Incorporate company processes, tasks materials, technology, and equipment.
- Develop exercises for which employees solve job problems.
- Promote continuous learning.

EMPLOYER: How will you ensure that the workplace literacy training program you develop will be tailored to the needs of trainees from my company?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Assess employee skills.
- Allow for self-paced learning.
- Use a variety of instructional methods and media.
- Define success as attainment of objectives, not amount of time spent in training.

EMPLOYER: How will you customize assessments to the workplace requirements in my company?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Assess skills needed in the workplace, not “grade levels.”
- Explain assessment procedures to employees.
- Assess participants’ needs, interests and abilities.
- Assess employees periodically during the program to guide their learning.

EMPLOYER: How will you ensure that program delivery is flexible and will encourage and facilitate the participation of my employees?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Market and promote the program to employees.
- Provide incentive to employees.
- Create modular programs and be flexible about when and where classes are held.
- Ensure program confidentiality.

EMPLOYER: Who would you monitor the workplace literacy training program so that it doesn’t interfere with the company’s productivity?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Involve management in class design and implementation.
- Seek management and employee feedback about productivity and general improvement in work environment during each class session.
- Include productivity measures in class evaluations.
- Be flexible about when and where classes are held.

EMPLOYER: How will you ensure that staff involved in the development and delivery of programs are highly skilled and well trained?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Understand adult learning.
- Have skills in administration, marketing/negotiating, literacy skills analysis, curriculum development and instruction, education counseling, assessment, and evaluation.
- Be knowledgeable about the corporate environment.
- Be able to work with various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

EMPLOYER: How will you use evaluations to assure training quality?

PROVIDER RESPONSE:

- Develop measures of satisfaction, learning, process, and effectiveness.
- Involve management, supervisors, employees, and unions in evaluation development.
- Incorporate feedback from evaluations into training on an ongoing basis.

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IX. Sample Cover Letter to Prospective Employer

***Put on your agency's letterhead**

Date

Name and Address of Employer

Dear Mr. or Ms. _____:

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with [name of agency] to talk about a workplace English Language Learner's (ELL) project. We believe this project is valuable to the community, and we are very excited to begin planning it.

One of the goals of the workplace ELL project is to promote immigrant integration through workplace English language classes. Many immigrant workers arrive in the U.S. with limited knowledge of English. They want to learn English but face barriers to accessing classes such as long waiting lists, limited time outside of work to study, and transportation issues. Many immigrants seek to become active and engaged U.S. citizens. Immigrant workers need assistance to learn English, develop relevant vocational skills, and integrate into the businesses and communities where they work. Workplace ELL classes can be offered in a variety of ways. Each employer has the flexibility to offer the classes in a way that is comfortable and convenient for the individual workplace. Additionally, workplace ELL classes work best when the curriculum is designed with both employer and employee needs in mind. Therefore, the employees will have the opportunity to learn the skills immediately applicable to the day-to-day operations of the company.

Employers benefit greatly when workers improve their English skills. Businesses that sponsor workplace English classes have reported lower employee turnover, improved worker safety, enhanced communication skills, and better customer service, among other benefits.

We hope that you will consider partnering with us on this exciting new project. Enclosed you will find further information about our organization and our community's immigrant population. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [phone] or [e-mail].

Sincerely,

Executive Director or Board Chair

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X. Workplace English Language Learner(ELL) Survey for Teachers

**This survey could be given to the course instructors, the sponsoring agency, or anyone involved in working on the project. The information could be shared with the employer when developing the next session of classes.*

1) Please summarize the results of your post-class assessment.

- *What percentage of your students demonstrated an increased ability to communicate effectively in English?*
- *What percentage of your students reported a positive impact of the classes on their job performance?*
- *What percentage of your students reported a positive impact of the classes on their job promotions and advances?*
- *What percentage of your students reported an interest in continuing to attend workplace ELL classes?*
- *What percentage of your students reported they intended to become U.S. citizens after the class?*

2) What were the biggest changes or advances that you saw in your students at the conclusion of the ELL classes?

3) What did you find most helpful about meeting with the employer to plan the curriculum?

4) What do you think would encourage more employers to offer workplace ELL classes?

5) What were the greatest challenges that you found in working on this project?

6) If you could change anything about this project, what would that be?

Any other comments/feedback: _____

THANK YOU!

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XI. Workplace English Language Learner (ELL) Survey for Employers

1) What percentage of your workforce is Limited English Proficient?

0-20%

21-40%

41-60%

61-80%

81-100%

2) How does Limited English Proficiency affect your employees? (Check all that apply.)

It limits employees' growth potential in the workplace

It increases employee turn-over rates

It limits my company's growth potential and/or competitiveness

It negatively impacts production rates

It negatively impacts worker safety

It causes communication difficulties amongst staff

It negatively impacts customer service

It has no impact on my business

Other: _____

3) Did the workplace ELL class curriculum meet your specific needs?

Yes

No

4) What was the impact of the ELL classes in your workplace? (Check all that apply.)

Increased ability to communicate effectively with workers who took the classes

Increased employee growth potential

Improved worker safety

Increased company growth potential and/or competitiveness

Improved worker retention

Other: _____

No impact

5) Do you intend to continue offering ELL classes to your employees at your workplace?

Yes

No

6) Are you willing to financially support future ELL classes at your workplace?

Yes

No

7) If you answered yes to question 6, in what way would you be willing to finance the ELL classes? (Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher pay	<input type="checkbox"/> Paid class time for employees
<input type="checkbox"/> Class materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

8) If you answered no to question 6, what would convince you to finance the ELL classes? (Check all that apply.)

- Proven need within your company for increased English language skills
- Proven results for workplace ELL classes in your location or other locations
- Matching funding from an outside source
- Employee contribution to attend the class
- Other: _____
- Nothing would convince me.

9) Would you recommend workplace ELL classes to other employers?

- Yes No

Any other comments/feedback: _____

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XII. Workplace ELL Resources

Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Workplace ESL Programs

Allene Guss Grognet

Center for Applied Linguistics

Project in Adult Immigrant Education(PAIE)

June 1996

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/PLANNINGQA.html

English That Works: Preparing Adult English Language Learners for Success in the Workforce and Community

Brigitte Marshall

Oakland (California) Adult Education

July 2002

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Englishwks.html

Issues with Outcomes in Workplace ESL Programs

Miriam Burt

National Center for ESL Literacy Education

January 6, 2004

http://www.workandeconomy.org/images/Issues_in_Improving_Immigrant_Workers_English_Language_Skills_-_Burt.pdf

Getting to Work: A Report on How Workers with Limited English Skills Can Prepare for Good Jobs

Working for America

2004

<http://www.workingforamerica.org/documents/pdf/gtw50704.pdf>

Charting A Course: Responding to the Industry-Related Instructional Needs of the Limited English Proficient:

Prepared for Texas LEARNS

By Barbara Tondre-El Zorkani

August 2005 / Revised February 2006

<http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/docs/charting06/cover.html>

What are factors to consider when planning for, setting up, and evaluating a workplace program for immigrant workers?

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition

2007

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/faqs.html#twenty

Contextualized Curriculum for Workplace Education: An Introductory Guide

Jenny Lee Utech

Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable

June 2008

http://www.umass.edu/roundtable/projects/Integrated%20curr_guide%20p1.pdf

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XIII. Workplace ELL Sample Materials

Programmatic Guidelines

A More Perfect Union: A National Citizenship Plan

Catholic Legal Immigration Program (CLINIC)

January 2007

<http://cliniclegal.org/resources/more-perfect-union-national-citizenship-plan>

Sample Curricula

Workplace Health and Safety ESOL Curriculum

Jenny Lee Utech

Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable

2005

<http://www.umass.edu/roundtable/projects/Health-Safety-ESOL.pdf>

Introduction to Workers' Basic Legal Protections on the Job: ESOL Curriculum

Diana Satin

Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable

2009

<http://www.umass.edu/roundtable/projects/Worker%20Rights%20Curriculum%20final%204.24.09.pdf>

Organizations Involved in this Work

English at Work

<http://englishatwork.org/>

Professional Development Opportunities

National Adult English Language Learning Professional Development Network

<http://www.ell-u.org/>