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##### **Massachusetts**

##### **Policies for Effective**

##### **Workplace Education Partnerships**

FY2024 - FY2026



**Adult and Community Learning Services**

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# INTRODUCTION

Workplace education programs are a vital component of the Massachusetts Public Adult Education service delivery system managed by the Office for Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) within the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Public Adult Education is comprised of community adult learning centers (CALCs), workforce partners, and other entities working together to create a strong, unified, and effective system for adult learners seeking greater opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Business leaders recognize that the quality of the workforce is their competitive edge, and in a state that depends on a highly skilled workforce, enhancing worker skills is essential for retaining relevance in an increasingly competitive marketplace. To that end, workplace education programs offer basic skills instruction integrated with work-related content that enable workers/students to engage more effectively on the job and ensure their skills remain relevant, thereby increasing their potential for job advancement and providing employers with a reliable and motivated workforce.

### **Workplace Education** Programs

Workplace education grants are provided by ACLS to support education providers who are partnering with business and labor organizations to meet the current and future skill demands of incumbent workers. Workplace education programs represent a state strategy to locate and serve undereducated adults in familiar contexts. Offering classes at the workplace increases the possibility of fitting learning into adults’ busy schedules. Education programs at the workplace provide workers with contextualized language, literacy, and related skills instruction so they can maintain employment, engage more fully, and advance on the job.

Grants are intended to fund instructional services at the workplace for those with skills below the postsecondary level, which may include anything from basic literacy or English language proficiency all the way to skills expected of a high school graduate. However, each workplace education program faces its own set of language and literacy needs depending on its employee population, thus, workplace education classes are custom designed to meet those needs.

Workplace education programs are funded in two phases, and these guidelines illustrate the activities that are required to take place in each of the two phases.

# PHASE ONE: PLANNING

### WNA Process

Once the workplace education provider identifies a committed business partner, together, they will need to explore the existing possibilities for a workplace education program. This is to be accomplished by conducting a planning process called the Workplace Needs Assessment (WNA). Through this process, the educational provider will learn about the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and traditions in the workplace environment in order to understand the setting of a prospective multi-year program of classroom instruction and to be confident sufficient assets exist for its success. This process, which typically takes three months, allows stakeholders, in a neutral manner, to investigate the educational needs within the organization and identify the organizational assets needed to support an education program.

Interviewing workers[[1]](#footnote-2)1 is a key element of the WNA process. When conducting interviews, the following principles should be applied:

* Allow sufficient time to hear the concerns of workers
* Maintain objectivity
* Maintain confidentiality
* Look for ways to understand the cultural values and norms (written and unwritten) of the workplace, by creating open-ended questions that allow workers the freedom to express themselves

In addition to interviewing workers, the WNA process also involves:

* Analyzing the overall educational needs of workers within a business/union/organization
* Identifying potential assets to the success of the workplace education program
* Identifying potential barriers to the success of the workplace education program and developing strategies to overcome potential barriers to the program
* Evaluating the language, literacy, and numeracy skills needed across a range of jobs within the workplace
* Examining the oral and written communication systems of the workplace, including the use of workers’ first languages and bilingual resources
* Investigating the readiness of the partnership to sustain a multi-year basic education program

Finally, each workplace education provider must establish connections with and provide evidence of outreach to the local MassHire Workforce Development Board where the business partner is located and demonstrate alignment with the local WIOA plan.

### WNA Team

The workplace education provider is responsible for appointing a person to lead the WNA team, overseeing all phases of the WNA process. The size of the team depends on the size of the employer and the number of departments and/or shifts to be included in the program. A typical WNA team will include a teacher, a workplace education coordinator, and one or two representatives from both the employer and union, wherever the workforce is unionized. Team members will need time to plan together as a team and to individually carry out certain tasks.

The WNA team determines the method of introducing the WNA process and goals to the workers. At this early stage, the WNA team clarifies its purpose to the workers and identifies data collection activities. Most teams will consider data collection options such as focus groups, one-on-one interviews, written surveys, questionnaires, or online surveys.

It is essential that the WNA team ensures the confidentiality of all feedback and communicates a policy of confidentiality to the workers. This initial step should help dispel any uneasiness when the work of soliciting input from work groups begins. The information collected will determine whether the workplace partner is ready to establish an education program; no classes should be promised at the start of the planning process.

### WNA Tools and Methods

Participation in the WNA should be voluntary, and participants should represent a diverse cross section of workers, including a diversity of roles (e.g., line staff, supervisors), job types and shifts, age, gender, ethnicity, and first languages spoken. The WNA should aim for a representative sampling of between 10% - 20% to ensure a variety of perspectives.

In addition, a complete WNA:

* Examines the resources within an organization, including other education and training programs, tuition reimbursements, and related benefits that can expand the scope of a workplace education program
* Researches the educational goals of potential students
* Gathers a *preliminary* assessment of the basic skill needs of potential students
* Researches the skills workers need for advancement

An effective WNA utilizes a variety of tools and methods to elicit input. The selection of data collection tools (questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, surveys, focus groups) will differ depending on a variety of factors, including: the scope of the program, the number of workers to be involved, the number of language groups represented, the level of trust between different groups of workers, and how much access the WNA team has to the employer partner’s staff. WNA team members must also determine if some documents should be translated into the first languages of workers, and if so, how many languages.

Not all of the suggested data collection protocols or tools listed are necessary for every WNA; each WNA team develops the tools appropriate to their needs. For example, a literacy task analysis may or may not be conducted as part of the WNA. A literacy task analysis determines the literacy and related basic skills required for completing certain tasks (e.g., reading a code or inputting data) on the job. The WNA may use the resulting inventory to identify skill gaps. If selected as an activity, the WNA team must determine the appropriate breadth and depth of their literacy task analysis.

Another potential tool for the WNA is a job task analysis, which is a more formal and rigorous assessment of requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities. A job task analysis may highlight how frequently a certain type of task is performed and how critical the task is to overall job performance. Again, the WNA team must determine the appropriate breadth and depth of a job task analysis if they choose to take this on.

Finally, the WNA should identify problems that cannot be mitigated by a workplace education program. It is important that each stakeholder understand what can and cannot be achieved by a workplace education program. This shared understanding is critical in developing a solid foundation for a successful program.

### WNA Report

The data collected during the WNA is analyzed and reviewed by the WNA team for accuracy. If the results of the WNA yield recommendations for a workplace education program, the report will include:

* A program design with the type of class(es) to be offered: ABE, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), writing, or math
* A class schedule (dates, times, hours per week, weeks per year) and number of students per class
* A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by all stakeholders and that reflects the employer partner’s commitment to the partnership

# PHASE TWO: IMPLEMENTATION

### The Planning and Evaluation Team: Function and Roles

Because numerous stakeholders are invested in a workplace education program, a team governance approach is an essential component of the Massachusetts workplace education model. Establishing a Planning and Evaluation Team (PET), whose members meet and communicate regularly, serves multiple functions, including:

* Designing goals and outcomes for the program
* Identifying and removing barriers to student participation in class(es)
* Identifying and documenting student achievement and successes
* Providing input for formative and summative evaluations

PET includes representatives from management, labor, and education. Each workplace education program selects its PET members strategically, considering the following:

* Who is most invested in the program and available to attend meetings?
* Who has decision making authority?
* Who can serve as a “champion” for the program, helping generate enthusiasm and support from supervisors, employees, and other staff?

As part of its work, a successful WNA team will have identified several potential employee partners who have shown a deep interest in and commitment to the goals of the workplace education program. Formerly active members of the WNA team may volunteer for or be invited to form the PET. Staff should participate in PET meetings and visit the students’ workplaces to observe and collect materials for classroom instruction.

Frequently, students have a role on the PET as well. At least one student from each class is encouraged to participate in PET meetings. Participation in team meetings provides students with leadership skills, helps them practice business discourse, and allows them a glimpse of management and facilitation strategies. The student representatives can elicit concerns and opinions from students in the class and voice them at meetings. Teachers can help student representatives prepare for PET meetings by using role-plays in class, making participation in PET another workplace skill—one that may increase opportunities for advancement.

### Initial Work

Initial PET meetings often focus on the logistics of program start-up:

* + Setting an agenda and schedule for PET meetings
* Identifying class participants
* Developing waitlist policies and attendance policies to ensure equitable access to the education program
* Determining who will be eligible to attend class(es)
* Planning and scheduling orientations to the program
* Notifying supervisors and potential students of openings in the class(es)
* Resolving work coverage issues for enrolled students
* Identifying strategies for input into the curriculum and instruction

### Ongoing Delivery of Instructional Services

As the program continues, the face-to-face PET meetings may occur monthly, every six weeks, or as frequently as needed to ensure the program is running efficiently. The number of meetings is often correlated to the simplicity or complexity of the program design. For example, the number of departments involved in the program usually increases the number of supervisors and managers involved in meetings. If the workforce is unionized, union representation is an additional stakeholder. The importance of regular meetings (face-to-face or remote) cannot be overstated.

On an on-going basis, PET meetings should focus on the development of the program:

* Is the program on track?
* How do we know that program goals are being met?
* What adjustments need to be made to improve the program?
* What workplace themes should be addressed in the program’s curriculum?
* What are some tools and strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of the program and the effectiveness of the PET itself?
* How can the PET share successes while maintaining the confidentiality of individual assessment results and student progress?

### The Workplace Education Provider

As the grant recipient, the workplace education provider is expected to hire, train, and supervise the workplace education program staff. Program staff include the workplace education coordinator and teachers. The workplace education provider is also responsible for fiscal oversight of the program and ensures that expenditures are allowable and appropriate and that allocated funds are available throughout the fiscal year. Finally, the workplace education provider is responsible for entering all the data required by ACLS and for submitting required reports.

### The Workplace Education Coordinator

The workplace education coordinator needs strong organization and team facilitation skills to meet and collaborate with diverse stakeholder groups in order to deliver a high-quality educational program. The workplace education coordinator develops a vision for and brings leadership to the project. The responsibilities of the coordinator are far reaching and include, but are not limited to, the following:

* Serving as the liaison between ACLS and the program
* Orienting the PET to its roles and responsibilities
* Convening regular PET meetings
* Maintaining records/minutes of PET meetings
* Providing staff supervision including regular teaching evaluations and classroom observations with written feedback and follow up
* Ensuring that curricula and instructional methodologies are based on a solid foundation of research and effective practice
* Ensuring that current and appropriate technologies are incorporated into curriculum and instruction
* Ensuring full enrollment and excellent class attendance

### The Employer Partner

Managers, supervisors, and human resources staff make excellent choices for representatives on the PET. All members must believe in the value of the program and commit to attend meetings. The employer partner is responsible for providing classroom space. This space should be quiet and come equipped with table(s), chairs, good lighting, and good ventilation. Often, classes are held in conference or training rooms or in sections of a cafeteria during non-operational hours. Whatever space is designated as a classroom should be consistently available. It is helpful for the teaching staff if the employer also provides secure storage space for instructional equipment and supplies, such as whiteboards, markers, newsprint, books, and computers. Because the education program is contextualized, the employer further supports the program through the development of customized and contextualized curricula. Specifically, the employer provides the coordinator/instructor with access to the workplace so that instructors can effectively tailor instruction to the needs of the students.

### The Union

Unions play an important role in workplace education programs. The union partner should select a representative (business agent, steward, local president) to serve on the PET. Like the employer partner, a union representative should be available and committed to the success of the program. Unions play an active role in recruiting students for the program; union newsletters, often translated into the native languages of union members, can describe classes and invite workers to participate.

The union representative provides useful literacy materials, such as copies of the union contract and flyers about union meetings, as the basis of instruction. In addition, the union member is a valuable resource for teachers about workplace rights, safety and health protections, and procedures for taking full advantage of workplace protections and benefits under a union contract.

### The Teacher

Teachers create work-related lessons by using a variety of activities and methods to discover the workplace education language needs and relevant themes of interest to the students. PETs, however, vary in their involvement from partnership to partnership. Some PETS are a major source of work-related curriculum. Other PETs are supportive but largely “hands off” in curriculum development, and still others work with the educational partners to develop a detailed curriculum as a result of observing students in the workplace. In most cases, however, a teacher can and should use the PET as a forum to resolve any conflicting goals for classroom instruction.

### The Students

The students’ role is to attend all classes and be active participants with the full support of their line supervisors and top management. Effective programs have an authentic and documented process for helping students identify, monitor, and achieve their goals. Instruction and curriculum should strike a balance between students’ individual goals for education and the goals of the employer.

### Recruitment of Participants

Students are at the center of the workplace education program. A successful program recruits student employees who have both a need and an interest in taking classes. Classes, however, must be voluntary; employees must not be required to take any classes. A thoughtful screening process, including initial placement tests at the beginning of each learning cycle, will result in a group of students ready to attend and succeed in classes.

PET should start planning student outreach and recruitment as early as possible. PET can use WNA interviews, focus groups, and contacts to identify possible students. Suggestions for recruitment include:

* Setting up information tables in highly trafficked areas during peak times
* Utilizing existing workplace meetings and communication systems (e.g., newsletters, all-staff meetings) to support program outreach
* Translating all written flyers and brochures into languages used by workers
* Encouraging potential students to meet and talk with teacher(s) as often as possible
* Attending department meetings to discuss the program with workers in small groups
* Following up with workers who signed up for class before the class begins
* Describing the program in language that respects and does not stigmatize students
* Making short videos that promote the program
* Offering a demonstration class to attract students

### Program and Class Design

Partnerships are encouraged to assess the pool of potential students when designing classes. Most partnerships successfully offer one class but frequently struggle to maintain two or more classes; there is no expectation or requirement on the part of ACLS for a partnership to offer more than one class.

To achieve full enrollment, mixed-level classes are practical necessities, but the range of instructional levels in one class should be reasonable. Partnerships need to design a program where student workers can get to class easily and on time, where shifts are stable during the program weeks, and where the goals of the workers in class are similar.

Generally, classes are offered at a time when the greatest number of students can attend, such as between shifts during a workday or during students’ scheduled off-days. Offering classes during the students’ lunch break is not recommended but can be considered in certain cases.

Whatever the class schedule, workplace education programs must:

* Offer classroom instruction on a fixed schedule
* Offer the maximum intensity, frequency, and duration of instructional services possible
* Maintain high enrollment

### Release Time

Release time refers to time given by the employer to students in order to take classes during normal business hours. This time can be paid or unpaid. Release time (paid or unpaid) is not required, but 100% paid release time is highly recommended, as this level of commitment provides the best incentive for students to attend classes.

A workplace education program that is not able to offer release time must identify strategies to ensure students will attend every class and persist over time. If release time is not practical because of heavy workload periods, lean staffing, or complications with scheduling, employers should consider offering stipends to students to attend class during non-working hours.

### Calculating Coordination Hours

Numerous factors determine the number of workplace education coordination hours needed. The size and type of employer partner, the number of departments releasing students to classes, and the number of internal partners (labor and management) should all be considered. A partnership, for example, with one employer partner offering one class where all students come from one department will need fewer hours of coordination than a partnership with multiple classes and students coming from various departments. The grid below provides a rough guide for calculating the number of coordination hours needed, based on the number of classes and weeks per year for possible grant awards.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Number & Duration of Classes** | **Range of Coordination Hrs** | **Range of Grant Award** |
| 1 class - 32-42 weeks per year | 15 -25 hours per week | $40,000-$50,000 |
| 2 classes - 32-42 weeks per year | 25-35 hours per week | $50,000-$60,000 |

### Paid Preparation Time for Teachers

Programs must include paid time for teachers’ class preparation. It is recommended that programs provide one hour of paid preparation time for every one hour of class time.

### Professional Development for Teachers

#### The program should make time available for staff to participate in professional development (PD) activities. PD is defined as a structured learning activity designed to strengthen the skills and/or knowledge needed by individual practitioners to perform effectively in their job. Examples of PD activities include peer coaching, study circles, teacher research, mini-courses and institutes, and distance learning opportunities. At the beginning of the year, teachers can reflect on their own strengths and areas for improvement and plan PD accordingly.

Experienced ESOL and ABE teachers with extensive knowledge of teaching approaches can focus on the workplace aspects of the program, becoming more knowledgeable about how the business and unions function, or how other workplace programs have developed contextualized curricula. They can attend conferences and seek out materials that focus on workplace education and workforce training.

### Contextualizing Curriculum

Contextualized curriculum is the cornerstone of an effective workplace education program. The contextualized curriculum often begins with an explanation of the articulated goals of all stakeholders in the program, supported by the information collected through the WNA, and further clarified through PET discussions.

A curriculum based primarily on thematic units is well suited to workplace education programs. Goals can be chunked into topic areas. The curriculum can build units that focus on English language, literacy skills and math that integrate speaking, listening, and reading/writing related to these needs. Teachers must base instructional methodologies and strategies on a foundation of research and effective practice, such as incorporating whole group, small group, and individualized instruction to respond to the needs of the student population and using a variety of tools and technologies to support learning whenever possible.

For programs offering ABE instruction, the partnership’s curriculum and its components must be informed by the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education ([CCRSAE](http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf)). The level-specific standards of the CCRSAE provide the skill sets to be mastered, including math and numeracy, ABE thematic curriculum units must be informed by employer needs, the students' goals, needs, and interests and the union (if the workforce is unionized).

Programs offering ESOL instruction are required to implement curriculum aligned to the standards and benchmarks of the Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education ([MA ELPS](https://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/frameworks/frameworks.html)). The MA ELPS combine college and career readiness skills and language skills into a single set of standards for English language learners.

### ACLS Policies

ACLS requires that workplace education programs conform to the policies and practices outlined in the [*FY24-28 Massachusetts Policies for Effective Adult Education*](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.doe.mass.edu%2Facls%2Fabeprogram%2Fpolicies.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)to the greatest extent possible. In it can be found more specific information on topics relevant to workplace education programs such as, pre- and post-testing, formal and informal assessment, measurable skills gains, and fiscal and data accountability.

1. 1 A note about the terms “worker” and “student:” In the Phase One section, as workers are not students yet, the term “workers” will be used. However, in the Phase Two section, they will be referred to as “students.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)