Organizing and Running a Workforce Education Program: A guide for labour councils

By the South Shore Labour Council, CLC
&
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Introduction

Labour Councils in History

Nearly 150 years ago, when it was illegal to belong to a union, workers met in the basements of the homes of their local leaders. These gatherings became our first labour councils. The records of these meetings show that these workers called for a universal public education system, an end to child labour and an end to the six-day work week.

These first labour leaders never looked back. They continued to call for the creation of laws that would benefit all members of society. These laws would become the foundation of our social programs in Canada today.

- *Excerpt from the Canadian Labour Congress pamphlet Your Labour Council: Building Our Community.*

The Canadian Labour Movement

In figure 1, the large square with workers in it represents you and your union. The cogs represent the labour bodies that unions can affiliate (belong) to and support through payment of per capita dues (cents per person) and the donation of in-kind labour.
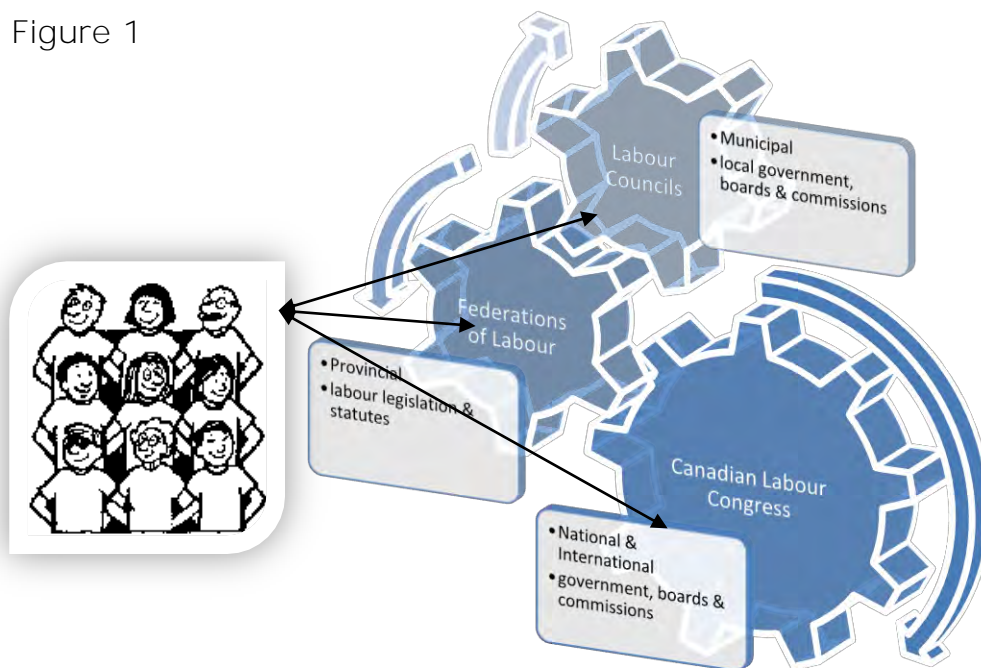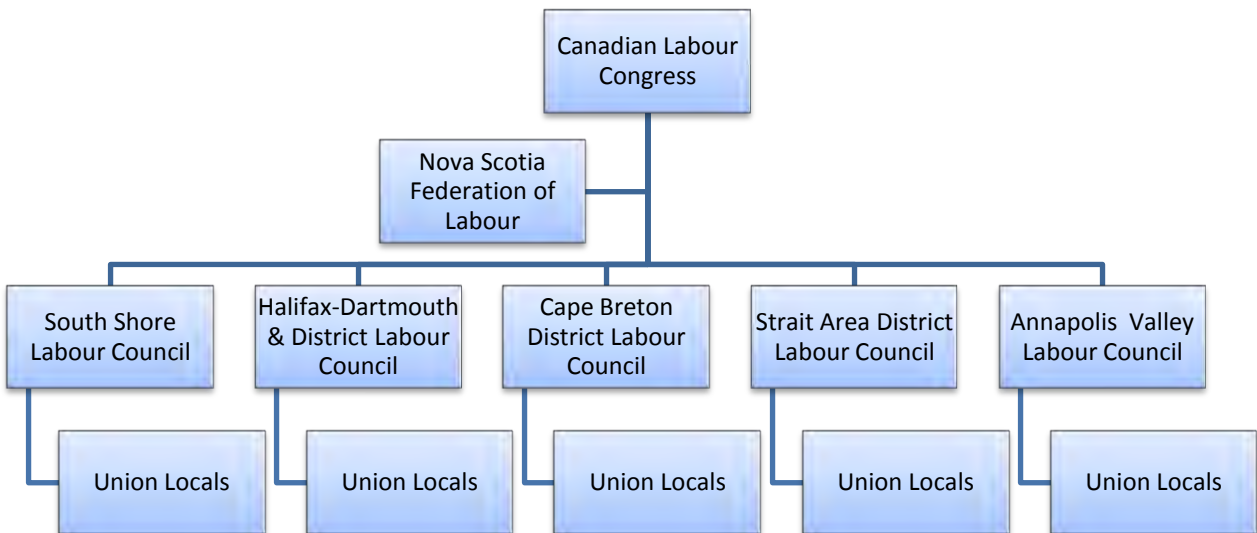
Figure 1

Figure 2

Labour Councils Today

In Figure 2 you can see that the Canadian labour movement is a huge network of local unions, branches, lodges, divisions, and federations. At the federal level the Canadian Labour Congress is the national labour central. Labour councils and federations of labour exist as chartered bodies of the Canadian Labour Congress in each province. Federations of labour are the coordinating bodies for the labour movement in each of the provinces and territories.

The CLC-chartered labour councils deal with matters concerning local government, municipal councils and local boards and commissions. Labour councils operate at the municipal level and are the bodies most often charged **with the hand's**-on delivery of labour programs. In Nova Scotia, at this moment in time, there are five active labour councils.

As you can see by this structure, labour councils provide a means of bringing local unions together and enable labour to play an important role in the community.

As part of their mandate, Labour councils offer educational opportunities to their members at annual schools. The South Shore Labour Council (SSLC) expanded on this role when it responded to a need voiced by their affiliated members. The labour council organized and ran an Essential Skills for Computers program. This manual will tell why we did it, how we did it and what we learned from the experience.

About This Manual

This manual is a report and a guide for labour councils in Nova Scotia. It was prepared by the South Shore Labour Council, in partnership with the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour.

The South Shore Labour Council and the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour would like to thank the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Skills and Learning Branch, Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development for the financial support for the development and printing of this manual.

How the manual is organized

An icon is used throughout the manual to draw your attention to something we think is really important.

Look for this icon:

Glossary

Sometimes we will use a word that is commonplace in unions or workplace education programs in Nova Scotia. You may not be familiar with this word. We have put these words in **bold print** the first time the word is used. If you see a word in bold print that isn't a title or sub-title, you can look up the meaning in the glossary at the end of the manual.

Chapters

There are four chapters in this manual.

1. **Why Labour Councils?:** this is the part that tells: who, what, where and why.

2. **Financing**: we explain how we got the money for the program.

3. **Logistics**: we describe how we organized and ran the program.

4. **Successes/Challenges**: we talk about what we learned from this experience.

A word of thanks

Canada

This project was made possible with funding support from the Government of Canada's **Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.**

We have drawn heavily on the work of those who have gone before us and wish to thank the following for allowing us to use their resources:

The Canadian Labour Congress for allowing us to call on Tony Tracy, National Staff Representative, for information and help in putting this manual together and the use of their pamphlet; *Your Labour Council: Building Our Community* and the booklet; *Your Labour Council.*

The Skills and Learning Branch, Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development for their financial support of the pilot project Essential Skills for Computers Course and the writing of this manual and for the use of their guide; *Making It Work: A Guide for Workplace Education Project Teams in Nova Scotia.* We also thank Judy Purcell, Skill Development Co-ordinator, for adapting to our schedule and helping our labour council make this program a reality.

Participants of the Essential Skills for Computers Course, without the co-operation and input from the workers who took part in the pilot project Essential Skills for Computers Course, there would be no manual.

The Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship (ACSBE) for giving us a discount on the computer lab rental fees, participating on the Project Team, and handling the computer glitches that occurred.

The Office of the Worker Counsellor for allowing us to use the services of Caitlin Parkinson, administrative assistant, during the production of this manual and for her additional help in adapting some of the graphics.

Why Labour Councils?

Why should labour councils organize and run programs?

Labour councils are involved in many areas of community life. We work hard to make our communities healthy and sustainable. Educating our members is one of the ways we do this work. The South Shore Labour Council believes that learning is a human right and that adults need more opportunities to exercise that right. It is the education of members affiliated to our labour council that is at the heart of the project that has lead to this manual.

The manual is written so that you, the reader can see what we did, how we did it and hopefully, it will act as a guide if you want to do something similar yourself. The guide is written for labour councils in Nova Scotia that have access to the funding available through the **tripartite model** of workplace education that exists in our province.

This does not mean that labour councils in other provinces cannot do what we did. You will have different regulations and mechanisms at your disposal. We encourage you to find out what is available to your labour council and to take advantage of it.

We hope that you can learn something from our experience in organizing and running a program for workers from multiple work sites in rural Nova Scotia.

In Solidarity,

South Shore Labour Council Project Team Members:

Ann Cunningham

Bud Johnson

Linda Wentzel

What we did and why we did it

Labour Councils are often called the "foot soldiers" of the labour movement. They bring together the union activists in their district. Labour councils **operate at the municipal level and are most often charged with the hand's**-on delivery of labour programs and campaigns. They are in a position to respond to issues at the local level and to show leadership in communities.

Small- and medium-sized businesses account for 50% of total employment in Nova Scotia. Small businesses employ fewer than 50 people. Medium size businesses employ between 50-499 people. (Source: This information was taken from Statistics Canada, 1983-1999 Employment Dynamics, as quoted in *Nova Scotia Small Business Primer*, 2003). That means that unions in Nova Scotia will face some real challenges when trying to organize workplace education programs.

When it comes to offering upgrading and literacy programs for our members we are fortunate that in Nova Scotia there are funding grants available that will cover the cost of hiring an instructor. However, there must be 7 participants to start a program. In small to medium sized work sites that can be a problem. It makes sense to combine with other workplaces to run a program.

The South Shore Labour Council was aware that some affiliated members wanted to learn computer skills and for a variety of reasons, were not able to take part in a program at their workplace. The labour council was willing to organize a program for multiple work sites and unions.

There are a **number of reasons that our affiliated members couldn't take part** in a program at their workplaces: a lot of workplaces are in rural locations without access to public transit, many workers carpool to work which makes extra time at work for an upgrading program difficult or even impossible and as we have already explained the number of workers in a specific work site can be a big problem. There are two other reasons that workplace education **programs don't happen,** employers and unions **that don't buy into the** concept or model.

Let's talk about employers first. Some have not yet bought into spending money on training workers. In Canada, employers spend very little money training their employees and when they do they tend to spend it on those who have the most education. Who has the higher levels of education in your workplace? Is it the workers or the managers?

We have heard a lot of reasons from employers about why they don't want to spend money training workers.

- o Times are tough;
- o **I can't spend money educating a worker only to lose him/her to a** competitor;
- o **I can't stop production to upgrade a worker's skills and I don't have** enough staff to cover people who are sitting in a classroom;
- o **I don't need to offer training because everyone here has their grade** 12; and
- o The schools should send me people who are already educated.

For unions, just like employers, there are a number of reasons why they **don't organize and run programs in** their locals.

- o **It's hard to find enough volunteers to take on another job.**
- o **We don't have enough money.**
- o The employer should be paying for these programs.
- o **We offer a lot of 'tools' courses, we don't have the time to offer** essential skills courses too.
- o Lite**racy and essential skills courses don't have the same priority as** collective bargaining, health and safety, etc.

The bottom line is there are workers in the workforce who need to improve their skills to keep their jobs, to get better jobs, or to improve their quality of life and they are not getting the opportunities to do that.

Many people are surprised to learn that providing learning opportunities is a long labour tradition. The early trade unions played an important role in advocating for public education and that role continues today. For the labour movement, getting involved in literacy and essential skills programs is continuing that tradition. Union literacy is linked to labour education, one of the largest informal adult education programs in Canada. (Source: Tamara Levine, Learning in Solidarity: A union approach to worker-centred literacy. *Just Labour*, Vol. 1 (2002), 86-93.)

As labour organizations, we need to work hard to find ways to provide workers with opportunities to upgrade their skills. W**e can't let it fall to** someone else to do for us. Literacy and essential skills are the tools workers need so that they can participate in other union courses. By offering a program to your members, you may be opening a door to other union courses and helping to develop new activists for your labour council and affiliated members.

There are a number of unions in Nova Scotia that take advantage of the **Workplace Education Initiative** program offered through the Skills and Learning Division of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development. Many of these union locals also took advantage of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour 1-day workshop to train members of their **Project Team**.

In the 2008-2009 fiscal year (April/08-March/09), there were 158 programs at 98 work sites and 26 **Organizational Needs Assessments**. As well, there were 10 apprenticeship tutoring programs. More than 2,000 employees in Nova Scotia benefitted from this training. We have to point out that not all of these were unionized sites and some of the employees were supervisors and small business owners.

The NSFL is working hard to encourage more unions to take advantage of the Workplace Education program. The federation also understands that not all unions will be able to start a program in their workplace. We have to remember that not all workplaces have the numbers to run their own **programs and in some cases, it's not possible to get employer buy**-in for a pr**ogram. That's where labour councils can play a valuable role in advocating** and promoting workforce education.

As we have demonstrated, <u>a labour council can bring workers together so that they can participate in a program</u>.

Three volunteers from the labour council worked on a joint committee called a Project Team to organize an *Essential Skills for Computers* course for workers who were members of unions affiliated to the South Shore Labour Council. In the end our program had *thirteen* workers from *six* work sites and *three* unions.

Who are we and where are we?

We are located on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, which explains our labour council name, the South Shore Labour Council. Our district is very beautiful, in **fact many brochures describe our area as the "Artists Shore" because of all the** artists that live here and all that come to visit and work at their art here. This is also called the Lighthouse Route by the tourism department; our highway signs have a little lighthouse on them. The South Shore encompasses three counties, Lunenburg, Queens and Shelburne. The total population in is 100,183 (2006 Census). The traditional natural-based resource industries such as forestry, farming and fishing are still the main employers
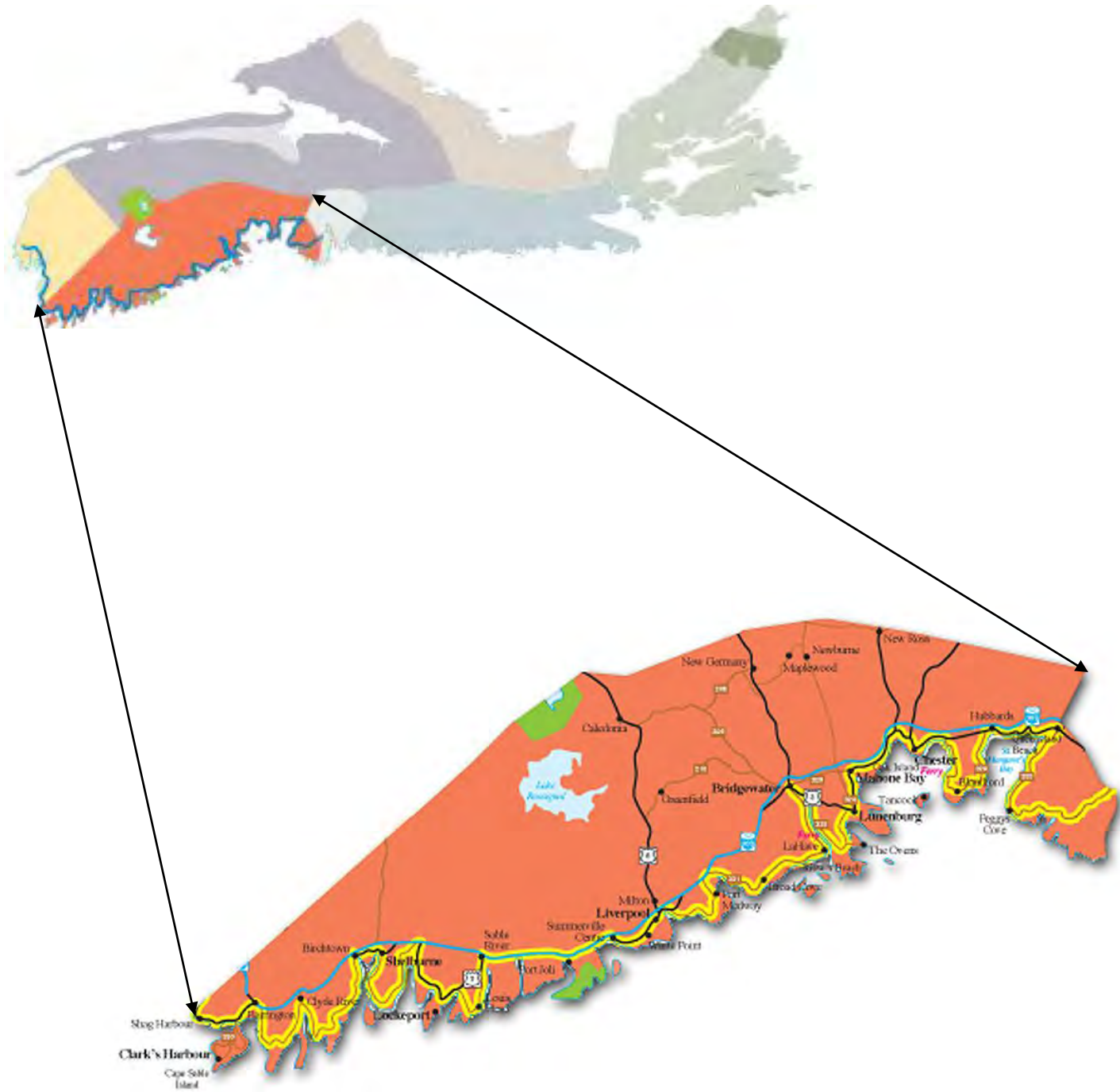
The rugged beauty is also due to the fact that we are a rural area with few large businesses and towns. There are some pockets of manufacturing, for example we have a tire manufacturer in Bridgewater, a plastic pipe manufacturer in Mahone Bay, a paper mill in Liverpool, and an aerospace plant in Lunenburg. Health care, education and government also provide a lot of jobs in our area.

The main highway in our area is the 103, which is not twinned in our district and still goes through some communities. The roads heave a lot in the spring, making driving slower than other times of the year. These conditions make it difficult for some of our members to travel to a class outside of working hours.

The nearest large centre is the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), our provincial capital. Our labour council district covers from <u>Shelburne </u>in the South to <u>Caledonia</u> in the West and just to the edge of HRM in <u>Hubbards</u> in the North. There is no public transportation system.

In Figure 3 on the next page, you will see that we are in the South Western region of the province. We have included an enlarged map of our area so that you can get a better idea of where we live and work.

Figure 3

Who needs to be at the table?

The tripartite model of Workplace Education in Nova Scotia demands that a joint committee be formed to oversee the program. The joint committee is called a **Project Team. This is where decisions about the program are made so it's** important that the people sitting on the committee are committed to providing their members with the best educational experience possible. You must choose your members carefully because they make the program work.

Labour council:

The labour council will need to select <u>at least two persons</u> to sit on the **Project Team. In the beginning we found that it's important to have** the secretary there to take notes for reporting back to the membership and the treasurer to discuss finances.

For our Project Team we selected; Bud Johnson, President, Ann Cunningham, Secretary and Linda Wentzel. Linda is a staff member of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL). **She coordinates the federation's** *Lighting the Way* literacy project. Linda was on lay-off at the time our program took place and volunteered to help the labour council on this project.

Skills and Learning Staff:
The Department of Labour and Workforce Development, Skills and Learning Branch employs eight staff persons called Skill Development Coordinators. They work in all parts of the province. The Skill Development Coordinator is a mandatory member of the Project Team and will help a labour council apply for funding, search for a place to hold the class and help you find an instructor. They have years of experience and will be able to help a labour council through the steps necessary to start a program.

Community Organizations:
There are organizations in every community that provide services your labour council may want to use. We found a computer lab at a reasonable cost at the Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship (ACSBE).

You may find other services that will benefit your program. By using local resources your labour council will be supporting some worthwhile programs for all people in your community.

A staff person from ACSBE sat on our project team and was able to answer questions and deal with issues arising about the computer lab space, especially when there were problems with the computers themselves.

It is also important to mention that the centre is an extension service of Acadia University, which is located in Wolfville, and their primary role is to provide services to our community, not to make money. That meant that the labour council was able to negotiate an affordable rate for the use of the computer lab.

Additional Information
The Project Team also includes the instructor once they are hired. The instructor will give updates to the Project Team at each meeting. They should not disclose personal information about any of the learners at the meetings. The instructor is expected to speak in general terms about the way the course is going; whether or not there are any problems or success stories, and any other information he/she thinks the Project Team needs in order to oversee the course.

Usually learners are a part of the Project Team too. They join the team once the course has started. In our case, both Ann and Bud decided to participate in the course, so they were also the learner reps on the Project Team.

Funding

How we found the money

There is one question that we are asked a lot: *How did a small labour council find the resources to organize and run an essential skills program?* Our **answer is simple; it's not hard if you look for funding in many different** places. We are not accountants or financial wizards, we are ordinary working people who were presented with a challenge and we saw that challenge as an opportunity.

Before we started to look for funding there were some things that we already knew:

o The Skills and Learning Branch of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development provides grants to Project Teams so that they can pay for an instructor.

o The South Shore Labour Council decided that they might have enough money to pay for a computer lab if they could find one at a reasonable price.

o Linda Wentzel, a staff member of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour also sits on the Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education Committee and was able to ask the Program Manager to consider the labour council as a possible site for a program. This was a slight adaptation of the current tripartite model.

What we didn't know is how much a computer lab would cost, or if there were other costs associated with organizing and running a program. We struck a small committee to research these questions. It took a couple of months to gather the information we needed.

The Skills Development Coordinator was able to suggest the ACSBE Centre and the local Nova Scotia Community College as possible locations with computer labs. Since both sites were actually across the street from one another and in a town that was central for travel. We selected the most affordable site.

We also found out that since there was no employer involved in the program, <u>the labour council would have to assume the **employer's role and responsibility**</u>. That meant that the labour council would have to assume any other costs involved in running a course, including the course materials and hosting the closing celebration.

Since we were spending all our available funds on the computer lab rental, we decided to host a pot luck celebration. To avoid having to rent a location for the celebration, it was held in conjunction with a regular labour council meeting. Most of the graduates and their families stayed for the meeting. For some, it was the first time they had attended a labour council meeting. You will read more about the celebration later in this manual.

Employers usually handle the job of paying the instructor once the grant is received because they already have a payroll system in place. In our case there was one instructor that had to be paid. We decided that the Skills and Learning Branch would send the grant money to ACSBE and that they would handle this duty and provide an accounting to the labour council. Since the **centre had a payroll system in place and we didn't they were able to carry** out this function for us without any difficulty. This worked out very well for the labour council.

Funders

South Shore Labour Council

The South Shore Labour Council voted to pay for a computer lab and closing celebration for the course participants.

Skills and Learning Branch, Department of Labour and Workforce Development

Through the Workplace Education Initiative, the labour council was eligible for a grant to pay the instructor. The grant also paid the instructor to do the individual needs assessments, for some of her preparation time, and for attendance at two Project Team meetings.

They also adapted the Organizational Needs Assessment into an **Educational Needs Assessment**, making this a **workforce education program** instead of a **workplace education program**.

Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship

ACSBE provided the computer lab at a discounted price, maintained the computers, made sure the lab was clean and ready for use each week and provided a staff person for the Project Team. In fact, all Project Team meetings were held at the centre. They were also able to accommodate make-up dates for classes that were cancelled due to weather and road conditions.

The reason we say that the computer lab price was discounted is because we were quoted $1,194.00 for 35 hours of use. When we received the bill at the end of the course which ran 37 hours, the price was $1,050.05.

Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour provided binders, note books, pens and pencils for each participant and a small honorarium for the instructor.

Participants

You may wonder why we have listed participants among the funders. This is an important point to remember, participants provided their own childcare where necessary, travel costs and any lost time for those who worked shifts.

The participants were very creative in getting to class from their communities. To start, the participants themselves decided on the location that would be best for them. Once they had chosen the town of Bridgewater as the easiest for all to get to, the labour council looked for an available computer lab.

Remember that there is no public transport in our area so participants had to drive to get to classes. Some of the participants were able car-pool from their communities. It not only saved on the cost of gas and helped the environment, but provided company on some lonely stretches of roads.

As well, calling from one community to another usually involves long distance charges. To help reduce costs, the participants created phone trees to let each other know when classes were cancelled due to weather and road conditions. The instructor phoned a contact person in each area and that person started the phone tree for their area.

	Budget		
Funder	**Item**	**Projected Cost**	**Actual Cost**
SSLC	Computer lab	1,194.00	1,050.05
	Closing celebration	100.00	50.00
Skills & Learning	ENA (focus group)	N/A	N/A
These items were included in the grant to the Project Team	Instructor :		
	o Orientation	50.00	50.00
	o INA	325.00	325.00
	o Prep time	500.00	500.00
	o Instruction time	875.00	875.00
	o Project team meetings	50.00	50.00
	o Evaluations	275.00	275.00
	Printing certificates	In-house	Unknown
ACSBE	Staff time	In-kind	Unknown
	Meeting space	In-kind	Unknown
NSFL	Class supplies & honorarium	100.00	165.00
Total		$3,469.00	$3,340.05

Budget Notes:

The **closing celebration** was held in conjunction with the June meeting of the South Shore Labour Council. The labour council rents a hall for the regular meetings, so we combined the two functions, saving $35.00 in rental fees.

Celebrations usually involve food and ours was no different, but here again we saved some money. The celebration was pot luck; participants, labour council members, and families brought contributions to the celebration. As with most pot luck dinners, the food seemed to multiply during the evening and there were lots of leftovers that went home with some of the participants and labour council members!

Since the labour council regularly provides tea and coffee at meetings, these were included in the regular meeting budget, not the celebration budget. However, this was a celebration, so we splurged a little and bought a cake decorated with a computer, milk, cream, napkins and utensils.

The **focus group meeting** was facilitated by Judy Purcell, Skill Development Co-ordinator for the South Shore. It is part of her job description to carry out this part of the start-up activities. In a workplace, this would be called an Organizational Needs Assessment. In our case, it was really an **Educational Needs Assessment** to see what our affiliated members wanted to learn. We did not match their learning goals to those of a workplace.

Other costs associated with conducting focus group meetings at a workplace such as release time and meeting space did not apply to the labour council. **Our focus group meeting took place at Linda Wentzel's home in Lunenburg** and the participants donated their time after work.

Printing certificates for each participant is done in-house by the Skills and Learning Branch of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development. This is done for all Workplace Education Initiative programs.

ACBSE donated their staff time and meeting space for project team meetings as part of their contribution to the pilot project. They also lowered their original price quote for the use of the computer lab. This was a pleasant surprise for the labour council.

The **instructor** costs were based on hours worked at $25 per hour. Class instructors periodically negotiate pay raises through their organization, the Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia (AWENS). Future costs may be slightly higher.

Logistics

Once the South Shore Labour Council decided to organize and run a workforce education program, there were some steps we had to take to make this idea work. In this chapter we will explain what we did. If you do not live in Nova Scotia you may have to do some things differently.

Forming the Project Team
In Nova Scotia, all the stakeholders in a program sit on a Project Team. The idea is that all will contribute to and share in the success of the program. The responsibility of the Project Team is to plan and carry out all the activities related to the workplace/workforce education program. As we stated earlier, the South Shore Labour Council chose Bud Johnson, president, Ann Cunningham, secretary and Linda Wentzel as our Project Team.

Project Team duties include:
- writing the proposal and application for funding;
- advertizing and promoting the program;
- hiring the instructor;
- providing workplace materials for the instructor;
- coordinating the focus group meeting and the Individual Needs Assessments;
- working with the instructor to plan the program;
- holding regular meetings that will give everyone an opportunity to discuss issues which may arise, find solutions, and solve problems; and
- evaluating the program.

This isn't as hard as you may think. We worked with Judy Purcell, the Skill Development Co-ordinator in our area. She has a lot of experience starting programs and was a big help to us.

Judy helped the labour council write the funding proposal. The proposals are reviewed every month by a sub-committee of the Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education Committee, so we knew that we wouldn't have to wait very long for the application to be approved.

Getting the word out

The labour council Project Team decided that the first step would be advertizing the course. The labour council did a mail out to all affiliates, which included a description of the course, contact information and a sign-up sheet.

Members of the Executive also talked about the upcoming program at every meeting. As a follow-up to the mail-out, we tried to make contact with as many unions as possible by phone. Where possible, we asked that there be one person in each workplace to act as a contact person so that we could get the information back on time.

We used clear language and design principles when we wrote the materials. This is important; we wanted to make sure that our message was clear and expressed in a way that made sense to readers.

Our program involved small numbers, thirteen participants. However, the evaluation forms tell us that the participants heard about the course in a variety of ways. They listed these ways of learning about the course: heard about it from someone, saw a poster on a bulletin board and heard about it **at a union meeting. There doesn't seem to be any one way of telling** everyone about a course. You need to use a lot of different approaches when it comes to getting the word out.

Focus group meeting

Judy asked us to arrange a focus group meeting with those who had signed **up for the program. We met at Linda's house in Lunenburg –** again at no cost to the labour council and she made tea, coffee and cookies. The location and the snacks gave the meeting a relaxed feeling.

During the focus group, Judy asked a series of questions to find out what kinds of things the group wanted to learn about or on computers. The best quote of the night came from a person who said: **"I want to know enough so** that I can control the computer, and not have **the computer controlling me."**

Judy also asked questions about what else people would like to learn. We got some ideas for other courses that we could organize in the future.

After the meeting, Judy wrote a report for the labour council. It outlined what types of things the participants wanted to learn, where they wanted

the class to be, what days of the week would work for them and what times were best for the majority. That information was used to write the funding application. It can also be used to plan our next course because we got a lot of suggestions about other courses people would like to take.

Hiring an instructor

Judy suggested a qualified instructor and helped to set up the interview. The decision of who to hire was up to us. If **we'd had someone in the labour** council who was qualified, we could have hired them. Unfortunately, we **didn't have anyone in our ranks but we think we hired someone who was a** very good instructor.

<u>Checking references is important</u>. Take the time to call companies or people that are named in the résumé. Find out if this person will be a good fit for your labour council.

Individual needs assessments

Once the instructor was hired, one of her first jobs was to phone all the people who signed up for the course and arrange to do Individual Needs Assessments.

This is a mandatory step in the process. It takes about one hour to do an assessment. **This is not a test; it's an interview with the instructor. It is her** job to find out what each person wants to learn during the course, how much they already know about the subject, and to try and figure out how **they learn best. It's a conversation between two equals, who want to learn from each other. Some of the participants told us that they didn't think it** was possible to talk about computers and learning for an hour and ended up taking more than an hour to do just that!

Once all the interviews are completed, the instructor used the information to develop a work plan for the course. The outline was presented to the project team to see if we agreed with the plan. We did and you will find the outline at the end of this manual, under Resources.

Selecting a place, day and time

During the focus group meeting, one of the questions that Judy asked was: Where do you want the course to be held? Judy took notes and reported back to the project team later, but we were at the meeting and realized that everyone wanted a central location.

The location everyone agreed on was Bridgewater. It was about forty-five minutes away for the people who lived in Liverpool, they were the farthest away. The participants asked us to find a location with lots of parking. We were able to do that, our two choices both had large parking lots that are cleared promptly after a snowfall. One was the Community College and the other was the ACSBE Centre which is in a shopping mall.

There was a little more discussion on a day and a time. After a lot of talking the participants decided on Wednesday evenings from 7pm to 9pm. This gave workers time to go home, eat supper and change for the class. There were a couple of workers who knew that they would either arrive late or miss a couple of classes because of their shifts. They decided it was worth the effort and stayed with the class.

The curriculum
The Essential Skills for Computers course curriculum was based on the information the instructor gathered during the individual needs assessments. She then developed a work plan and presented it to the project team for approval.

We liked the work plan, but the real test was whether or not the participants liked it. They did, each participant felt that their interests were reflected in the work plan. Some were disappointed that their interests had to be weighed against the interests of others, but everyone felt included.

The first session
The first session is very important; it sets the tone for all the classes that follow. Our first session had two main functions, the work plan and a reminder that this was a union sponsored course.

The evening started with reading of the anti-harassment statement. It was important for participants to remember that they were attending a union-sponsored course and that they had an obligation to be respectful of their co-learners' attitudes, learning styles and capabilities and cultural differences. That is why the course started with the anti-harassment statement.

The instructor then presented an overview of the work plan. The participants needed to know what they would be learning; after all they were investing their time and money to participate in the course. At this point, there was still time for them to tell the instructor that they wanted changes to the work

plan. There were no changes made. Everyone was satisfied with the work plan.

The Closing Celebration

One of the best parts of organizing and running a workforce education program is celebrating the accomplishments of each and every participant. We have already told you that we hosted the celebration in conjunction with a regular labour council meeting.

The participants were encouraged to bring their families to the celebration. Since it was pot luck, everyone was sure that they would like at least one thing on the menu!

The celebration is also an opportunity for the labour council to invite guests to speak to the course participants. We invited representatives from each union represented in the class structure, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress National Representative.

Each invited guest was given 5 minutes to speak and they all brought greetings from their organizations and spoke about the value of education and the role it plays in the Canadian labour movement.

There were some people and organizations that we knew could not be at the celebration in person. We asked them to send written greetings and congratulations to the participants. The participants were delighted that they did this. One of the organizations that we asked to send greetings was the Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education Committee. This is the committee that advises government on workplace education and is the body that approves the grants for each program, including ours.

After all the guests had spoken, the Executive Board members of the South Shore Labour Council expressed their congratulations. At that point the celebration was turned over to the course participants. They had chosen a class spokesperson who thanked the labour council, the Skills and Learning Branch, and the ACSBE centre and the instructor Julie. They also presented her with a gift and flowers. At this point, Linda presented an honorarium from the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour.

The participants and their families mingled while the labour council set up for their meeting. Most participants stayed for the meeting.

Successes & Challenges

Decisions Made

Early in the process of organizing this course, we realized that we had to make a lot of decisions. Some were easy and some were a lot harder.

These are the decisions we had to make:

1. **Hiring an instructor.** The thought of interviewing people for the instructor position can be overwhelming. As union members, we are not accustomed to doing the hiring. We wanted to get the best instructor we could for the program. We live in a rural community so there weren't many options. The ASCBE Centre had an instructor that they used and who was a member of the Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia (AWENS). There was no one else short listed by our Skill Development Coordinator. That made it a little hard to judge whether or not we were getting the best instructor for the job.

   We conducted the interview and found that we really liked the instructor. She presented her résumé and some samples of her work. We broke for a caucus meeting to discuss her application and together decided to hire her. It was a matter of taking a chance because there was no one else to compare her to. We were very pleased with the job she did and would hire her again, but it would have been a more open and transparent process if there had been more candidates to choose from.

   The labour council has never regretted hiring the instructor. She provided an excellent learning experience for our affiliated members. She customized the program so that everyone was able to participate in the course, no matter what their level of experience with computers.

2. **Deciding who got to be in the class.** This was a hard decision. There were twelve computers in the lab. We had to make the selection process fair. And in the end, we had to tell people that they couldn't participate in the class.

The unions sent their lists of persons who signed up for the course and we invited everyone who signed up to come to a focus group meeting. We knew we had more than twelve people.

After the meeting, we discussed how to select participants, but we **didn't have to do** anything right away. Two people changed their minds about participating in the course before the Individual Needs Assessments were started. Another told the instructor when she phoned him to schedule an Individual Needs Assessment.

Right after the individual needs assessments were completed, one participant called Linda to ask her if he could stay in the course if he took a job promotion that took him out of the bargaining unit. He got the promotion because he had signed up for the course.

Linda took his question to the next labour council meeting where it was debated. In the end, the labour council decided that even though the person was a member in good standing when he signed up for the course, he would not be able to participate. The labour council felt that **the members' money should be spent educating members in good standing. This was a hard decision to make and we don't know what** the outcome would have been if there had been an empty seat available.

3. **An unexpected addition.** After all the changing of minds and hard decisions were over we thought we had twelve people signed up for the course. The first evening, thirteen people showed up!

   A person that the instructor had called to schedule an individual needs assessment had not returned her call and so it was assumed that he would not be participating in the course. We were wrong and now we had thirteen people and twelve computers – we thought.

   Just as we became aware of the problem, one of the participants arrived with a new laptop she had just purchased. She wanted to use it during the course so that she would be familiar with it. That allowed number thirteen to stay in the class.

4. **Financing.** Even though we have already dealt with financing in the previous chapter, it was probably the most important decision we made. It was a huge leap of faith for the labour council to earmark over $1,000.00 for a computer course.

There are many requests for funding presented to labour councils in the course of a year. There are many ways for labour councils to decide how to best serve their affiliates. Education is just one of many functions that a labour council performs.

For the South Shore Labour Council, it was a matter of saying; this is important to workers on the South Shore and we can do it – we *should* do it. We felt that it was really important to offer this course. Education for members is about helping them live their lives as full citizens in their communities and we believe that we did that by organizing this course.

Our labour council also believes that we have helped our members gain some skills that will help them participate in other union courses in addition to their immediate goal of learning to use a computer. For some participants, this was the first time that they took part in a union-sponsored educational program. It was a good first experience for them.

We also have to point out that we are not a rich labour council. In fact, we are quite a small labour council and we like to think that we spend our money wisely. It took a lot of debate and time to explore whether or not we could organize and run a course, but in the end we think we made the right decision.

Our next question will be; can we do this again? We think the answer to that question will be a resounding yes!

Lessons Learned

We have had some time to reflect on our experience of organizing and running a computer course for 13 workers from 3 different unions and 6 different work sites. We have learned some things along the way and would like to share them with you.

Advertise the program.

We knew that we had to get the word out about the computer course. We also had to leave the door open for those that wanted other courses. We sent out a package to every affiliate on our mailing list. It included a letter

describing what we were trying to do, a description of the course, a sign-up **sheet with a contact person's name and phone number on it** and room for people to tell us what else they would like to learn.

The workers that responded were members of unions that had delegates in regular attendance at labour council meetings. The delegates were the contact people and were able to answer questions that arose on the shop floor. This turned out to be an important way of advertizing the course.

It would have been nice to have more responses, but there were only 12 seats available in the computer lab. It is doubtful that the labour council could have financed a second course at the same time if more people had signed up. We are not sure what we would have done in that situation.

We also realize that it takes some courage to sign up for an adult education program. Those that took the first course are the leaders, the brave ones although they would tell you they are not. If the labour council were to advertise a second course, these first participants would be part of the advertising strategy. They would be able to tell co-workers and those in other unions how the course was for them, about their experiences in an adult education program. Most of all, we think they would talk about how **much fun they had! That's probably the best advertising possible.**

State the terms of participation clearly.
You must be a member in good standing.

We *really* wish we had done this in the beginning! We did not think of this when we were talking about who would be in the course. We worried about not having enough spaces for those that wanted to learn about computers. We worried about when and where to hold the course. Not once did we think of asking participants to be members in good standing. We should have.

It was very hard to tell a former brother, who had gotten a promotion that took him out of the bargaining unit that he could not participate. We do not want to be in this position again. Next time, we will include that information on the sign-up sheet.

Preparation time for instructors.

This is so important! Our instructor was paid for 20 hours of preparation time. While she has not confirmed how many hours it took, we are sure that

she spent a lot more than 20 hours preparing lesson plans that took into account the different levels of experience among the 13 participants.

Each class involved a general lesson plan on a particular topic that included practice on the computer. During the practice, the instructor moved through the room helping each person with the areas that they needed more help with. For some participants there were extra instructional sessions at this point.

The instructor also reported that most participants <u>demanded</u> homework so that they could practice between classes. This took time to prepare as well. (We were surprized by this! When was the last time you wanted to do homework?)

Finally, the instructor was paid for 35 hours of instruction time, but actually taught 37 hours.

Labour councils can help instructors when it comes to preparing for classes. Labour councils can offer to do photocopying and provide union materials to use in classes. **These won't cost a lot of money, but will be a big help to the** instructor.

Finances

When we first started talking about this project **we didn't realize that without** an employer in the picture, **the employer's usual portion of the budget would** fall to the labour council.

As it turned out, it was manageable. Again, we want to point out that we are **not a rich labour council, but we are a determined one. The phrase; "many hands make light work," took on new meaning as we looked for ways to** provide everything needed for the course.

We were able to work around the usual employer costs such as materials; the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour provided those. The participants attended the course on their own time, so there was no release time to cover. The focus group and needs assessments were also done on the **participants' t**ime. Usually employers pay more than unions when the programs take place at the workplace because they involve release time for workers and meeting space for focus groups and individual needs assessments. Union costs are usually in-kind, but can sometimes include books and materials.

A computer course is probably the most expensive course to offer, mainly due to the lab rental. If this had been an essential skills course on any other subject, the costs for space would have been lower and the costs for materials such as text books and other supplies might have been higher.

In the end, we found that by working together we were able to provide everything needed for the course. Many small purses were able to fill one large pot!

As a committee, we suggest that labour councils be creative in looking for sources of money.

- o Ask union locals to contribute money or supplies.
- o Look for labour-friendly corporations to sponsor the program (offer advertising).
- o See if a central labour body (a federation or division) can help you with donations of materials.
- o Check out community organizations that may be able to contribute funding or in-kind help. Some organizations, such as the Rotary Club, have a mandate to sponsor literacy programs.
- o If you decide to purchase text books for courses that lead to a GED, sign them out to participants and tell them that if they are returned in good shape they are free. If they are not returned or are damaged there will be a cost to the learner. This allows labour councils to reuse the same books for another course while including the value as part of their contribution.

In closing, we would like to say...
This is an ending from an evaluation form we use and we thought it would work well here.

In closing, we would like to say that the South Shore Labour Council did this because we believe that literacy and essential skills are union issues. They affect our members and have a significant impact on their lives, families, union participation and communities.

We believe that education is one way of reaching out to union members who may not be active in their unions. We also believe that we should not wait for someone to act for us. The South Shore Labour Council saw an opportunity to help affiliated members and we took action. We would do this again in a heartbeat.

Glossary

Educational Needs Assessment is used to determine the essential skills training needs of a group of workers. It is an assessment of what courses should be offered and how these programs can be offered in the best way. It is a "big picture" understanding of the needs of your affiliated members.

Focus Group Meeting is an informal gathering to share information about the proposed project, to gather information about what workers want to learn. Topics can include what kind of training practices employers are providing, what essential skills workers need for work, union or home life, recommendations for scheduling and location of courses. It is a way to document the educational needs and goals of your affiliated members.

Individual Needs Assessment is a one-on-one meeting with the instructor to talk about learning goals and needs. The assessment generally takes about one hour and is a relaxed and informal process. The instructor will try to find out what the individual skill levels are and how best to instruct the classes. The information gathered is used to customize the class sessions to meet the real learning needs of your affiliated members.

Organizational Needs Assessment is done when working at a workplace. It is the first and most important step in developing a training plan at a work site. It is carried out by a Skill Development Coordinator or a consultant who surveys 15-20 percent of the total workforce. It provides the same type of information that an Educational Needs Assessment provides; information on what programs should be offered and how these programs can be offered at times and locations that suite workers and management. The only difference is that the goals will include employer goals as well as union goals.

Project Team is a joint committee made up of the union, management (if applicable), program participants, the instructor and the Workplace Education Skill Development Coordinator.

A Project Team:

- o Shares information with workers about the project;
- o Writes the proposal and application for funding;
- o Reports back to the labour council;
- o Hires a workplace education instructor;
- o Monitors the project activities to make sure they are on schedule and that **labour's goals and objec**tives are being met;
- o Acts as a resource and support for the instructor;
- o Works with the instructor to plan the program;
- o Once the program has begun, holds regular meetings giving everyone an opportunity to discuss issues, find solutions and solve problems;
- o Takes part in continuous evaluation of the program.

Tripartite Model is a Department of Labour and Workforce Development model of workplace education. The department, in partnership with labour, business and industry, manages a program called Workplace Education. Workplace Education promotes learning at work and supports the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce. Although the program is meant to take place at work, the Skills and Learning Branch of the Department of Labour and Workforce Developme**nt will adjust it to fit a labour council's reality.**

Services offered:

- o **Conduct an assessment of an organization's learning needs;**
- o Base program recommendations on the kinds of programs that would benefit organizations and the workers;
- o Help organizations apply for funding to implement these programs;
- o Help selecting trained adult educators to teach the programs;
- o Offer support to organizations while the program is on-going.

Workplace Education Initiative The Department of Labour and Workforce Development, in partnership with business, industry and labour organizations, manages a program called Workplace Education. You will find a description of the Workplace Education Program below.

Workforce Education Program is a program that addresses the needs of workers who are not currently working or workers who are participating in a program offered by a labour council. It is a program that is not attached to a particular work site or employer.

Workplace Education Program is a program that takes place at a place of business or a location selected by a workplace Project Team. This means that workplace education programs can take place at work if that works for everyone, or at a training centre or computer lab that is mutually agreed upon as a good location by all members of the Project Team, or it can take place at a union hall, if all members of the Project Team agree. It is a program that takes place wherever workers gather to learn together.

Source: These definitions were developed from; *Making It Work: A Guide for Workplace Education Project Teams in Nova Scotia*. We wish to thank the Skills and Learning Branch, Department of Labour and Workforce Development for allowing us to use this wonderful resource.

Course Outline

The Computer System and File Management	
2 hours	The computer system parts & functions
	Computer Ergonomics
	Start up procedures
	Parts of the desktop & an application window
	Understanding different programs & their icons
	Using help functions
	Basic keyboard & mouse skills
	Windows explorer
	Viewing contents of folders
	Creating and naming folders
	Understanding file paths
	Using find and search facility to locate documents
	Use of minimize, maximize and close
	Resizing and moving windows
	Logging off, close and shut down procedures
Word processing Using Word	
5 hours	Loading Word
	Parts of the document window
	Entering, amending, inserting and deleting text, numbers & symbols
	Opening a previously saved document
	Changing text appearance with the use of font styles, size and colour
	Alignment of and emphasizing text
	Setting margins & line spacing
	Spelling, grammar & thesaurus
	Use of Find and replace
	Inserting pictures from clipart and pictures from file
	Copy, cut and paste
	Use of print preview
	Keyboard short cuts
	Creating tables
	Saving & printing documents
Spreadsheets Using Excel	
5 hours	Understanding Excel terminology and its uses
	Loading Excel
	Parts of the Excel window

	Entering text and numeric data
	Changing column widths
	Entering simple formulae
	Deleting and inserting rows or columns
	Replicating entries or formulae
	Recalculating data
	Formatting cells and display features
	Saving and printing
	Using autofill
	Sorting data
	Creating charts and graphs, pie, column & line

Internet & Email

4 hours	Viewing web pages and using links
	Using search engines
	Finding specific information
	Organizing favourites folder
	Changing your home page
	Setting up an email account
	Entering contact information
	Composing an email
	Opening, replying and forwarding messages
	Sending email attachments
	Use of cc & bcc

Databases Using Access

4 hours	Understanding database application basics
	Understanding the parts of the document window
	Creating a database structure
	Entering data
	Amending, deleting and replacing specified data
	Use of filters and sorting
	Creating and saving queries
	Printing specific fields

Desktop Publishing Using Publisher

	Creating a blank publication
4 hours	Use of lines & shapes and colours
	Use of text & picture frames
	Inserting Word Art
	Inserting pictures from clip art
	Copying and rotating pictures
	Formatting pictures
	Use of colour and font variations, shading and borders
	Resizing & positioning images

	Use of the wizard
	Printing publications
Presentational Graphics Using PowerPoint	
4 hours	Creating a presentation
	Slide layouts
	Creating a slide master
	Adding text and inserting images
	Use of page view/zoom
	Resizing and moving images
	Formatting and background colour
	Adding, deleting and re-ordering slides
	Changing slide orientation and sizing
	Applying timings
	Starting a slide show
	Adding notes to slides
	Printing slides
1 hour	Putting it all together – create manage & integrate files
1 hour	Keyboarding technique
1 hour	Computer maintenance
1 hour	Downloading & burning to CD
1 hour	Digital photography
1 hour	Final assignment & course evaluation

Sample Instructor Interview Questions

Section 1: Experience

1. Outline your teaching experience.

2. Some of the courses you may be teaching involve the following areas

   a. Communication skills

   b. Mathematics

   c. Computers

   d. Writing

   e. Problem solving

   Do you feel confident in these areas?

3. What is your experience in working with adults?

Section 2: Methodology

4. As an instructor in a workplace/workforce education program, how would you use the union to assist you?

5. What methods would you use with learners to improve their essential skills in this particular program?

6. Adult learners have to see a reason for learning something. Learning has to apply to their work, union, or other responsibilities to be of value to them. How can a course be adapted to meet this need?

Section 3: Evaluation

7. How would you evaluate and document learner progress?

8. How would you recognize the efforts of learners at the end of a program?

9. When you find yourself in a new teaching situation, what do you hope to achieve?

Section 4: Fostering Partnerships

10. What experience do you have working on a team?

11. How would you develop and foster partnerships among the stakeholders in your role as Workplace Education instructor?

12. How would you handle problems which might arise during the course of the program? (Please give us an example.)

Section 5: Adult Education

13. Adult learners bring a wealth of experience to the classroom. Can you think of ways that this experience and knowledge can be used for the benefit of the class?

14. How would you respond to anyone who asked how a particular learner was doing in class?

15. This is a part-time position. Can you fit the program into your schedule?

End the interview by thanking the prospective instructor for taking the time to meet with your committee.

Ask for references. <u>Make sure you check the references</u> before hiring an instructor.

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Resources

Canadian Labour Congress

The CLC has produced a series of handbooks called; Learning in Solidarity. There are 5 publications in this series:

- Learning For Our Lives: A Union Guide to Worker-centred Literacy

- Bargaining Basic Skills: What Unions Should Know About Negotiating Worker-centred Literacy Programs

- Making it Clear: Clear Language for Union Communications

- Making it Clear: Clear language screen

- Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-centred Literacy

Department of Labour and Workforce Development, Skills and Learning Branch

The Skills and Learning Branch has information kits that you can use. They have also published the following:

- Making It Work: A Guide for Workplace Education Project Teams in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

The federation has a resource centre with materials that are useful to unions running programs. You can borrow items for 2 months at a time.