

Learning Needs Analysis for your Staff and Volunteers

This fact sheet aims to give a brief guide to undertaking a learning needs analysis for your organisation, its staff, trustees and volunteers.

Learning Culture

Every organisation needs appropriately qualified and trained staff and/or volunteers and trustees in order to run effectively.

There may be high turnover of staff/volunteers or changes in the landscape in which you work and so it is important to ensure that learning and development opportunities are available within your organisation in various forms.

It will therefore be important to think about the learning culture in the organisation:

- Is learning valued?
- Are learning and development embedded across the organisation?
- Do you have a training budget?
- Are staff encouraged to seek out learning and development opportunities?

Developing a good learning culture takes time and commitment and can have implications for your budgets. However, the long term benefits include a better quality service; higher skilled staff/volunteers; lower staff turnover; higher staff motivation etc.

Here are some ways in which you can encourage and raise awareness of the value of learning:

- [Investors in People](#)
- [Learning at Work Week](#)

Learning and development may include:

- Taking time to read the latest news and information from the sector in which you work; keeping up-to-date with changes and new ways of working
- Attending networking sessions or peer-to-peer time
- Action Learning Sets
- Mentoring
- Attending seminars and workshops (internal or external)
- Going on training courses (internal or external)
- Online training courses
- Away days
- Coaching sessions
- Shadowing
- Job swaps or secondments
- Cascading information from conferences/seminars/training at team meetings
- Lunch and Learn sessions delivered by staff to staff
- And so on.

In order to make the best use of time and money, it is worth spending some time working out what the learning and development needs of the organisation are. This is where a Learning Needs Analysis comes in.

What is a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)?

A training or learning needs analysis is a review of learning and development needs for staff, volunteers and trustees within your organisation.

The review should consider the skills, knowledge and behaviours that the people in your organisation need, and how these can be effectively developed.

Ideally they are undertaken across 3 interlinked levels:

- Organisational
- Team/Departmental
- Individual

Before you start...

There is no point going straight to a learning needs analysis if you don't know what the organisation is going to be doing. It is therefore a good idea to ask a few questions of the organisation before starting an analysis of training /learning needs, including:

- Do we have a strategic and business plan?
- Do we have regular support and supervision in place?
- Do we have an appraisal system in place?
- Do all staff have up to date job descriptions?
- Do volunteers and trustees have up to date role descriptions?
- Do all staff have written objectives?
- Do we have a competency framework in place?
- Do we have a training strategy and/or a stated commitment to the value of learning and development for our staff/volunteers and trustees?
- Do we have processes (formal and informal) in place for effective consultation across the organisation?

The more questions you can answer yes to, the easier you will find it to undertake a learning needs analysis.

Methods of LNA

There are many ways you can carry out an LNA and so the methods may depend upon the size and type of organisation.

No matter which method you use the outcome should be an appropriate and robust learning and development plan that is based on research and linked to the organisational, team and individual objectives.

Some methods include:

- Analysis of existing strategy to work out what skills are needed to deliver it
- Questionnaires
- On-to-one interviews
- Focus Groups
- Researching competency frameworks and national standards

Organisational

It is important to start with the organisation.

- What does the organisation want to achieve?
- How does it intend to achieve these goals?
- What skills/knowledge/expertise/personalities/behaviours does it need in order to do this?

If you don't already have a strategic plan in place, it would be a good time to get one started – the thinking required for the plan will automatically bring up a number of learning needs.

A really useful tool is the SWOT Analysis. Get as many people as possible involved and either in smaller groups or as a larger group fill in the grid of organisational Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Use this to build up a picture of where the organisation is heading and how it could improve or strengthen in order to reach its objectives.

What learning and development may be required if you are going to continue to strengthen?

Team/Departmental

After strategic planning has taken place, the plan needs to be broken down into team work plans, covering the different work streams/programmes/projects.

For line managers this will mean reviewing the skills needed within the team against the teams' objectives. Do you have the required skills/knowledge etc. to help your team to work together as effectively as possible? Have you taken individual needs in account as well?

A useful tool for identifying learning needs at the departmental/team level is through having appraisals or performance reviews.

Normally undertaken annually, appraisals provide an opportunity to review work objectives for the previous year, and agree objectives for the year ahead. The learning needs you identify should be related to these objectives.

TOP TIP! Remember to make your objectives **SMART**:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Time-bound

Appraisal form design should include a section on learning and development. However, relying only on an annual appraisal to identify learning needs will not allow for the flexibility of addressing challenges as they arise. So it is important to have more regular Support and Supervision sessions (monthly or 6 weekly for example) – these should be structured sessions that give the line manager and staff or volunteers a chance to discuss the work being carried out, any support needs, achievements etc.

You might also consider using a Competence-Based Diagnostic tool to help with identifying job related learning needs. A template can be adapted using any relevant competency framework for example the national occupational standards.

These competency frameworks are often used as a basis for job design, appraisal forms and identifying learning needs.

Competencies are statements of effective behaviour in meeting a particular outcome.

Here are some useful competency frameworks:

- [National occupational standards for Management and Leadership](#)
- [National occupational standards for Health and Social Care](#)
- [National occupational standards for Teaching](#)
- [National occupational standards for Childcare](#)
- [National occupational standards for Youth Work](#)
- [National occupational standards for Work with Parents](#)
- [National occupational standards for management of volunteers](#)

Managers can be instrumental in identifying the broader skills and knowledge resource base that exists within the organisation. People may well have knowledge and skills that are not fully demonstrated within their current jobs, but which could be used in other ways – for example in mentoring new members of staff.

It may be that many learning needs can be dealt with on a team level, for example through cascading information at team meetings. However, this is more likely to be effective if it takes place within a system and culture which makes it easy for people to identify and ask for support from team members.

Individual

Appraisal and support and supervision meetings allow individuals to reflect on their own learning needs in relation to their work objectives:

- What additional skills and learning do they need to improve what they do?
- What learning would help them to consolidate previous learning?
- How can other skills be used in this job?

It is important to take into account people's career ambitions and personal development objectives. Especially in 'flatter' organisational structures, there may be few opportunities to move up the career ladder, but people are unlikely to remain motivated if there is no progression or challenge built into their work.

But be realistic about what the organisation can offer!

Assessment tool such as [360 degree feedback systems](#) can be helpful in getting a more rounded picture of individual performance, and the impact that people are making at different levels within the organisation. They are particularly useful at higher levels in the organisation.

Another key aspect at the individual level is how a person learns. While some prefer to go somewhere quiet with a sector text book, others may prefer role play or putting it straight into practice. Some learn well in groups and others prefer more 1:1 learning.

Your personal development plan should outline your personal learning objectives, linking them to agreed work objectives, whilst taking into account your preferred learning method.

In supervision meetings when discussing a personal development plan individuals and managers may want to think about the following questions:

- What do you want to get from your work?
- What are your strengths?
- What areas would you like to improve?
- Where would you like more responsibility?
- What is preventing you from developing as you would like?
- Which interests or talents would you like to develop?
- How do you like to learn?
- What skills or experience would allow you to feel more confident at work?

Don't forget to include trustees and volunteers in the training plan.

Prioritising learning needs

Once learning needs have been identified across the organisation, they will need to be analysed and prioritised. The organisation needs to know which fit the most with what it is trying to achieve and what it has budgeted for, for example.

Some areas to consider are:

- What impact will developing these skills have on our performance?
- What would be the cost/benefit of investing in developing these skills? *
- Which skills needs are the most important to our long-term success?
- Which skills needs are the most urgent?

*A case should be made for the value of the learning: cost/benefit means assessing the potential costs of learning and development activity against potential gains in quantifiable way. With this information you can make a case for the value of learning interventions to decision-makers and funders for investment in training.

For example:

- Reduced turnover and savings on recruitment costs
- Higher skill levels leading to more efficiency and fewer errors
- Reduced risk of accidents or breaches of legislative requirements (particularly for trustees)
- Higher morale and levels of motivation
- Impact on fundraising capacity through a higher skills base
- Improvements to the quality of your service and reputation
- Sustainability and succession planning

Evaluation of learning

Learning interventions may not always be the appropriate solution for organisational issues, and the process of undertaking LNA and a cost/benefit analysis is likely to highlight areas where other solutions are required.

Where learning interventions are appropriate, it is important to evaluate their effectiveness – this should be planned into the process from the very beginning. Think about:

- How the individual felt about the learning intervention?
- What was actually learnt and how has it been implemented in the organisation?
- Has it changed anything in the individuals behaviour/attitude etc.
- How far has it helped with the individuals and organisational objectives?

Much of this can be covered through support and supervision sessions and appraisals as well as observation in the work place. Useful methods of helping people implement learning is by having opportunities at team meetings or at lunch and learn sessions during which they cascade the learning to others in the organisation.

All of this together should provide a comprehensive and useful learning and development plan for the organisation.

Useful Resources

- Community Southwark – Resources/Staff and Volunteers
- GOV.UK – [career skills and training](#)
- Skills for Care - [Workforce Planning Guide](#)
- Triangle Consulting for NCVO Workforce Development team; One East Midlands: [Workforce Wheel: An outcomes tool to help you support and measure change in people management](#)
- Vol. Resources - [People Management Resources](#)
- [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#)
- [Cranfield Trust](#) (also run HRNet)
- [HRBird](#)
- [Human Resource Solutions](#)
- [Locality](#) (HR)
- [NCVO](#) - HR Support
- [PEACe HR](#)
- [Populo](#)
- Small Charities Coalition – [Resources/HR](#)
- [Target HR](#)
- [Your HR Business Partner Ltd](#)
- Southwark Council - [My Learning Source](#)
- Motivated and Competent.com - [10 reasons why a 'learning culture' is crucial to your organisation](#)

Support

If you would like any support with this or any other issues please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: development@communitysouthwark.org.uk or 020 7358 7020.