The Workplace Education Initiative (WEI) provides business skills training for working Nova Scotians. This training enhances individuals' workplace skills and supports businesses and organizations to be more successful, open to change and ready for growth.

This program is offered by the Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration (LSI) in partnership with business, industry, and community organizations. It is primarily funded by the Government of Canada through the Canada–Nova Scotia Workforce Development Agreement (WDA).

Workplace Education Initiative Service Delivery Model

WEI training is funded by the Government of Canada and the Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration, with employers providing in-kind support (e.g., paid staff leave, space for training, and administrative support). Instructors are hired as independent contractors by businesses and organizations that host WEI training. The initiative is also supported by eight regional WEI LAE Coordinators.

The training offers participants 40 hours of training over approximately 10 weeks, customized to individual and organizational needs. WEI delivers programs in individual companies and sector councils, and in "clusters" of small businesses hosted by community organizations. Classes are kept relatively small with 8 to 12 participants.

This allows for individual attention and support throughout the training, positioning participants for success.

WEI provides training for working Nova Scotians and entrepreneurs in the following workplaces:

- NS businesses (for profit and not for profit)
- business/sector/industry associations
- private-sector unions
- social enterprises

There are two types of WEI programs:

A. **Stand-alone programs (individual companies)** are meant to address identified essential business skills training needs in a single business or organization.

   If a business is interested in hosting a WEI training program, they contact their regional WEI Coordinator, who supports them to apply for an Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA). The ONA documents the training needs of the organization after assessing the organization's challenges related to workforce planning, business processes, and/or plans for growth and expansion. ONAs involve activities such as individual interviews, focus groups, surveys, and

workplace tours.

The WEI Coordinator then works with the business to build a training plan and apply for LSI funding. Once funding is approved, they work with the business to organize a Project Team (made up of employees, management, union representatives, etc.). The team recruits participants, hires an instructor, secures space for training and monitors the WEI training.

B. **Cluster programs** address the needs of a collection of businesses that have common essential skills challenges (communication, digital literacy, etc.). WEI cluster programs are hosted by community-based organizations where industry and business people tend to gather – for example, Industry Sector Councils, Chambers of Commerce, or Community Business Development Corporations (CBDCs). The organizations are given a stipend for hosting WEI training, and their responsibilities include

- identifying the need for WEI training

- applying for LAE funding with support from their regional WEI Coordinator

- advertising and administering the training (hiring the instructor, securing training space, and monitoring the program, etc.)

Cluster programs are developed to meet regional business needs. Project Teams for business clusters tend to have regional representation of business and industry as well as program participants to ensure that the program matches the actual training needs in the region.

Conducting Needs Assessments of Organizations and Individual Participants

A. **Organizational Needs Assessments**

The Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA) is a key part of identifying the essential business skill needs of organizations. ONAs must be conducted prior to WEI training. WEI Project Teams (supported by the WEI Coordinator) coordinate the process of ONAs.

All contributions to the ONA are kept confidential, and participation is voluntary.

The ONA lays out a five-year workplace training plan. It is important to note that ONAs are not only meant to recommend WEI programs. The intent of ONAs is to articulate an organization's overall training needs. ONAs may include other government training resources or services that can help them meet those needs.

Workplace tours are extremely helpful in providing insights in the assessment process; they can also give guidance to WEI Instructors on how to customize programs to position participants to transfer learning to their workplaces. Important information can be gained from directly observing people working and

from the tools, processes and documents they use in their workplaces.

An ONA summary report is generated from the assessment and presented to the WEI Project Team for validation. Once this occurs, a training plan is formalized and WEI Coordinators support organizations to apply for LSI funding.

The ONA summary reports also identify any perceived barriers to workplace training, so the WEI Project Team, Coordinators and instructors can create a plan to mitigate those challenges. Project Teams continue to use the ONA reports to prioritize and determine additional training needs in their workplaces over a five-year period.

Common elements of an ONA include the following:

Organizational Profile common questions:

- Can you describe your business's purpose (customers, markets, etc.)?

- How long has your organization or business been in existence? Are there any identified sustainability issues?

- Does your organization have dedicated Human Resources personnel?

Workforce Profile common questions:

- How many people work in your organization?

- What are the range of occupations in your workforce?

- What are the essential business skills needed in these jobs?

- Do you have a unionized workforce?

- How long has the average person been attached to your workforce? Does this vary based on employee gender or diversity?

Current and Future Workforce Needs common questions:

- What are the factors in the economy / business community / sector that would have potential impacts on your business? (for example, shifts in technology, processes, government funding, investments, stressors, or trends)

- What are the challenges and opportunities that your organization / sector / business community is currently facing? Do you anticipate them continuing into the short-, medium- and long-term future?

- Is your business exporting goods or services? Is your business active internationally?

- Does your organization / business have difficulty recruiting and/or retaining people? Why do you think this is the case?

- Does your organization / business have difficulty recruiting and retaining diverse

candidates? Why do you think this is the case?

Training Needs common questions:

- Please list and describe the current training practices in your organization / business.

- Has your organization / business invested in formal training over the past five years? If yes, what sort of training has been invested in? Do you think there is still a demand for this type of training?

- Has your organization / business identified specific training needs for their employees? If yes, what type of training has been identified, and, if possible, why?

- In which essential business skills areas do you see a need for training?

- What organizational or economic changes have been made in the past that have required retraining? Is there a possibility that this type of change might happen in the near future?

- Has your organization / business recently purchased, or is it planning to implement, new equipment or processes in the near future?

- Have there been any changes in the community or industry in which your organization / business operates that may have an impact on working Nova Scotians? Is training needed to address those changes?

Readiness common questions:

- Does your organization / business have a Human Resources plan?

- Does your organization / business have a strategic plan (in addition to an operational plan)?

WEI Program Planning common questions:

- What would be a good time to hold training? What time of the year works best?

- Are there any potential challenges that may prevent individuals from participating fully in a Workplace Education program?

- What is the best way to promote WEI programs to potential participants?

- What contributions can management, union, and/or employees provide to support WEI programs?

Recommendations:

- Training plan
- Referrals to other programs/services
- Additional resources

B. Individual Needs Assessments

Individual Needs Assessments (INAs) are conducted for all WEI program participants. The INA is a process whereby the WEI Instructor can understand participants' goals, concerns, and expectations.

INAs are conducted individually, either in person or over the phone with participants.

The INAs provide WEI Instructors guidance on whether to spend more or less time on certain content based on individuals' confidence and experience levels.

INAs uncover potential physical or learning challenges of participants that may interfere with learning, such as literacy challenges, learning disabilities or health concerns. This information may lead to further customization of the overall program or to individual accommodations to meet those needs (for example, extra time, homework, or learning aids).

There are different considerations for INAs conducted for stand-alone programs and business cluster programs:

i. **Stand-alone businesses:** When conducting stand-alone programs, WEI Instructors work with the WEI Project Team to coordinate timing for INAs. The INAs are generally done in person at the work site. This allows the instructor to observe the participants' work environment and the future training space, and to have direct access to workplace materials that they can incorporate into the WEI training.

ii. **Business Organization clusters:** Because participants will be from various workplaces, most likely the WEI Instructor will not tour workplaces. This may mean that meeting in person with participants is not feasible, and interviews may take place over the phone. In the INAs for cluster programs, WEI Instructors generally spend more time with each individual talking about their specific workplaces in order to customize WEI training appropriately.

Common elements of an INA include the following:

Participant Profile:

- What is their contact information and availability to attend the program?
- Can they describe their job – including essential business skills?
- What do they like, dislike, find challenging about their work?
- How many years have they been doing this?
- Do they have hobbies, participate in community / volunteer work?
- Do they have any physical or learning challenges that may affect their ability to fully participate in the WEI training? (e.g., environmental sensitivities, learning or physical

disabilities)

- What would make the learning environment a positive experience for them?

Education and Training:

- What types of training have they completed since they finished school? What level of education have they completed?

- Do they have a preferred learning style?

- Can they describe their most memorable learning experience?

WEI Program Planning and Expectations:

- Why did they sign up for this program?

- What are their goals and expectations for the program?

- How do they plan to use their new or improved skills in their job?

- Do they plan to change their job or business model in the near future? Are there any changes coming up in their current job or business that they believe the WEI training will help them with?

- Have they participated in any other WEI programs?

Additional questions for INAs for WEI digital literacy programming:

- How do you use your computer at work and at home?

- What social media platforms do you use?

Participants will be asked to demonstrate that they can use and/or are familiar with

- hyperlinks, navigating browsers, using different boxes, etc.

- email attachments

- antivirus software, backup systems

- file locations and how to manage them

- functions such as print settings, switching between windows, downloading, and Internet purchasing

- different devices for social media and familiarity with different social media

- specific software functions (e.g., in Excel: cut and paste, clip and drag, autosum, formulas, etc.)

Additional questions for financial management programs (e.g., Sage software):

- What is your accounting knowledge, experience and background?

- What is your business structure?

- Do you use Sage currently? What version and in what capacity? What challenges do you experience with the program?

- What is your level of experience and confidence in functions such as general ledger, accounts payable/receivable, inventory, budgets/costing, reporting (pulling and

exporting), payroll, and financial statements?

The following are the main roles involved in the design, delivery and administration of Workplace Education Initiative programming:

1. Role of Regional WEI Coordinators

WEI Coordinators administer WEI training in their regions. They coordinate training budgets, manage resources, facilitate planning activities for the overall WEI program (for example, developing new programs and curricula), and ensure the smooth running of the design and delivery of WEI programs. To do this effectively, they work directly with the host organizations and WEI Project Teams to

1. **Assist in the promotion of WEI Training** within the community or business (e.g., through information sessions and networking)

2. **Determine if WEI programming is a fit** for their organization and potentially identify other resources such as Workplace Innovation and Productivity Skills Incentive (WIPSI) that might be more appropriate

3. Assist with the applications for Organizational Needs Assessments (ONA) and funding for WEI training

4. Establish and coordinate (as needed) the WEI Project Team

5. Ensure the host organizations meets the WEI training agreement requirements (e.g., reporting to LSI) and track their compliance with the agreement

6. **Ensure that the WEI training has fidelity to the model** by providing and funding resources for WEI Project Teams and instructors (e.g., policies, WEI Instructor manual, WEI curricula and frameworks), giving educational guidance and monitoring training

7. **Evaluate and monitor WEI training**, ensuring the training is of high quality by visiting classrooms and communicating regularly with WEI Instructors and Project Teams

8. **Interview, recruit and support WEI Instructors** in their design and delivery of WEI programming

9. Work with partners to guarantee that the needed resources are in place to successfully deliver WEI training

10. Assist in the coordination and facilitation of closing celebrations

11. Assess whether the WEI training met the learning and business outcomes as identified in the ONA and the learning objectives of the training plan and make recommendations for further workplace training

In addition to their direct responsibilities supporting the host organizations and WEI Project Teams, WEI Coordinators fulfill an important role in their regions. They are advocates for regional businesses and industry, helping them navigate other workplace training resources and government programs that will assist them to meet their workforce challenges.

2. Role of the WEI Host Organization and Project Team

The host organization must first determine their potential interest in WEI training. Once this occurs, they work with a WEI Coordinator to

1. **Establish a WEI Project Team.** This may involve recruiting activities such as information sessions. The WEI Project Team should be representative of the whole organization, business community and/or the business workforce. For example, there needs to be a selection of stakeholders and partners in business cluster training and frontline staff, management, and potentially labour in stand-alone training

2. **Coordinate an Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA)** (if one has not been completed in the past five years or if significant change has happened in the business). This includes applying for funding, assisting in the facilitation of the ONA, and reviewing the ONA report and validating the recommendations.

3. **Create a WEI training plan** (with support from the WEI Coordinator). This includes scheduling and prioritization of WEI training, creating a plan to evaluate and monitor business and learning outcomes (based on the ONA), and working with the WEI Coordinator on the budget for training.

4. **Apply for WEI training funds** from LAE through the Labour Market Programs Support System (LaMPSS).

5. Arrange for training space and promote WEI training in the business or community.

6. **Hire a WEI Instructor** to design and deliver WEI training.

7. **Collect participant data** as per Government of Canada reporting requirements and register participants.

8. **Evaluate and monitor WEI training** based on participant evaluations and ongoing communication with the WEI Instructor and Coordinator.

9. Assist in the coordination and facilitation of closing celebrations.

10. **Assess whether WEI training met the learning and business outcomes** as identified in the ONA and the learning objectives of the training plan.

11. Make recommendations for further workplace training

12. WEI Project Teams may look quite different based on whether the WEI training

is being hosted by a community organization as a business cluster or an individual business for a stand-alone program:

- **Business Cluster WEI Project Teams** are generally made up of the WEI Instructor, WEI Coordinator, and representative(s) from the host organization and government and business community stakeholders (e.g., Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency [ACOA], Community Business Development Corporations [CBDCs], Chambers of Commerce, and Nova Scotia Business Inc. [NSBI]).

- **Stand-alone WEI Project Teams** are made up of the WEI Instructor, WEI Coordinator, and representatives from all levels of the organization (management, frontline, HR, labour etc.). Having participant representation on the WEI Project Team is very important in stand-alone programs.