

HOW TO Strengthen Members' Foundational Skills



Basic math literacy, reading comprehension and English language skills are fundamental for workers to access career ladders that can increase their financial security. The lack of these foundational skills can limit our members' career advancement prospects in public and private settings, whether they are having trouble passing a civil service promotional exam or completing an occupational certification. Empowering your members with these skills can be as critical to their financial earnings as bargaining wages and benefits.¹

Luckily, connecting your members with a foundational skills training program does not need to be complicated. In fact, you can run a pilot with one course to see how it goes before committing to an on-going effort. Use our step-by-step guide along with our supplemental tools to get started and reach out to the [Job Training and Development Center](#) for added support.



DEFINING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Foundational skills are the essential competencies that most adults need to succeed in the modern U.S. workforce. Unlike traditional K-12 education, foundational skills are taught with real-world or job-specific applications in mind. Common subject areas include:

- **Reading Comprehension & Math Literacy:** Developing the ability to read, write and perform computational math at levels necessary for professional and personal functioning.
- **English as a Second Language (ESL):** ESL classes are designed for non-native speakers to develop proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking English.
- **GED/High School Equivalency:** Focused preparation for standardized exams (Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies) to credential those who did not complete high school.

¹ Refer to our [model contract language resources](#) if you are interested in adding language to your collective bargaining agreement on advancing members' career development and training opportunities.

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Step 1

Identify Your Members' Needs

It is important that you identify which foundation skills are needed most, how your members are most comfortable accessing training and what barriers they may face to participating in training. If you are not sure where to start, refer to our [How to Assess Members' Training Needs](#) guide and sample member survey.

Step 2

Identify External Partners

External education and training partners play a pivotal role in connecting your members with foundational skill-building training. Likewise, partners that can provide supportive services such as access to transportation or child care are also important. Once you have identified your members' foundational skills needs and potential access barriers, your next step is to identify external partners in your area that offer the training programs and supportive services your members have prioritized. Use our [External Partnerships Planning Tool](#) to help identify potential partners in your region and kick start your research and outreach efforts.

Step 3

Determine the Structure

As you start your education and training partner search, you will also need to determine how members will access classes. Options include:

1. Hosting courses/classes at facilities regularly utilized by your union.
2. Offering a member-only course at an education or training partner's site.
3. Referring members to open programs at partner training locations.

To determine how you want to provide access, consider whether your union has...

- the appropriate space to host the identified course/class onsite.
- a critical mass of members who are seeking the same skill training.

Step 4

Track Member Interest and Participation

Use our customizable [Training & Skills Tracking Tool Template](#) to keep a list of those interested in foundational skills training as well as those who have accessed and completed the training. Assigning a single person to maintain this information will help your efforts succeed, and it can help you make the case for additional support and resources in the future.²

² Refer to our Grant Readiness Toolkit if you're interested in seeking outside funding.