



# Engaging Employers

A Guide for Learn Local providers

# Purpose

This guide aims to help Learn Local providers engage employers in pre-accredited training to meet work skills needs and provide employment opportunities for adult learners.

### Information sources

The guide draws on the experiences and resources generated by Learn Local industry engagement support initiatives funded by the ACFE Board, that include:

- Skills for Work and Study (SfWS) initiative
- Learn Local Industry partnership stocktake
- Just in Time industry (JiT) partnership initiative
- Learn Locals @Work with industry case studies
- Engaging Employers professional development program
- Strengthening Pathways for Adults Learners in Gippsland (SPALG) project.

The guide also draws on other found relevant reports on involving employers in adult education. These reports from the UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia confirm lessons learnt from ACFE Board funded initiatives and provide useful additional ideas.

### Contents

The guide takes the reader through the why and how of engaging employers in pre-accredited training. It covers:

- The rationale and current policy position on Learn Local providers engaging with employers and the benefits for all involved. These can be drawn on to make own business cases.
- Employers' perspectives on training and working with education providers. It is crucial to understand employers' views and needs, just as for learners, to undertake effective marketing and develop 'win-win' projects for everyone.
- Preparation work required if outreach to employers is a new activity for the Learn Local provider and principles for good partnering.
- The various levels of employer engagement that can be developed, and models that can be used.
- Critical success factors for engaging of employers in codesign of pre-accredited training.
- The guide does not cover every situation or opportunity. It is a working document, with subsequent versions being released to reflect new knowledge/understandings gained from Board/ Learn Local provider engagement with industry.
- Feedback from Learn Local providers is welcome on their experiences of effective, efficient employer engagement models and practices to expand and improve the guide.

# Purpose

It is timely to engage employers in pre-accredited training.

### Rationale

- Skills are at the top of the agenda for employers in the current dynamic COVID pandemic affected environment.
- Employers are having trouble filling job vacancies and skilling up their existing workers to perform changing jobs due to technology.
- Foundation skills remain a key issue for employers.
- In 2022, three out of four businesses (74%) said they are affected in some way by low levels of literacy and numeracy and 17% said they are highly affected (*Australian Industry Group Centre for Education and Training Survey of 342 businesses employing a total of 213,890 employees*).
- Education programs that meet employers' workforce foundations skills needs drive job outcomes for lower-educated and skilled adult learners for whose benefit Learn Local providers' work.
- Most adults of working age are looking for tangible opportunities to find a job and keep it so they can support themselves and their families.
- Employers are focussing on their lesser skilled workers and their skills enhancement.
- The number of Learn Local providers working with local employers is growing and the job outcomes achieved for lower-educated and skilled adult learners through co-developed pre-accredited foundation skills training that meets workforce needs.
- Employers look for training relevant to the skills needs of their workers. They judge training on its relevance, flexibility and costs and much less on whether it is accredited or non-accredited.

### Case example Caden Hart, from Winslow Constructors:

"It's a fortunate turn of events that they were Learn Local and not just the standard RTO. Because we're not then restricted to just nationally accredited skill sets. We could have a bit more flexibility and creativity as far as or how we generate some training here, which is going to sort of really prepare these guys and girls as they transition into our workforce.

"For most new labourers who join our business, this is their first job in the industry. They don't really know what to expect," he says. "They think it's probably going to be an unskilled, short-term job." "But for us at Winslow, the focus is: how do we bring people on the journey for the long term?"

The Learn Local program realigns that 'short term versus long term disconnect' between the worker and employer from the outset.

(2021 Learn Local at Work with industry case study: Preston Reservoir Community Education Centre with Winslow and Mirvac).

## Employer engagement in pre-accredited training is supported in government policy

The Victorian Government places a priority on education-employer partnerships to link learners with work opportunities. This includes the Learn Local pre-accredited training sector.

**The Ministerial Statement on the Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020-25** calls for the Learn Local sector to:

- lead in Language, Literacy, Numeracy, Employability and Digital (LLNED) skills development for adults needing these skills for work, further study and life.
- extend its practices to include engagement with industry to help align pre-accredited LLNED programs with employers' workforce skills needs so that learners can obtain and retain jobs.

**The ACFE Board Strategy 2020 -2025** aims to achieve the goals of the Ministerial Statement.

The Adult, Community and Further Education Board has introduced several strategic initiatives to support Learn Local providers to engage with employers to support their adult learners work, further study and life goals, as previously outlined and used to inform this guide.

The Victorian Skills Authority's (VSA) first Victorian Skills Plan for 2022 and outyears calls for continued development of place-based relationships between the Learn Local sector and local communities and industries to understand and support current core skill shortages and future workforce needs.

**The Victorian Skills Plan for 2022** and outyears acknowledges:

- foundation skills are more important than ever as industries and jobs undergo structural changes in response to the pandemic and that these changes may further challenge educationally disadvantaged Victorians seeking to enter work or those in existing jobs that are changing.
- Victoria's Adult Community Education sector is the one that supports learners to acquire the foundation skills they need and many work closely with local employers to link learners with work opportunities.
- Learn Local involvement in general introductory work skills training that prepares people for job opportunities can lift confidence and put them on a further study or direct path to employment or a better job (*VSA Skills Plan 2022 Action 4*).

**The new National Skills Agreement** to replace the current one from 1 January 2024 has as one its guiding principles endorsed by the National Cabinet on 31 August 2022:

- ensure that no Australians are left behind as the Australian economy transitions and adapts to structural change, including by providing opportunities for life-long learning and foundation skills development.

The new national Foundation Skills (LLNED) Strategy under development is inclusive of non-accredited and accredited provision.

The use of non-accredited foundation skills delivery alongside accredited provision is being acknowledged in state and national policies and support provided for non-accredited foundation skills delivery.



## Employer engagement in pre-accredited training benefits everyone

Engaging employers can be good for employers, good for learners, good for Learn Local providers and good for the wider community. Win-win situations are best to look for and develop.

Suggested 'benefits and outcomes' that you may wish to use for your project on employer engagement are provided below.

**Table 1 Benefits of Adult Education Employer partnerships**

For employers	For adults	For Learn Locals	For local community
✓ Addresses their work force needs	✓ Gain knowledge and skills for real jobs	✓ Become more aware of local job opportunities	✓ Increases the size and quality of the local employment 'pool'
✓ Supports employee development and loyalty to the business / Reduces staff turnover	✓ Connect learning to real world settings/ ✓ Improves attendance	✓ Develops contextualised courses that meet real work needs	✓ Less vulnerable to economic downturn due to labour shortages
✓ Enables meeting of potential new employees	✓ Enable talk with employers /view workplaces	✓ Brings curriculum to life Achieves job outcomes for more learners	✓ Less vulnerable to anti -social behaviour
✓ Reduces recruitment costs	✓ Connects to interviews for jobs	✓ Guides further study pathway development	✓ Makes community a positive place for new population growth
✓ Improves business productivity /Decreases workplace errors	✓ Increases motivation for learning	✓ Motivates teachers and improves their self-esteem	✓ Intergenerational benefit within families and communities
✓ Displays business as community-minded and supportive	✓ Sets up career pathways in local community	✓ Showcases the Learn Local as part of community solutions	✓ Builds confident community as having education to employment support

Sources: New Zealand Ministry of Education undated; Jobs for the Future 2012; The Urban Institute 2015

## Communicating the business case to employers

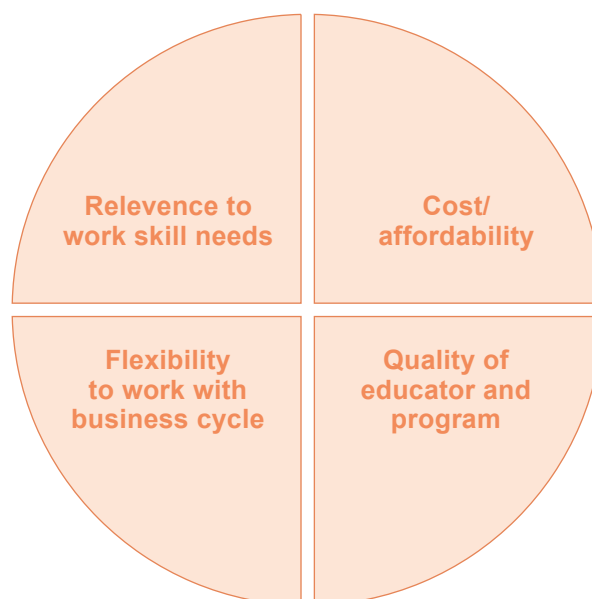
Know your customer. Seek first to understand employers.

Successful marketing to employers requires communications that take account of their views, needs and concerns – just as is done for your adult learners.

### Consider these research findings on employers general views on training:

1. Employers train their workforces to improve their businesses for productivity benefits. The key concern for employers is having employees with the required capability to perform the job.
2. Employers use a mixed model of training; both nationally recognised accredited training and non-nationally recognised non-accredited training and view these two forms of training as complementary.
3. Employers judge training by its relevance to the knowledge and skills needs of their workers; its flexibility in fitting in with their business cycles; the expertise of the training provider; and its affordability. These factors are more important to employers than what type of training it is, accredited or non-accredited.
4. Employers use non -accredited training because of its 'ability to be bespoke', as some employers labelled it; namely, tailored to specific job skills or organisation-specific skills development needs.
5. Unless there is a regulatory or legislative requirement, some employers are not concerned about their employees completing nationally recognised qualifications or parts thereof, although these may be considered signals of capability.
6. Completing qualifications or parts thereof is more likely to be of interest to employees, especially when they seek to change jobs and for longer-term careers (*Bowman and Callan 2021*):

### Summary: What matters to employers regarding workforce training





**Remember what matters to employers are also their key risks in engaging with education.**

The type of arguments employers give for not engaging in training include: that it is not relevant; I have no time or ‘time is money’ it is difficult to accommodate training around work demands; and cost.

**Imagine yourself in a business owner’s shoes:**

“The stakes for failure are high. Most owners have invested significant risk and funds to start their business. When businesses fail, the owners can owe large amounts to their suppliers, investors, lenders, and employees. Many have staked their homes for an initial loan or investment guarantee. And they have staked their livelihoods and reputations on their businesses’ success. As a result, they must be very strategic about how they invest their time and resources.

Second, satisfied customers are a business owner’s lifeblood. So their employees need to be excellent at satisfying customers. And they must be able to do this every time they engage with a customer or create a product for sale. Their employees must be efficient, courteous, on time, and present on the job every day, for every customer, or for every product. And employees must have the skills and motivation to create services and products with the quality, speed, and price that are at least as good as competitors” (*Jobs for the Future 2012*)



**Be aware that successful marketing to employers strengthens marketing to students**

This is because students highly value the link to employment and see employer endorsement of training and hiring of completing learners as valuable. Similarly, the more students Learn Local providers attract and develop into a pool of potential employees, the more relevant and valuable the Learn Local providers are to employers.



**Keep the ultimate benefit in mind: Employment outcomes for the employer and the learner.**

Clear benefits for industry and learners, a win – win model was nominated as a key success factor by Learn Local providers in the industry partnering stock take project. A strong and positive industry partnership requires understanding both employer needs and learners needs.

Learners like clear employment pathways. Understanding a simple and linear pathway is encouraging for learners as they know where they are and where they could get to.

Clear further training pathways also are important to have and convey to both the employer and the learner. While students of pre-accredited programs are preparing largely for entry-level roles through foundation skills development, they need also to see a pathway to further study if that’s what they want.

Employers can be equally keen to have workers who pathway on in their business.

## Create a value proposition

On the right is an example value proposition on why employers might partner with Learn Local providers aimed at focusing on what matters to employers. Try improving on the example noting that understanding and integrating terminology and language used by the industry is important and was a nominated key success factor in the Learn Local industry partnering stock take project. Employers interpretation of 'upskilling' may not involve foundation skills. It is also important to be clear about the pre-accredited training product, its focus on foundation skills development contextualised to specific industries and workplaces.

### Example Value proposition: Employers - Why partner with the Learn Local sector?

- Learn Local providers work with businesses to attract and strengthen their workforce.
- Learn Local courses can be delivered to upskill or reskill existing workforces – Learn Local providers work with employers to develop pre-accredited training that assists their employees to upskill or reskill them for their jobs or a career change. Learn Local courses provide industry-specific or employability skills, such as literacy, numeracy, English language and digital skills.
- Adults who complete Learn Local courses gain the confidence, core skills and training that help them adapt to the workplace. Many Learn Local courses embed employability skills such as team work, technology and communications skills so that people are job ready as soon as they complete the course.
- Learn Local courses are flexible and targeted – Learn Local providers can provide customised, quality training programs, specifically tailored to an employer's needs. These can be delivered on and/or off workplace premises.
- Learn Local courses are affordable – pre-accredited training is government-subsidised, and courses are offered at low cost. Since training programs can be tailored to employers' needs, you only pay for the training modules you need.
- We focus on quality and experience – Learn Local courses are delivered by providers who complete a stringent registration process with the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB — the body that oversees the Learn Local sector). Providers also follow a strict Quality Framework and the people who lead Learn Local courses are experts in their field. (Source LL website February 2023.)



**Perhaps show employers the Learn Local @Work project material to demonstrate good partnering with successful outcomes for everyone.**

These case studies include of:

- Heyfield Community Resource Centre with Central Gippsland Health
- Preston Reservoir Community Education Centre with Winslow and Mirvac
- Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services with Spotless Hospital cleaning Service
- Gippsland Employment Skills Training GEST with Aussie Broadband.

These case studies show that Learn Local providers can make real change to learners and businesses. Each case study includes 2 videos. One of the videos provides the perspectives of all three stakeholders - the employer, the learner and the Learn Local provider -and for which there is accompanying narrative. The second video focuses on the Learn Local provider and messages for peers on engaging employers in pre-accredited training. Read the Learn Local @Work Case Studies [HERE](#)



*Photo: International English Language Students  
Credit: Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions*

# Preparing to engage

If employers have not been a priority of your Learn Local provider perhaps consider these steps.

### **Become informed about the local economy, labour market.**

Start by becoming informed about the local economy, labour market, and industry trends that will affect employers and your adult learners seeking job outcomes. This is because students highly value the link to employment and see employer endorsement of training and hiring of completing learners as valuable. Similarly, the more students Learn Local providers attract and develop into a pool of potential employees, the more relevant and valuable the Learn Local providers are to employers.

Reach out to local employers and industry experts to identify employer workforce needs and assess what your Learn Local provider might offer in the way of highly targeted core skills pre-accredited courses that are contextualised to help improve workforce productivity.

### **Know your business to identify which local employers to engage with**

Be clear on the focus of Learn Local providers: adults who are under prepared in foundation skills. Look for industries and occupations in which employers are likely to engage with Learn Local providers. These are employers who regularly recruit entry-level staff or have staff in such positions who may be struggling and who need to build their foundation skills to retain work or advance in their jobs through further study.



These are some of the industries that Learn Local providers are partnering in with local employers but there are others to explore as well: Horticulture Arboriculture; Wool-handing; Food processing; Warehousing and Transport drivers; Building and Civil Construction; Manufacturing; Community Services, Allied Health Services, Aged Care; Hospitality, Shopping Centre Maintenance ; Early Childhood Education.

**Build individual relationships with well-informed local business and community leaders** who track economic trends in their work. The leaders of chambers of commerce, key industry groups, and professional associations should be on the Learn Local partnership manager's list of relationships to cultivate. And elected local government officials, regional economic developers, and community development foundation leaders are in a similar position to monitor regional workforce trends and the ACFE Regional Councils.

**Engage directly with professional associations or industry sector peak bodies**, those that represent groups of employers. This is seen to be particularly valuable for raising the levels of engagement by small employers, who face unique barriers – time being a major one of them. The evidence is that a personalised approach through a recognised local facilitator is an essential strategy with small business managers. *(Dawe and Nguyen 2007)*



### Perhaps engage in some professional development

Consider working your way through the Engaging employers professional development program funded by the ACFE Board and delivered by the Small Business Mentoring Service. An online self-paced learning format of the Engaging employers professional development program is due to be available from September 2023.



### Again, Be clear on your product

ACFE Board funded pre-accredited training develops a learner's language, literacy and numeracy, along with employability and digital skills which can be contextualised for the workplace. Being clear about what the product is you have to sell and in a way that resonates with an industry need is key to securing opportunities to a successful employer partnership.

### Examples of how partnerships can get started

**Aussie Broadband** back in 2018, needed staff in its Morwell call centre. Aussie Broadband is an organisation that has large involvement with the community and looks for opportunities to make the community better. Aussie Broadband joined with Gippsland Employment Skills Training (GEST) to co-design a customised Learn Local adult education program that met Aussie Broadband's needs and those of local people who had experienced barriers to education or employment in the past. This cohort needed intensive support to re-engage with learning and to understand the expectations of an employer.

**Grow Bendigo** got Spotless and Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services together. GROW is a facilitator of fruitful relationships for economic development across five regions of Victoria. Spotless wanted to stem the high turnover of their cleaning staff at Bendigo Hospital. They could see their multicultural staff were doing an amazing job, but they were not reaching many potential new staff because the recruitment process was prohibitive. Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services Team leader of the Learn Local program went to the hospital and met Spotless facilitated by Grow Bendigo and helped them to create a course that would have educational pathways bringing community members into the hospital as cleaners."

**Central Gippsland Health** decided to partner with Learn Local provider Heyfield CRC after they were shown the results of the Heyfield CRC Kickstart program from Bairnsdale Health. Central Gippsland Health (CGH) regularly recruits entry-level staff. However, there's a general lack of financial, digital and workplace literacy. In response, the CGH partnered with Heyfield Community Resource Centre and TAFE Gippsland's Skills and Job Centre. CGH has found that learners who come through the program are better equipped for success in their roles, especially those who have entered employment for the first time. The program feeds directly into local TAFE courses. The Central Gippsland Health Partnership has given Heyfield CRC the confidence to approach and recruit 6 new local businesses into the Learn Local program.

Be aware that outreach or networking may not necessarily lead to immediate business for your Learn Local provider but may help set the ground to grow a relationship with employers.

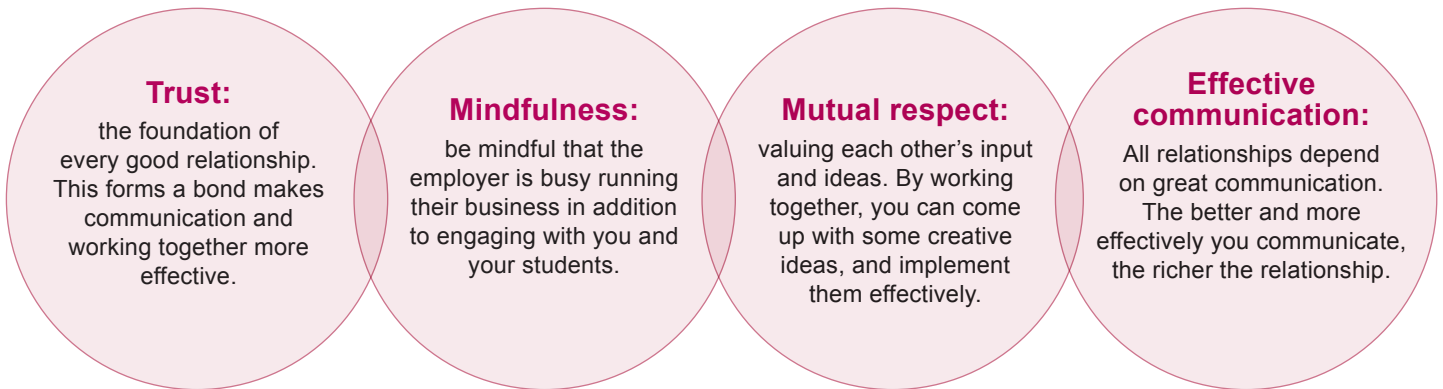
# Developing good relationships

Good relationships with employers are critical for engagement to be a success.

### Building relationships is a journey for both you and the employer.

Developing and maintaining a working relationship with an employer is based on the same principles you apply in all professional relationships.

### Principles for good partnering



### Time requirements

Building a relationship with a local employer takes time and requires effort, meaning that activities contributing to this should be carefully planned accordingly.

Employer engagement should be factored in from the beginning of the project, and if possible, any pre-existing links with or leads to, employers, should be identified and drawn upon as early as possible.

Naturally, the time spent on employer engagement has the potential for widespread benefits across the project. Keeping lines of communication open will facilitate the relationship.

'Informal' or 'unofficial' relationships with employers do need eventually to become more official in structure so that contacts are not lost if there are partner staff changes and to provide a guide for new staff to use. This is a lesson learnt in the 2021 JiT projects.



Our key employer contact staff changed mid-way through the project. The Learn Local provider had to rebuild its relationship with the company and explain the program to new person with other responsibilities that made it difficult for them to engage with Learn Local provider as regularly as originally planned. It is best to have specific person(s) to take on an official connector role to cement employer relationships.

Working with industry partners is time consuming and requires significant 1:1 attention and follow up. Creating 1:1 relationship with key individuals in the organisation is essential as a point of contact to ensure partnership success. We have developed an information sheet outlining expectations to assist further industry engagements.

As Prace explains about their partnership with Mirvac and Winslow Constructors: “ensuring that (the Partners) are on the same page with what they want to achieve from the partnership is critical. Each partner brought to the partnership a commitment to provide time, thought and energy into the project.”

### When to make things official

Requiring an employer to sign a written MOU before a strong relationship develops can undermine the process of building trust. That process includes familiarity and dialogue, as well as demonstrated follow through on initial commitments. As one employer put it to a US researcher: “We have to date before we get married.” Use memorandum of understanding only when a clear project has been developed.



*Photo: Research students in various fields  
Credit: Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions*



# Employer engagement frameworks

Employers can be involved in education programs in multiple ways.

Some researchers distinguish between employer engagement and employer involvement.

### Employer engagement

is more focused on the practical issues of making contact with employers to raise awareness and to encourage them to become involved in specific ways. E.g. speaking to a class; offering a workplace visit.

### Employer involvement

is characterised as more strategic inputs to a project or delivery partnership that allows employers to take a role in decision-making or providing general advice.

Other researchers view employer engagement along a continuum, with employer roles ranging from less active such as advising to more active and deepening to all levels of program design and implementation. Employer relationships forged and deepened have the potential to continue reaping dividends into the future.

One US employer engagement framework, geared to their community colleges is in this **figure 1**.

### Deepening employer engagement, from advisory roles to strategic partnerships

#### Advisory partners

- > Many community colleges have employer advisory councils that meet periodically to review curriculum content.
- > Individualist colleges adapt curricula to the skill requirements of individual employers.

#### Hand on partners

- > Employers work closely with faculty to develop curriculum in response to skill profiles for high-demand jobs.
- > Employers offer hands-on, work based learning opportunities, and industry staff serve as instructors.

#### Strategic partners

- > Community colleges work collaboratively with multiple employers across an industry sector to design career pathway programs with stackable credentials.
- > Employers may cover tuition, make hiring commitments; contribute equipment, in-kind, or financial resources, or establish Registered Apprenticeships.

Source: US Department of Labor, *Learnings from TAACCCT, Effective employer strategies show case* <http://support.skillscommons.org/showcases/eees>



*Photo: Research students in various fields*

*Credit: Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions*

A more fulsome continuum or ‘Ladder of Employer Engagement; provided in another US resource guide on engaging employers is reproduced in **figure 2** below.

The “ladder” is a stylized model from less intensive forms of engagement to more intensive ones.

The ladder suggests how productive relationships with employers might evolve, with activities at one level helping build trust, momentum, and leverage for more intensive activities and partnerships with employers.

Depending on the needs and interests of educators and employers and what partnerships or collaborations are already in place some steps may be skipped, engaged in simultaneously, or performed in different sequences.

## Ladder of Employer Engagement

	New Relationship		Working Relationship		Strategic partnership	
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	
<b>Key employer role</b>	Advising	Capacity-building	Co-designing	Convening	Leading	
<b>Stage of relationship</b>	Initial contact / new relationship	Establishing trust and credibility	Working relationship	Trusted provider and collaborate	Full strategic partner	
<b>Activity example</b>	Discuss hiring needs, sills, competencies; advise on curricula; contract training ; hire graduates	Job site tours; speakers; mock interviews; internships; needs assessment; loan/ donate equipment; recruiting	Curriculum and pathways devepment; adjuncy facylty and preceptors	College employer sectoral partnerships	Multi-employer / multi-college partnerships	



- **Level 1:** Advising. In the most basic form, employers are consulted informally about hiring or training needs. More formally, educators shift from seeking short-term “input” to engaging employers strategically, collaborating with them to understand workforce challenges and support the success of employers, students, and communities.

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- **Level 2:** Capacity-building. Educators and employers respond to one another’s needs: educators provide customized training and skilled job candidates to individual firms; employers assist as guest speakers, work site visits, etc.

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- **Level 3:** Co-designing. The employer shifts to an active collaborator with the education provider, including design of new curricula and pathways.

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- **Level 4:** Convening. Educators work actively to recruit and convene businesses and their associations as substantive, ongoing participants in addressing workforce needs. At a more intensive level, education providers serve as hubs or brokers of collaboration with employers on workforce and with other education and training providers.

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- **Level 5:** Leading. At the most intensive level, educators, employers, and other stakeholders build partnerships that transform local or regional workforce systems and enhance the growth of targeted industries or sectors. Some of the most effective and long-lasting regional partnerships are those that are led by industry representative.

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# Learn Local employer engagement models

The findings of the early 2021 Learn Local industry partnering stocktake included that:

- Most of the responding Learn Local providers had a combination of formal and informal industry partnerships.
- Large Learn Local providers were more likely to have more industry partnerships.
- Location was not so important. The likelihood of having a partnership was very similar between regional and metro providers.
- There aren't big differences between Learn Locals who are/are not RTOs as well in terms of numbers of partnerships and type of partnerships.
- Most providers had received no government support to establish the partnerships, and particularly so for large size metropolitan providers and medium size regional providers.

Government support through ACFE Board funded initiatives is supporting Learn Local providers to work towards employers' direct participation in curriculum design and instruction.

A codesigning level of employer engagement (level 3 engagement on the ladder of employment engagement above) is preferable to drive employment outcomes for adult learners as this makes it more likely that the Learn Local provider has up-to-date training to meet employers work skills needs and provide job opportunities for learners.

## **New relationships: 1: 1 model for codesigning**

Learn Local providers can start with one employer partnership.

Own efforts are required by the Learn Local provider to develop an emerging partnership with a business that has an evidenced workforce core skills needs.

At this point the ACFE Board Just in Time (JiT) industry partnership initiative launched in 2021 can provide support to the partnership.

The JiT helps cover costs of further partnering and developing a bespoke training solution that meets the workforce core skills needs and so that adults disadvantaged in education who participate in the bespoke training can have job prospects with the business partner or another business in the industry field.

Testing of the bespoke training solution via delivery to lower skilled adult learners is also part of the contract for a Just in Time (JiT) industry partnership initiative with the Learn Local provider using own pre-accredited training hours.

## **1 to many employers in the sector**

Your reach out to one employer may turn to employers reaching in as your Learn Local provider's reputation grows as being able to customise pre-accredited training and delivery according to employer needs and provide adults with these skills who are eager to have or retain a job.

By focusing on a specific industry or sector, the Learn Local provider can maximise limited time and resources to tailor their programming to meet the specific workforce needs of that sector.



### **Loose Associations of Learn Local providers**

Another approach is for neighbouring Learn Local providers to work in different industry sectors of relevance to each and to make exchanges of teaching staff and resources to cover both sectors in the areas of both Learn Local providers.

Or several Learn Local providers work together within the one specific industry sector, as occurred in the 2021 Just in Time initiative.

Four providers had employer partners in building and civil construction. Some exchanged resources to help each other. Learn Local Preston Reservoir Community Education Centre (prace) developed a Civil Construction Labourer Course and various effective employer engagement aids with Winslow Constructions. Learn Local Wingate Avenue Community Centre used the PRACE course in its 2021 JiT project. Learn Local Djerriwarrh was provided the course to partner with Winslow constructions in Western Metropolitan Melbourne to increase labourer employment opportunities there. Also the prace developed MOU and Steering Committee templates to help formalise Industry partnership that they agreed to being made generic for inclusion in the ACFE Board funded Engaging Employers Professional Development Program.

### **Many to many: Consortia model**

With the number of Learn Local providers working with local employers growing there are opportunities for Learn Local consortia to form.

The advantage of working in a consortia model is the ability to attract a critical mass of employers.

This “one-stop shop” method enables industry to meet with multiple stakeholders at one time, creating time and resource efficiencies compared to meeting with individual Learn Local providers partner organisations.

Another advantage of the consortia model is that lessons that work can be quickly scaled up across an entire network, catalysing systems change.

Learn Local sector led industry practice networks is a new ACFE Board funded 2023 initiative targeting three industry fields.

## Brokers: In any model

The sector led Learn Local industry practice networks the ACFE Board is keen to support offers a brokerage model. It may be easier to begin to partner with industry via a relationship broker.

The broker may come from anywhere. Some examples are:

- Grow Bendigo a facilitator of fruitful relationships for economic development got Spotless and Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services together for their JiT 2021 project (see earlier)

- A Local job program, East Local Jobs Program, actively liaised with the Manningham business network of the local council to source hospitality businesses for Living and Learning at Ajani Inc's JiT 2021 project, contacting businesses via email introducing the program and then Ajani scheduled an information presentation online to explain what the project would offer them. The businesses were very clear in their training needs which assisted Ajani Inc us to design the bespoke training required.

- The BMD Constructions Social Procurement and Inclusion Advisor has been an integral part of the success of the JobCo 2021 JiT project, providing support and assistance with many aspects of the program, including introductions and linkages with employers, industry consultation and bespoke training content feedback.

## Challenges of dealing with a broker

A broker may be able to facilitate fruitful relationships but ultimately it is the Learn Local provider and the employer who need to codesign the pre-accredited program. Few brokers will have the intimate knowledge of the employer's business required to be able to advise on bespoke training content nor the intimate knowledge of the pre-accredited training product that can be contextualised.

# Summary: Emerging Learn Local employer engagement models

Model	Features	Current Examples
<b>One to one</b>	Build a positive relationship with one local employer that can lay the groundwork for future relationships	JiTs/
<b>One to many</b>	Leveraging one positive relationship to many employers	Heyfield with several hospitals
<b>Association</b>	Pools existing resources to co-design and collaborate	JiT 2021 informal network of Learn Local providers working with building and civil construction employers
<b>Consortium: Many to many</b>	Formal consortium of Learn Local providers working together to build capacity and capability to work with multiple employers in a particular industry field to deliver pre-accredited training that meets core work skills needs for adult learners who will be good fit in the available jobs across Victoria.	Emerging Learn Local industry practice networks: an ACFE Board funded 2023 initiative targeting three industry fields
<b>Broker Supported - in any model</b>	Independent broker that provides a coordination function for both the employer and Learn Local provider to identify and develop training solutions	e.g. SPALG project that yielded industry specific curriculum in 7 fields with skills shortages

# Critical success factors according to Learn Local providers

Pre-accredited training courses involving industry partnerships are more expensive and complex to run for multiple reasons: higher coordination costs, extensive time to engage with industry and complete learning resource adaptations, risk of disappointment if employers' pullback for core business reasons or learners are not suitable for the selected industry or the pre-accredited training educator is lost.

Challenges can arise from the goals and circumstances of each stakeholder, as well as from the environment they find themselves in together and cause organisation reputational damage.

The below are the key learnings assembled from across the Learn Local industry engagement support initiatives funded by the ACFE Board and confirmed by research on involving employers in adult education.

### **Fully understand employers' workforce foundation skills needs**

Work directly with employers to understand their needs. Having a broker helps enormously to make first contact with employers.

Achieve close engagement of industry/enterprise for advice. It involves extensive consultation (i.e. working with the HR dept), evaluation, feedback and gap analysis.

Drill into what the employer is looking for in staff and the gaps that need filling focused on the generic, transferable skills that people need to have.

Understand and integrate terminology and language used by the employer/industry.

### **Choose your partner employer(s) carefully**

Look for employers with good employment credentials, where people will want to work.

Look for employers with social philosophies or obligations, whose focus is on bringing people into their business for the long term.

Expect employers to give time off for the bespoke training if it is for their existing employees or to interview completing students for a job.

### **Ensure good co-ordination**

Take a systematic approach to employer engagement.

It is critical to coordinate the project in efficient arrangements to alleviate workload and time commitments of the industry partner. This means understanding that training projects are not industry core business.

It helps to have specific persons take on an official connector role as a point of contact to cement relationships and ensure partnership success.

Set and manage expectations from the outset. Document partner roles and responsibilities to assist further engagements. Have project meeting templates in place and adjust expectations, if need be, at project meetings.





*Photo: 20160720\_SDP\_1159*

*Credit: Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions / SDP Media*



## Ensure quality bespoke pre-accredited training.

The just in time nature of employers needs can make it 'hard' to respond. It can mean very short timelines for providers to develop the curriculum resources needed, contextualised to the specific needs of the employer partner. This was identified as the biggest challenge by all Learn Local provider respondents to the industry partnerships stock take survey in 2020/1.

Use available industry contextualised LLNED curricula as a starting point for modification to be bespoke to an employer's needs to reduce cost and minimize quality assurance work.

There now is considerable quality industry focused LLNED curricula available.

Existing quality industry focused pre-accredited curricula as a result of support initiatives of the ACFE Board includes in these industry fields

- Aged Care
- Allied Health Services
- Building and Civil Construction
- Food processing Factory Work
- Warehousing and transport
- Community Services
- Early Childhood Education
- Manufacturing

Quality industry focused pre-accredited curricula is housed on the Learn Local Secure Portal <https://vetsharedresources.instructure.com/> or the LL website: <https://learnlocal.org.au/resources>

Other industry fields where there are emerging Learn local industry partnerships and tailored pre-accredited training curriculum and other teaching and learning resources via the JiT initiative include aged care, arboriculture, shopping centre cleaning, maintenance, guest services and security.

## Don't forget you need learners for the program

Some projects have failed due to lack of student numbers to run a viable program. For some, referrals into the program were/are the biggest challenge.

We have learnt how important it is to really understand the needs of both the partner industry and the community. If there is no desire from the community to undertake this line of work, then the partnership will not succeed.

Apply a multi-pronged approach to marketing and promotion to gain learners for the programs. Work through industry – employment brokers. A good relationship with Jobs Victoria Employment Service and Skills and Jobs centres and the national equivalents is important to get adequate referrals. Work also through other local social services providers.

### Engage the right learners:

Undertaking an initial check of learners skills is key to sourcing the right learners for the pre-accredited program to be delivered and for providing the individual support some of the learners may require.

Learner placement in the right programs is aided by using the PRIAK tool for LN skills assessment and the new assessment tools being developed for Employability skills and Digital skills.

If need be run training in small groups at least in the early stages. It's more expensive but can have better learning outcomes.

Keep courses short (less than 100 SCH). Develop a sequenced pathway of courses if required to help reduce learner anxiety including preparing them for longer courses that will lead to better learning outcomes.

**Remember: Pre-accredited work experience is industry-hosted work experience, supervised by a Learn Local trainer**

You the Learn Local is responsible for your learners, unlike for schools and VET providers where the student is considered an employee of the Department of Education and Training and insured accordingly.

Any employer hosted pre-accredited learner work experience must be supervised by a Learn Local trainer and not involve activities that could be deemed 'productive work'.

Learn Locals should not facilitate individual unsupervised work experience placements because:

1. The Fair Work Act does not recognize pre-accredited training under the provisions for work experience.

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  2. There's also additional exposure for host employers who engage pre-accredited learners in activities that could be deemed 'productive work' because pre-accredited training is not included under ETRA or the Workplace Rehabilitation Compensation Act, with a risk that there could no protection to host employers when someone on a pre-accredited work experience is injured at the host employer's premises;

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  3. The insurance provided to Learn Locals under the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) Community Service Organisations package only covers work experience within their own organisations. Significantly, it does not cover externally placed unsupervised work experience placements.
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If Learn Local providers would like to conduct a different model to ACFE Board preaccredited work experience guidelines, the Board recommends that Learn Local providers either:

- inform the host employer that they will need to cover the activity with their own insurance policy, and ensure host employers have adequate insurance coverage to support the activities

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  - explore other arrangements to provide adequate insurance coverage.
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**Provide additional learner support**

This can include with resumè writing, preparing cover letters for job applications and learning how to apply for jobs online.

Also post-learning in employment mentoring advice is really important. Some learners struggle once they have finished the course, for example they can have an issue with their new manager, with police checks etc. Some Learn Locals providers provide conflict resolution support and/or mentoring.

# Final comments

## The stars have to align.

As one Learn Local provider of a 2021 JiT project concluded:

- “The timing has to be right. The relationship with the business/industry needs to be solid and there has to be a genuine commitment from the employer to interview the participants at the end (if nothing else) and sufficient numbers of learners need to be interested at the same time to run a viable Learn Local pre-accredited training program that meets employer’s work skills needs”.

## Persevere. If best of intentions don’t work out in the short term, learnings can be salvaged and used elsewhere

- **Case example:** A 2021 JiT project had to be put on hold because the employer delayed starting the project that the training was for to fill the available jobs “It’s very disappointing, but outside of our control.” The Learn Local provider used the methodology of the JiT project to undertake a separate project with a client in another industry field that has progressed to delivery stage.

## The rewards can be great with ongoing benefits to all parties.

- “The Learn Local program offers something unique to the Victorian training system. It’s built from the ground up, with people who know their local area and what’s needed. And it results in authentic pathways. It’s a really great model that we can replicate with any industry partner and support more students into work.” Everyone involved in the Learn Local program agrees it’s another brilliant example of a community designed solution to a local employment and training dilemma (*Learn Local at Work with Industry case study: The Loddon Campaspe-Spotless Experience*)
- The Learn Local program is producing excellent results. It’s making a huge difference in the lives of local people. It is building skills that pave the way to a career in construction. And it all ties back to strengthening the local community. (*Learn Local at Work with Industry case study, Prace, Mirvac and Winslow Constructors Experience*)
- “The partnerships with industry has had a fantastic result for locals,” she says. “It’s fantastic to see the learners in the workplace, and to bump into them in the street and for them to let us know what they’re doing. That’s one of the best parts about it.” (*Learn Local at Work with Industry case study: Heyfield Community Resource Centre, Central Gippsland Health Experience*)
- Claire of Aussie Brand “The reality is, when you put one person through a course and they get a job, the impact spreads. Kids get to see what it’s like to be in work. And that builds people’s capacity,” (*Learn Local at Work with Industry case study: The Gippsland Employment Skills Training (GEST) Aussie Broadband Experience*)

# Information Sources

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The Urban Institute 2015, The goals and dimensions of employer engagement in workforce development programs Washington, DC

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US Department of Labor, Learnings from TAACCCT, Effective employer strategies show case <http://support.skillscommons.org/showcases/eees>

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## ACFE Board Learn Local industry engagement support initiatives

Skills for Work and Study (SfWS) 2020, that produced quality pre-accredited core skills development curriculum at ACSF level 1 tailored to several industry fields in which there are entry level jobs

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Learn Local Industry partnership stocktake 2021, conducted by ACFE Division, that gave a point in time picture of the state-of-play of Learn Local industry partnering of 80 providers who participated in an industry – Learn Local relationships survey in July 2021, and 22 providers in follow up interviews Final project report unpublished

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Just in Time industry (JiT) partnership initiative, 2021-, supporting emerging partnerships between a Learn Local and local business with core skills for work needs to codesign a bespoke pre-accredited training program that meets the need and drives employment outcomes for lower educated adults final project reports unpublished.

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Learn Locals @Work with industry case studies 2021 that showcases good practice industry partnering to provide learners in pre-accredited training with employment pathways-videos and written studies available for use for promotional purposes

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Engaging Employers professional development program 2022/3, that prepares Learn Local providers to engage with local employers to provide learners with required entry level worker foundation skills requirements ran by Small Business Mentoring Service in 2022, being converted to an online self-paced learning format in 2023

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Strengthening Pathways for Adults Learners in Gippsland (SPALG) project 1999, that included brokerage work with a range of industry partners and Learn Local providers and produced a suite of Kick Start quality pre-accredited programs contextualised for industry and aligned to local industry skills shortages that subsequently were recognised by JobActives. See SPALG Toolkit A place-based approach to support innovation in the Learn Local sector <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ba8c0cad74562ce491fb5b3/t/5dcbaadc9cceb-3182ba49249/1573628777708/SPALG+Toolkit.pdf>

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