

**GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP
FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

STRENGTHENING LIFE SKILLS FOR YOUTH:

A Practical Guide to
Quality Programming



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ABOUT GPYE

With support from the World Bank Development Grant Facility, in 2008 the International Youth Foundation, the Youth Employment Network, the Arab Urban Development Institute, and the Understanding Children's Work Project joined together to form the **Global Partnership for Youth Employment (GPYE)**. Its goal: to build and disseminate evidence on youth employment outcomes and effective programs to help address the challenges facing young people in their transition to work. The GPYE leverages the technical and regional experience of its five partner organizations in youth employment research, programming, evaluation, and policy dialogue. The partnership's work focuses on Africa and the Middle East, regions in need of better evidence on effective approaches to youth employment. This report is one in a series of assessments, research studies, technical guides, and learning papers produced by the GPYE to build the evidence base for improving policies, program design, and practices related to youth employability in the region. These resources can be accessed at www.gpye.org.



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Guidelines for Usage

This Life Skills Guide is a practical tool to help users – donors and youth serving organizations - enhance the design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of life skills programming and training based on a set of nine Life Skills Standards of Excellence (listed below). These standards have been developed by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and its partners around the world based on more than a decade of experience in the life skills arena.

We hope that this guide can help to steer users through a strategic assessment of your current life skills offerings, as well as provide ideas and examples to assist your organization in enhancing overall life skills program quality, to the ultimate benefit of the young people all of us serve. As our goal is to help disseminate best practices worldwide, we encourage you to use and share this guide widely with organizations in your network.

Who should use this guide?

This guide is intended for any organization that works with youth (aged 15-29), as well as the donors that support this work. It was created based on IYF's work with organizations around the world, conversations with donors supporting and implementing life skills programs, and IYF's extensive experience implementing the Passport to Success® (PTS) curriculum globally. Based on our regular consultations with a large number of stakeholders on how to effectively design, implement, and evaluate life skills programs, we created this guide to share our knowledge in a structured manner.

Thus the Life Skills Guide can be used by both donors and youth organizations. We expect that it will be useful in the following ways:

Donors can integrate Standards of Excellence for life skills into requests for proposals to set expectations for quality, and consequently can assess proposals according to these standards.

Youth Organizations can evaluate and improve their existing life skills programs, or if they have not offered such programs before, design and adapt new programming to meet high quality standards.

Target youth for life skills training may be in secondary schools or universities, in non-formal education settings, in vocational or professional training programs, or already employed or self-employed. Or they may not be benefitting from any of the above services, with life skills training being the first support service they have received. Finally, life skills have proven particularly effective for highly vulnerable youth and at-risk populations such as illiterate youth, refugees, and those with physical handicaps.

The types of life skills programs that can benefit from these Standards of Excellence include the following:

- Stand-alone life skills training for various youth populations
- On-the-job training for employees
- Programs within:
 - Formal schooling (middle school, high school, or university)
 - Vocational or professional training
 - Employability or entrepreneurship training for youth seeking work

How to use this guide

To help lead youth organizations and life skills practitioners through assessing and revising their life skills programming, this guide is organized into nine sections each covering one of the Standards of Excellence. The Standards of Excellence are organized into four components as outlined in the table below and provide simple, easy to understand suggestions for how to effectively plan, design, implement, and evaluate life skills programs.

TABLE 1. Life Skills Standards of Excellence

Life Skills Standards of Excellence

Area I: Selecting a life skills program curriculum and engaging relevant stakeholders

1. Core life skills competencies are included and key stakeholders' needs are addressed during the curriculum design process
2. The curriculum is adapted and piloted to ensure it is appropriate for the target audience

Area II: Selecting and training life skills facilitators

3. Clearly defined criteria are consistently used throughout the trainer selection process
4. A robust Training of Trainers is offered to prepare and develop dynamic facilitators
5. A mentoring system is created to support life skills trainers' continuing development

Area III: Creating an environment conducive to life skills learning

6. Interactive, participatory, and practical teaching methodologies and tools are used
7. Adequate time is allowed for each life skills lesson within a well-paced schedule
8. An effective and comfortable learning environment is created for all participants

Area IV: Monitoring and evaluating a life skills program

9. Life skills training is adequately monitored and evaluated to improve program outcomes

Each Standard of Excellence represents an important step in the planning and implementation of a life skills training program. In each section of this guide, the Standard of Excellence is briefly explained. This is followed by a description of the content of the Standard and practical guidance for putting it into effect. Checklists and other practical tools should help you navigate the key information quickly.

We hope that you find these Standards of Excellence and accompanying guidelines valuable and practical as you develop or enhance your life skills programming. Congratulations for taking this important first step to improve the life skills – and by extension the conditions and prospects – of youth.

Importance of Life Skills

Before exploring each of the Standards of Excellence in depth, this introductory section will provide an overview of life skills training and the evidence for its role in improving youth outcomes, both personal and professional. It will also briefly discuss IYF's experience in assessing life skills programs globally, which has given rise to the creation of this guide.

Defining life skills

Over the past two decades, educators, employers, and policymakers have increasingly placed great emphasis on the development of life skills as a way to prepare young people for success in today's rapidly changing and globalized world. However, the range of how different organizations define life skills is vast.¹ For example, the WHO has defined life skills as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life²,” while UNICEF has defined them as a “large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help lead a healthy and productive life.”³

However, all of these definitions have several elements in common, including the psychosocial, interpersonal, and emotional nature of life skills, as well as their function in enabling youth to overcome challenges, act positively, and develop to their fullest potential. To synthesize these varying definitions for the purposes of this guide, we refer to life skills as the following:

Life skills are a comprehensive set of universal cognitive and non-cognitive skills and abilities, connecting behavior, attitudes, and knowledge, which youth can develop and retain throughout their lives. Life skills increase young people's well-being and help them to develop into active and productive members of their communities.

Life skills as the key to success for today's youth

Although young people around the world are more and more likely to pursue formal education, upon graduation they often find that they are not adequately prepared for the world of work. Because skills relevant to key growth sectors of the modern economy – both technical and “soft” skills – are often not covered in traditional education systems, employers often find a “skills mismatch” between the competencies youth need to succeed in the workplace and those they actually possess.⁴ This is a critical challenge for today's youth, and one key approach to overcoming this challenge is through the provision of life skills training.

The skills mismatch has continued to grow with globalization and as many countries transition to a more service-oriented economy. Employers are finding that regardless of their level of education, most new hires lack communication and client-relations skills; organizational and prioritization skills such as time-management; and

1 For an in-depth comparison and analysis of the concept and definitions of life skills, see Jacobs Foundation (2011). *Guideline on Monitoring and Evaluating Life Skills for Youth Development*, Volume 1, pp. 9-14.

2 World Health Organization (1997). *Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools. Introduction and Guidelines to Facilitate the Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programs. World Health Organization - Programme on Mental Health*. Doc. WHO/MNF/PSF/93.7A.Rev.2. Geneva: World Health Organization, p. 1.

3 UNICEF (2012). *Evaluation Report: Global Evaluation of Life Skills Education Programs*, pp. vi, viii, 1, and 7.

4 IYF (2013a). *Creating Opportunities for Youth in Hospitality*, pp. 5-6. See also IYF (2012). *Opportunity for Action: Preparing Youth for 21st Century Livelihoods*.

flexibility and adaptability.⁵ Entry-level employees in many emerging markets may be technically overqualified, but lack teamwork and interpersonal skills, making collaboration with colleagues and problem-solving between team members difficult.

This problem holds in all regions of the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a lack of vocational and soft skills desired by businesses is contributing to high rates of youth unemployment, while in Central and Eastern Europe, 40 percent of private-sector employers report that low skill levels – particularly life skills – in the workforce are a constraint on economic growth.⁶ In the Middle East and North Africa region, the World Bank reports that the transition period from school to work lasts longer than in other emerging economies, and the rising skills gap, between what employers see as crucial skills for a successful career and the skills youth have, is an enduring labor market issue.⁷

These challenges are particularly important in light of the “youth bulge” – a peak number of young people aged 15-24 – projected in the next several decades in almost all developing countries. This can create a window of opportunity for economic growth by tapping into the potential for increased productivity and higher earnings for young people – but only if they are adequately equipped for the modern labor market.⁸ Hence, it is imperative that global and national economies be ready to reap the benefits of this demographic trend and ensure that all youth have the opportunity to succeed.

There is growing awareness of the need for life skills training to help youth manage the transition from school to work and become active, healthy citizens. Schools and universities are increasingly adding life skills as a part of the formal curriculum, as an afterschool activity, or as a part of career guidance services – often with the support of youth organizations that oversee or directly implement these training programs. In addition, employers who see a need for improved life skills in their workplace, especially for entry-level employees, are increasingly turning to youth organizations to provide youth with on-the-job training. These are promising developments and indicate the many opportunities for youth organizations to cooperate with the public and private sectors for greater program impact.

Evidence for life skills

There is growing evidence that “both cognitive and non-cognitive abilities determine social and economic success” for young people and adults.⁹ As a result, comprehensive training programs that combine in-class employability and life skills lessons with hands-on practical experience “have higher rates of success, with success defined as improving the probability of obtaining employment and/or higher earnings.”¹⁰

5 IYF (2013b). *Getting Youth in the Door: Defining Soft Skills Requirements for Entry-level Service Sector Jobs*, pp. 4-5. See also IYF (2013c). *A Labor Market Assessment in Post-Revolution Egypt: Opportunities and Challenges for the Future*, p. 8.

6 IYF (2012), p. 2 and 6.

7 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F., Semlali, Amina and Brodmann (2010). *Non-public Provision of Active Labor Market Programs in Arab-Mediterranean Countries: An Inventory of Youth Programs*, p. 1.

8 Assaad, Ragui and Farzaneh Roudi-Faimi (2007). *Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: Demographic Opportunity or Challenge?*, p. 3.

9 Heckman, James J., Stixrud, Jora and Sergio Urzua (2006). *The Effects of Cognitive and Noncognitive Abilities on Labor Market Outcomes and Social Behavior*, p. 28.

10 Angel-Urdinola, Diego F., Kuddo, Arvo and Amina Semlali, eds. (2013). *Building Effective Employment Programs for Unemployed Youth in the Middle-East and North Africa. Directions in Development*, p. 17.

Life skills programs targeting youth in low- and middle-income countries have been shown to:

- **Improve economic outcomes for youth:** Life skills programs have been shown to increase the earning potential of young people.¹¹ In addition, they position youth to obtain jobs of better quality and formality, measured by written contracts and employer-paid insurance.¹²
- **Improve education outcomes for youth:** Recent research has demonstrated that when young people are provided interventions that include non-academic supports in social-cognitive skills, learning outcomes improve as do completion/graduation rates.¹³
- **Increase employer satisfaction with new hires:** Life skills programs strengthen young people's abilities in many areas that employers consider particularly important when hiring new employees. Employers often report a higher level of satisfaction with entry-level employees who have gone through life skills training than those who have not.¹⁴
- **Change personal behavior and social attitudes of youth:** Life skills programs allow youth to create a life plan and equip them with the skills to take steps toward achieving their goals. They also help young people to better understand healthy personal behaviors, thus decreasing outcomes such as teen pregnancies, drug and alcohol use, and interpersonal violence. As a result, they help to increase young people's sense of self-esteem and expectations for their future and the future of their children.¹⁵

These findings are very encouraging and demonstrate that quality life skills programming can contribute to a “win-win” situation by addressing both youth and employers' needs.

Assessing the quality of life skills programs

Although an ever-increasing number of youth organizations, schools, and companies are offering life skills training for young people, these programs vary widely in scope, methodology, and quality. In a number of countries around the world, IYF has conducted assessments of existing life skills programs and found that high standards of quality are not always met. For example, a recent assessment of 57 life skills programs across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region found that only two out of the 10 minimum standards used in that study were met in full.¹⁶ The results of that assessment are shown in the table following:

11 Ibarraran, Pablo, Ripani, Laura, Taboada Bibiana, Villa, Juan Miguel and Brigida Garcia (2012). Life Skills, Employability and Training for Disadvantaged Youth: Evidence of a Randomized Evaluation Design, pp. 5 and 21.

12 Ibarraran et al. (2012), p. 21.

13 Cook, P., Dodge, K., Farkas, G., Fryer, R., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mayer, S., Pollack, H., Steinberg, L. (2014). The (Surprising) efficacy of academic and behavioral intervention with disadvantaged youth: Results from a randomized experiment in Chicago. National Bureau of Economic Research. White Paper 19862.

14 IYF (2008), pp. 42-43.

15 Ibarraran et al. (2012), pp. 23-24. This large randomized impact evaluation looked at the labor market outcomes of the Dominican youth training program *Juventud y Empleo* targeting disadvantaged youth. According to ILO, “life skills contribute to a systematic development of attitudes; knowledge and skills patterns required for a job” and “enhance the abilities of trainees to [...] translate technical skills into employment.” See Lobner, Sabine (1997). Life Skills for the World of Work: Experiences in South Africa, p. 1. Benson, P. L., & Scales, P. C. (2011). Developmental assets. In R. J. R. Levesque (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of adolescence* (pp. 667-683). New York: Springer. Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087-1101. MacCann, C., Duckworth, A. L., & Roberts, R. (2009). Empirical identification of the major facets of conscientiousness. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 19, 451-458.

16 IYF (2013d). Preparing Youth for Success: An Analysis of Life Skills Training in the MENA Region.

TABLE 2: Status of Life Skills Training Programs in MENA Compared with Minimum Standards

Standards met	Standards somewhat met	Standards not met
<p>Life skills curriculum includes content related to core life skills.</p> <p>The classroom or workshop environment is conducive to effective and comfortable learning.</p>	<p>Life skills curriculum responds to needs identified by key stakeholders.</p> <p>The life skills curriculum has been pilot tested and adapted for the target audience.</p> <p>Specific criteria have been established for the selection of life skills trainers.</p> <p>Life skills trainers have received basic training in delivering life skills, whether starting up a new life skills program or building on an existing program.</p>	<p>The time devoted to life skills training is of sufficient duration and frequency.</p> <p>Life skills trainers consistently use appropriate teaching methodologies to deliver life skills sessions.</p> <p>Life skills trainers receive adequate support.</p> <p>Life skills training is monitored and evaluated.</p>

Source: IYF (2013d).

IYF’s extensive experience in assessing and supporting life skills programs led to the creation of the Standards of Excellence, and ultimately this guide, to enable organizations such as yours to design, implement, and evaluate effective life skills programs. Many organizations using this guide will have extensive experience working with young people; it is our hope that this publication will enable you to take the next steps in creating or improving your life skills programming. Through quality program design, consistent program implementation, and comprehensive program monitoring and evaluation, your organization can improve the life skills of youth – ultimately leading to better employability outcomes and young people who are healthy, engaged, and productive citizens.

Section 1: Curriculum Design

Life skills training is most effective when it offers young people a foundational basis to be healthy and productive members of their communities. The challenge as you design your own program aiming at increasing youth employability will be to identify or create a curriculum that:

- Encompasses key or “core” life skills
- Emphasizes workplace-readiness skills and behaviors
- Is demand-driven by incorporating the skills employers regard as paramount for hiring and job-success
- Is flexible enough to incorporate additional life skills identified through consultation with other key stakeholders (training institutes, government ministries, educators, etc.)

This section will provide an overview of the core life skills youth need in their personal and professional lives, and provide guidelines on how you can incorporate these into your training program. It will also describe how to identify and engage key stakeholders in your curriculum development process, through the formation of a Curriculum Committee.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #1

Core life skills competencies are included and key stakeholders’ needs are addressed during the curriculum design process

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To create a new curriculum or review their existing curriculum to ensure it covers all core life skills
- To build their network of stakeholders
- To ensure stakeholders’ voices are integrated into program design

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess the comprehensiveness of grantee organizations’ life skills programs
- To assess grantee organizations’ ability to engage a wide range of stakeholders in program design

Including core and work-readiness life skills in your curriculum

In order to develop your organization’s life skills curriculum, you must establish the core content that will meet youth needs, support positive behavioral changes, and increase youth employability, whether in a formal work setting or as independent entrepreneurs. Your life skills curriculum should balance a combination of personal skills that all youth need in their daily life with specific workplace-readiness skills youth need for future employment.

Core life skills are fundamental elements of any life skills training for any youth population; a list of these skills, based on IYF’s experience and extensive stakeholder consultations, is enumerated in **Table 3** below. It is crucial that you integrate these skills into your basic curriculum, regardless if the curriculum was created by your organization or is an adaptation of an existing curriculum.

Each core life skill may be covered through one or multiple lessons, and in some cases more than one skill may be addressed in combination. In addition, connections should be drawn between interrelated skills throughout the curriculum, wherever appropriate. More basic skills must be covered earlier in the curriculum as “prerequisites,” before more advanced skills can be addressed.

To address workplace-readiness skills, it is recommended that you differentiate between the following three groups, as each has specific needs in terms of life skills topics to be covered:

- Job-seekers (recent graduates and unemployed youth)
- Employed youth (or youth receiving on-the-job training)
- Potential youth entrepreneurs

As a result, at a minimum, your life skills curriculum should encompass the core life skills for all training programs (section A) and at least one key additional component (section B1, B2, or B3) as detailed in **Table 3**.

TABLE 3: Minimum Life Skills by Youth Cohort

<p>(A) Core Life Skills For Any Life Skills Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self confidence • Respecting self and others • Interpersonal skills (empathy, compassion) • Managing emotions • Personal responsibility (including dependability, integrity, and work ethics) • Positive attitude and self-motivation • Conflict management • Teamwork • Communication (listening, verbal, and written) • Cooperation and teamwork • Creative thinking • Critical thinking and problem solving • Decision making 		
<p>(B1) Workplace Preparedness Life Skills for Job-Seekers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and organizational skills (including time and financial management) • Career assessment skills • Job-searching skills • CV and cover letter writing skills • Interview skills • Image/appearance 	<p>(B2) Life Skills for Employed Youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace behavior and protocols • Planning and organizational skills (including time and financial management) • Customer-relations skills • Research skills • Financial literacy • Personal leadership • Workplace rights and responsibilities 	<p>(B3) Life Skills for Potential Entrepreneurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plan development • Personal leadership • Management skills (including employee, supplier, and program management) • Risk-taking • Coping with failure • Market research skills • Financial management

An additional consideration when creating the list of life skills to be covered is the delivery format of the training. As discussed in the Guidelines for the Guide Usage chapter, life skills training can take place in many environments (schools, vocational programs, on-the-job training, community centers, etc.) and this context will help to shape some aspects of the curriculum. The number of weeks or months available for training is also important, and will be discussed in detail in **Section 7**.

Finally, the characteristics of the target youth population should be taken into consideration. Some additional life skills, as well as the types of work-readiness skills, to be included may vary by age, education level, and socioeconomic status of beneficiaries. The special needs of at-risk youth, such as low literacy or numeracy skills, may also require attention.

Research shows that many global employers demand the skills outlined in Table 3 above. Likewise, the minimum soft skills - professional competencies and personal traits - expected from entry-level employees in several global industries include the following¹⁷:

Professional Competencies	Personal Traits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills (listening, verbal, written) • Planning and organizational skills • Teamwork • Interpersonal skills • Critical thinking and problem solving • Investigation and research skills • Creative thinking • Decision-making skills • Multicultural sensitivity and awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism (grooming and self-respect) • Honesty and integrity • Positive attitude, motivation, ability to learn • Dependability and responsibility • Adaptability and flexibility • Ability to take constructive feedback • Hard work and ethics

Identifying key stakeholders

A variety of stakeholders should play an active part in the development of your life skills program, starting from the very beginning of the curriculum design phase. As a first step, you should identify the various people and organizations – at the local, regional, and national levels – who can be effective partners to support your life skills programming. These will include those who will be directly and indirectly impacted by your life skills program, those who can support the training implementation, and those who may hire or support the graduates after training.

The participation of these stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of life skills training is fundamental to your program's success and sustainability for a number of reasons. Each group of stakeholders has an important role to play:

- **Community members:** Increasing awareness and acceptance of the program in the community by addressing local needs and concerns is crucial to encourage youth enrollment and participation in training.
- **Life skills experts:** Learning from the experience of other organizations who have implemented life skills programs, as well as curriculum design and training experts, will enable your organization to benefit from the latest knowledge in the life skills arena.

¹⁷ IYF (2013b), p. 4.

- **Public sector:** Engaging government representatives at the local and national levels enhances your program’s credibility and can lead to important public-sector support such as accreditation and funding.
- **Private sector:** Familiarizing local employers with your program and future program graduates will facilitate job and internship placements for youth, as well as establishing your organization as a “go-to” source for highly trained entry-level employees. Engaging regularly with business leaders also ensures that your training remains relevant to labor market needs.

Involving key stakeholders in the curriculum design process

Once you have identified the minimum life skills your curriculum should encompass and the key stakeholders for your program, it is time to start the collaborative curriculum design process.

In order to begin this process, you should approach each key stakeholder individually to present your organization and the planned life skills program, in order to engage their interest and gain their support. It is important to have a specific, personal contact within each stakeholder organization or group to establish a sound and long-term partnership.

During these sessions, you will work together with interested stakeholders to identify and refine the stakeholders’ needs in terms of life skills competencies. This will help to inform the topics that your life skills curriculum should address. It may not be possible to satisfy every need of every stakeholder, but you will be able to identify the most common and relevant suggestions, ensuring that the program addresses real needs and expectations.

Forming a Curriculum Committee

With the involvement of your key stakeholders, you should create a Curriculum Committee with at least one member of your own organization, one of your life skills trainers, at least one life skills curriculum expert, and one representative from at least three different stakeholder groups. Your organization should lead the process, yet be able to facilitate collaboration between all stakeholders. It is best to limit the number of members in the Curriculum Committee to no more than 10 members, as a larger committee may become difficult to manage and ultimately not as effective as a smaller one. The **Checklist of Curriculum Committee Tasks** at the end of this section gives an overview of what should be covered in the committee’s work.

Key stakeholders for outreach when designing a life skills program:

- Potential youth participants
- Parents of potential youth participants
- Community leaders and youth activists
- Donor organizations (public and private)
- Life skills curriculum authors
- Curriculum design experts
- Life skills trainers
- Local youth development experts
- Local government representatives
- Local education authorities (formal and non-formal sectors)
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Labor
- Employers and local business owners
- Business sector federations
- Chambers of commerce

A regional life skills program in the Caribbean brought together experts from a variety of sectors across three islands – Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada and St. Lucia – to form a dynamic and participatory committee for a two-day curriculum adaptation workshop. The committee was highly engaged in the initial selection of appropriate life skills competencies for Caribbean youth. Members of this committee included:

- Youth development experts
- Curriculum development and pedagogy experts
- Representatives from the Ministry of Education
- Experienced life skills facilitators
- Non-profit executives

The Curriculum Committee will either oversee or directly carry out the curriculum development or adaptation process, which typically takes several months. It can take up to three months to adapt an existing curriculum, depending on the extent of the adaptation (see **Section 2**). For example, lightly adapting a high-quality curriculum that has already been used in a similar cultural context will take significantly less time than translating and adapting a curriculum from another country or language. It can take significantly longer to create a new curriculum, anywhere from six to 12 months, depending on the content available. Once the curriculum has been developed or adapted and approved by the Committee, it should be piloted with a small group of trainers and target youth (see **Section 2**).

Finally, the Curriculum Committee should be in charge of routinely reviewing and updating the curriculum to meet emerging needs. A comprehensive review of the curriculum should take place every one to two years, or after having implemented the training with a certain number of youth cohorts. This should take place in conjunction with program evaluation (see **Section 9**) as evaluation results will guide the curriculum revision process.

Once your organization has elaborated a list of key life skills and workplace-readiness skills to include in a curriculum and engaged a broad range of stakeholders in consultations, the next step is to adapt your curriculum to the local context and target youth population, as will be discussed in the following section.

Checklist of Curriculum Committee Tasks

In an initial meeting, the Curriculum Committee should:

- ✓ Review and agree upon minimum standards for life skills programming
- ✓ Determine the exact list of life skills topics to be included
- ✓ Determine the number of modules in curriculum, based on this list of topics
- ✓ Decide on whether any of the following trainings might also be offered to complement core life skills training:
 - Literacy and numeracy skills
 - Computer/IT skills
 - Foreign languages (e.g., Business English)
 - Vocational and technical training
- ✓ Agree upon the common interactive methodology to be used for all modules and unifying delivery methods (see **Sections 6 and 8** of this guide)
- ✓ Create a training delivery schedule, including elements such as overall length of training, duration of each module, frequency and regularity of training (see **Section 7** of this guide)

To plan the curriculum development/adaptation process, the Curriculum Committee should:

- ✓ Agree upon a timeline for curriculum development, review, and pilot testing
- ✓ If an existing curriculum is being adapted, review the existing curriculum and discuss what types of adaptations will be necessary for the target youth population and local cultural context
- ✓ In a new curriculum is being developed, agree on who will be developing the curriculum (whether Committee members or an external person/group) and the scope of work for this assignment
- ✓ Develop a list of external experts who will be consulted for topic-specific knowledge in any specialized lessons within the curriculum

During subsequent face-to-face meetings after the curriculum has been developed or adapted, the Curriculum Committee is encouraged to:

- ✓ Discuss any problems or challenges encountered during curriculum development
- ✓ Check that the curriculum content includes all minimum life skills topics, as well as addresses the most common needs expressed by stakeholders during planning meetings
- ✓ Confirm that the modules align with the Standards of Excellence offered in this toolkit, particularly with regards to interactive pedagogy, group work, effective learning environment, adaptation to the targeted audience and their level of education, duration of training, and frequency of training
- ✓ Review all modules and the examples used in them to ensure they are culturally sensitive and relevant to the context and lifestyle of local youth

Section 2: Curriculum Adaptation

Once your organization and the Curriculum Committee have decided on the basic components and characteristics of your program, the next step is to decide if you will adapt an existing curriculum or create a new one. This decision should be informed by a mapping of existing life skills programs in your region or country, and a consultation with the organizations that have designed and implemented the curricula in use.

The information in this guide and the list of Standards of Excellence will help you to determine if existing curricula reach the necessary level of quality, or can be improved to meet the standards through an adaptation process. If you believe that existing curricula do not meet the needs of your organization and your target beneficiaries, you may choose to create a new one. Some factors to help you make this decision are discussed in this section. In addition, this section will describe how to adapt a new or existing curriculum to the local cultural context and pilot test the curriculum with youth from the target population.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #2

The curriculum is adapted and piloted to ensure it is appropriate for the target audience

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To decide on the best approach for developing or adapting a life skills curriculum
- To ensure that their curriculum is appropriate to the local context and the needs of the target population

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess the extent to which grantee organizations have adapted their curriculum to local conditions and needs

Curriculum development approaches

In order to create a curriculum for your life skills program, you may decide to adapt an existing curriculum from another organization or to create a new curriculum from scratch. Both of these approaches have advantages and disadvantages, as shown in **Table 4** below.

TABLE 4: Comparison of Curriculum Creation and Adaptation

	Creating a new curriculum	Adapting an existing curriculum
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that all content is appropriate to the local culture • Allows for the creation of new content tailored to your program objectives and needs of local stakeholders • Enables your organization to create new intellectual property and fully brand the curriculum with your organizational identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on the proven effectiveness of a program that has already been tested, even if in a different cultural setting • Allows for learning from the experience of partner organizations that have developed and already implemented the curriculum • Increases stakeholder support if the existing curriculum is well known and perceived as high quality and effective • Reduces training costs if there is already a cadre of trainers who have experience with this curriculum • Facilitates large-scale evaluation of program results if the curriculum is used in many countries or regions
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant expertise in educational pedagogy and curriculum development; outside consultants may be needed • Requires significant financial and human resources; may limit the ability for internal staff to focus on other projects during the development process • Is very time intensive and may require several rounds of development and revisions • Limits the ability to respond quickly to requests from employers or training organizations for quick life skills program start-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not respond to all local life skills workforce development needs identified by your Curriculum Committee • May lack flexibility in terms of training schedule or methodology that does not fit with your program objectives • May be difficult to adapt or not culturally relevant to local youth needs

Both approaches have advantages and may be the most appropriate in a given context. However, IYF has found through its assessments of youth organizations (for example, in the MENA region) that most organizations obtain their life skills curriculum from an international source, often from international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹⁸ As a result, the process of adapting a curriculum to the local cultural context will be the focus of the rest of this section.

Many of the potential disadvantages to adapting an existing curriculum can be easily overcome through an iterative, interactive adaptation process, engaging the curriculum provider and the key stakeholders identified for your Curriculum Committee. The curriculum provider can share its experience in life skills training and often has an established network of implementing partners that can provide additional advice and support. In some instances, on a contractual basis, the curriculum provider may also be willing to oversee or support the adaptation process.

¹⁸ IYF (2013d), p. 14.

How to adapt an existing curriculum

Once you have chosen the specific life skills curriculum you want to use, you can start adapting it to meet your organization's goals. Key to this process is involving relevant stakeholders and identifying the areas in which the original curriculum will need to be modified to reflect local needs. The objective of adaptation is twofold: first, to address the skills development needs of your target youth and their future employers; and second, to contextualize the original life skills program by making it socially and culturally relevant to them.

In Egypt, due to donor interest in meeting youth and employers' needs, IYF adapted two distinct versions of PTS: one for university graduates entering professional careers and another for youth entering vocational employment. The two versions of the life skills training are appropriate for these distinct cohorts of youth and the unique skill sets required for their future jobs.

The time and effort required for adaptation will depend significantly on the level of adaptation necessary for the chosen curriculum. In particular, whether the curriculum must be translated from a foreign language or it already exists in your country's language will have a significant time and financial impact. Hence, you will want to be sure to budget the appropriate amount of time and resources to the adaptation - up to three months for IYF's Passport to Success® life skills program in some cases.

In general, two approaches to life skills curriculum adaptation can be used. The first, which is most useful when the curriculum exists in your language and has already been adapted to a fairly similar cultural context, is to start teaching the curriculum "as-is" with a pilot group and then collect feedback from the trainers on what content and exercises to modify. This approach can be more demanding for trainers, as they will be training youth and assessing the curriculum content at the same time. However, it can significantly shorten the time needed for adaptation and reduce costs for your organization.

Due to tight programmatic deadlines for starting life skills sessions, one of IYF's life skills interventions in Zimbabwe used curriculum materials that had previously been adapted for the Caribbean. Instead of concentrating program efforts on revising content prior to the TOT, the program team decided to collect specific feedback on the lessons from trainers during a small first round pilot with the intention of doing a final revision afterwards. The TOT also contained a session to equip trainers to adapt scenarios and activities "on-the-fly", which would help ensure the examples were relevant to that specific cohort of youth.

The second option is to embark on a full adaptation of the curriculum prior to pilot testing and revision. In this case, an Adaptation Committee (consisting of key stakeholders such as target youth, civil society activists, local leaders from the public and private sector, relevant business owners, and education authorities) will meet to review the existing curriculum lesson by lesson and provide comments on the relevance and appropriateness for the local target audience. These suggestions for revision will then be incorporated into the curriculum – typically by a smaller team of consultants or youth organization staff members – to create a new version of the curriculum that is fully adapted to the local context. Lessons can be modified, deleted, or added as long as the minimum life skills listed in this guide remain in the final product.

Pilot testing the curriculum for the target audience

Pilot testing a curriculum prior to full-scale implementation ensures that its content responds to the needs of the target audience, and that the examples and language resonate with youth. While all life skills trainings should be pilot tested, it is most essential for newly developed curricula. For existing curricula whose efficacy has been proven in other settings, the pilot test will help to fine-tune its adaptation and measure its local cultural relevance for the specific youth cohort.

To pilot a new curriculum, the entire curriculum should be tested with a small group of youth (typically 15 to 25 people) from the target population. For existing curricula, you may decide to test the entire program or only a few modules with a small group of youth to receive their feedback on the adaptation.

The process of gathering post-training feedback is highly important as this will inform the remaining revisions that must be made to the curriculum going forward. Thus, results of the pilot test should be gathered immediately to collect candid reactions and ensure that no comments or suggestions are lost. Feedback from the relevant parties can be collected using the following methods:

- **Trainers** can be asked to keep logs of young people's participation and reactions during the training, as well as their own observations as to what parts of lessons worked well and what parts may need revision. Trainers' feedback can also be gathered through surveys and focus group discussions on curriculum relevance to local needs, cultural and social appropriateness, and participants' pre/post-training behavioral changes.
- **Youth participants** can complete pre- and post-training self-assessment tests that measure changes in their knowledge, behavior, and attitudes as a result of the training. In addition, youth can be invited to take part in focus group discussions to share their impressions of the curriculum and reactions to specific lessons.

For all feedback, but especially in the framework of focus group discussions, it is essential that trainers and youth participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions. They should be able to talk openly and honestly about their experience, regardless of age, gender, or level of education. The focus group moderator is responsible for creating a professional yet caring environment that builds trust and in which all concerned parties feel comfortable expressing their views.

Pilot testing is only valuable if the feedback that comes out of the process is subsequently incorporated back into the curriculum. The adaptation team must address the curriculum's identified shortcomings and concerns about its implementation by modifying the curriculum content, delivery methodologies, and training material. The team should also use good judgment in ensuring that the suggested modifications respond to actual concerns and not biases or misinformation held by youth or trainers. No major changes – for example, significantly altering or dropping a lesson – should be formalized without formal review and consultation with curriculum design or content experts.

After the curriculum is finalized and implementation has begun, it should continue to be reviewed from time to time to ensure quality and relevance are maintained. At a minimum, the curriculum should be reviewed once every two years. Curriculum follow-up is as important a step as the original adaptation, as you will be able to systematically refine the lessons and offer a training that consistently meets evolving youth needs.

One Moroccan organization IYF works with holds an annual curriculum review, during which new lesson components are added to address developments in the core skills or emerging needs of the target population.¹⁹

Once curriculum development, adaptation, and pilot testing are completed, you will be ready to move on to the next very important step – selecting and training life skills facilitators. This topic will be covered in detail in the next several sections of this guide.

Guidelines for Ensuring Life Skills Curricula Are Culturally Appropriate

- ✓ The curriculum contains all core life skills as defined in Section 3 of this guide, with more basic skills taught first as prerequisites to more complex skills that will be developed.
- ✓ Each life skills lesson or module addresses the needs of the target youth cohort. Some of the key indicators against which the suitability of each lesson can be checked are: age, gender,²⁰ level of education, and formality of the setting in which the youth will be instructed in life skills (high school, university, vocational center, community center, after school clubs).
- ✓ External stakeholders, especially future employers, have helped to identify and prioritize the life skills most relevant to their workplace needs and develop more job-focused case studies and activities.
- ✓ Lessons appeal to youth in terms of language as well as social and cultural relevance. Choices in vocabulary and terminology should resonate with youth without being too colloquial.
- ✓ The examples, case studies, and success stories used should be familiar to youth by mirroring their daily reality as well as the job-market and workplace realities of the community or country in which they will be searching for jobs. Political and religious examples should be avoided.
- ✓ Interactive activities and group structures suggested are culturally appropriate. Youth should be encouraged to work together and become comfortable with their group-mates, but local cultural constraints (e.g. restrictions in interaction between genders) should be taken into consideration.
- ✓ Names, foods, locations, and occupations used in examples and activities are drawn from the local culture and easy for youth to relate to. Family structures and interpersonal relationships that are described in the lessons should be appropriate to the local context.

¹⁹ IYF (2013d), p. 15.

²⁰ UNICEF notes that gender-neutral life skills programs ignore the actual differences in life skills needs for young female participants and young male participants. See UNICEF (2005). *Life skills-Based Education in South Asia: A Regional Overview*. Prepared for the South Asia Life Skills-Based Education Forum 2005. Regional Office for South Asia. New York: United Nations Children's Fund.

Section 3: Trainer Selection

Skilled and talented trainers are the most important ingredient for your program's success.²¹ The ability of youth to acquire life skills and exit the training program better equipped to succeed in the workplace and in life depends largely on the quality of instruction. Facilitators must be able to engage directly with youth by using interactive training methodologies (see **Section 6**). In order to ensure that your trainers have these skills, your organization must have clear criteria and processes in place for hiring new trainers.

This section will help your organization to define the criteria for selecting future trainers, design the trainer application and selection process, and evaluate applicants' qualifications before they begin the Training of Trainers process.²²

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #3

Clearly defined criteria are consistently used throughout the trainer selection process

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To plan and execute a systematic, consistent process for selecting life skills trainers

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess the ability of grantee organizations to select and hire high-quality life skills trainers

Defining trainer selection criteria

You will want to establish and apply clear selection criteria throughout the selection process, not only to be fair to applicants, but also so that your own internal processes are systematic and consistent. Abiding by clear selection criteria also ensures long-term cost-efficiency, as you are able to select the candidates most likely to commit to your life skills training program, thus avoiding the cost of training candidates who will not receive certification or might potentially leave to work elsewhere.

While there are no global standards for qualifications of life skills trainers, both practical experience and inherent personal competencies are fundamental to teaching life skills. As a result, your application and selection process must capture candidates' qualifications in both of these areas. Some of the key minimum requirements for life skills trainers are listed in **Table 5** below.

21 The words "trainer," "instructor," and "facilitator" are used interchangeably in the standards of excellence; they refer to all selected and qualified personnel assuming a life skills training role towards youth program participants.

22 Your organization should make clear to all applicants that they must successfully complete the Training of Trainers process before they will be approved and hired as life skills trainers.

TABLE 5: Minimum Qualifications for Life Skills Trainers**Required experience:**

- Experience working with the target youth population, for instance with an NGO, in schools, in a community setting, in a social work or counseling role, for an extended period of time
- Experience delivering training to youth using participatory and interactive teaching methodologies
- Preferred additional experience in similar life skills training and youth employability programs

Required personal skills:

- Effective facilitation and communication skills
- Confidence, flexibility, patience, and empathy to effectively lead life skills lessons
- Enthusiasm for working with disadvantaged and at-risk youth

Required education:

- Minimum of a secondary education (in most cases) in order to address a variety of youth cohorts, particularly youth with enrolled in institutions of higher education
- Basic computer and IT skills

Trainer selection process

Once you have developed selection criteria for your life skills trainers, the next step is to determine how you will identify and select the requisite number of trainers needed to deliver your life skills program. There are two primary sources for identifying trainers:

Internal

You may be able to identify viable trainers from within the staff of your organization. Equipping your staff as life skills trainers can contribute to the sustainability of the program in creating a consistent source of internal skills and knowledge to draw upon for future life skills programming. Your staff may also find this opportunity to enhance their training skills an attractive option for their personal and professional development. In this case, you will want to use the minimum qualifications listed above and employ a transparent internal selection process to ensure fairness. You may want to incorporate some of the strategies below for recruiting external trainers into your internal process.

External

You may prefer to recruit trainers from an external pool, if your organization does not have enough staff interested or available to deliver the life skills training, in addition to their current job responsibilities. In this case, the first step is to publish a job announcement to attract the maximum number of applicants. The job announcement should be publicized through media channels (newspapers, radio stations, etc.) and online job websites as relevant in the local context. It is also particularly important to share the announcement through your organization's network of partners and stakeholders, as qualified candidates are often already a part of the youth-serving community. More detailed information about the trainer position, including a full list of required qualifications and the fact that candidates will need to undergo Training of Trainers and be approved by your staff and Master Trainers, should be available on your website or in print.

Once applications are received, only those that meet the minimum required qualifications should be selected to proceed to the interview round. This step is important because face-to-face interviews allow for a qualitative, in-depth assessment of the candidate's skills, competencies, values, goals, and the compatibility between your organization, the youth you serve, and the candidate.

You should determine the format and duration of the interview process, for example, whether interviews will take place with one of your staff or a panel of experts, and if a second round of interviews will be necessary. You may consider engaging the support of stakeholders involved in training and education such as Master Trainers, education experts, community leaders, and youth advocates to assist you in evaluating applicants.

One effective way to evaluate a candidate's skills is ask them to share examples of their past experience (for example, a situation or challenge they encountered, actions they took and why, and the outcome) to determine whether they will react appropriately in situations they may encounter during training. As an additional resource for your organization during this process, you can refer to the **Interview Questionnaire for Life Skills Trainers** at the end of this chapter for suggested interview questions.

Equipping selected trainers

Through this process, you will effectively be able to identify a sufficient number of qualified trainers from among your staff, recruit trainers exclusively through an external mechanism or engage potential trainers from both areas. The final mix of trainers will be guided by your training needs and program management strategies. The most qualified candidates selected from both internal and external sources will then proceed to take part in the Training of Trainers process, which will be covered in the following section.

Interview Questionnaire for Life Skills Trainers

Experience working with youth:

- Please describe your past experience working with youth, your past training experience, and your past experience with life skills in particular.
- Please describe your style when working with youth and the types of relationships you have been able to establish with youth that you have worked with in the past.
- What do you find challenging about working with disadvantaged youth and how do you deal with those challenges?
- What do you enjoy the most about training youth?
- Please provide an example of a time when you have worked with difficult youth participants and explain how you resolved the situation.

Personal life skills and competencies:

- Please describe the life skills that have you gained through your past experiences that you find most useful in your own life.
- What life skills do you think are most needed for youth in our community?
- How do you think life skills can help youth to succeed in the workplace and in life?
- How do you feel that your personal values and goals align with those of this program and of our organization?
- What unique personal skills and characteristics would you bring to this program?
- If we were to ask your previous employer or students about you, what do you think that they would say about you?

Section 4: Training of Trainers

The more support your organization gives to its trainers, the greater the quality of the instruction for youth and more successful the training. A Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop allows new trainers to increase their comfort with your program's specific subject matter and enhances their ability to effectively engage with participants. Hence, your responsibility as an organization is to ensure that your trainers get the most effective training to best address youth learning styles and needs.

A TOT workshop is typically three to five days long and covers the curriculum content as well as all teaching methodologies. It is led by one or more Master Trainer who has experience both with training youth in your life skills curriculum, as well as with training other adults to take on facilitator roles. All of the details necessary for planning a TOT – including personnel, logistical, and financial considerations – will be discussed in this section of the guide. In addition, this section will cover how to assess the abilities of new trainers and promote their improvement through constructive feedback.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #4

A robust Training of Trainers is offered to prepare and develop dynamic facilitators

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To plan and conduct a comprehensive TOT workshop that will fully prepare trainers to enter the classroom

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess the quality of grantee organizations' preparation and support of new trainers

Identifying Master Trainers

A successful TOT starts with engaging or developing a cadre of experienced life skills Master Trainers who will lead the workshop, share their knowledge and experience, model experiential and interactive training methodologies, and build professional mentoring relationships with the trainer candidates.

Therefore your organization should select Master Trainers who:

- Possess and display life skills as well as communication and motivational skills
- Have lengthy previous training experience, ideally both with youth and adults
- Have specific life skills training experience and are familiar with your curriculum
- Have a proven track record of consistently using interactive training methodologies
- Can properly assess their students' learning styles and adapt tools and exercises to these needs
- Can provide constructive feedback to the trainer candidates and can provide your organization with a fair, balanced, and useful assessment of each candidate's skills
- Are open to regularly undergoing refresher training

In Jordan, one successful life skills training program through IYF has developed an interview selection tool that is used to identify both Trainers of Youth and Master Trainers. The tool ranks trainers for selection purposes based on their level of education and training expertise, combined with in-person interview questions designed to evaluate their interpersonal skills and comfort-level with specific training methodologies unique to the Jordanian program. This type of tool is an effective way to ensure consistency of the training pool and also helps identify the most committed and enthusiastic candidates.

The number of Master Trainers needed for your TOT will depend on the number of trainer candidates who will be participating. The ideal ratio is one Master Trainer for every 10-12 participants. This ratio is not so high as to limit real interaction and experiential learning, but also high enough to ensure diversity of experience among training group members.

Cost and logistical considerations

An important part of the TOT planning process is establishing a reasonable and sufficient budget that will guide your expenditures during the TOT. Although costs will vary considerably by context, typical costs include the following:

- Refreshments and lunches for all TOT participants
- Lodging if TOT participants are not able to commute to the TOT location each day
- Reimbursement of travel expenses for participants, where appropriate
- Photocopies of all necessary training materials
- Sufficient copies of the curriculum for all participants
- Training materials, such as flip chart paper, markers, tape, scissors, etc.
- Per diem or salary for the Master Trainers

In terms of logistics, it is best to start planning for a TOT several weeks, or even months, ahead of time. A venue must be secured that is sufficiently large for all participants – typically a hotel conference center or community center is used. Contracts with a catering company for meals and refreshments, and in some cases with an audiovisual equipment company (for overhead projectors, microphones, translation, etc.) must be established in advance as well.

The length of TOTs can vary from one organization to another,²³ but all future life skills trainers should receive at least 20 hours of initial instruction in the life skills curriculum, and be able to practice the learned skills prior to completion. Based on past experience, three to five days is the average amount of time necessary to conduct a comprehensive TOT workshop. Participants must be informed of the training dates

Suggested list of materials for TOT participants:

- Master Trainers' name and contact information
- Background information on your organization
- Contact information for a designated program manager within your organization
- Planned training schedule for your upcoming life skills program
- TOT description and objectives
- Detailed TOT agenda with individual session objectives
- Required and recommended resources
- Expectations for attendance and participation
- Criteria for assessment of trainer candidates' performance
- Trainer certification guidelines, as appropriate

23 For instance, one youth organization in Morocco provides 56 hours of training delivered by senior trainers in an intensive seven-day TOT. IYF (2013d), p. 19.

sufficiently in advance so that they can take time off from work and for travel to the TOT location. Because multiple-day training is a significant time commitment, participants must be informed that attendance is mandatory for all hours of the training in order to receive certification.

TOT minimum content

Once logistical aspects of the TOT have been confirmed, your organization should work with the Master Trainers who will lead the workshop to create a training outline and schedule. During the TOT, all trainer candidates should receive a well-rounded basic training that will allow them to:

- Understand the goals and objectives of your life skills program
- Understand and achieve mastery in all of the life skills included in your curriculum
- Understand and practice what it means to be and how to act as facilitators and role models²⁴
- Practice effective teaching methodologies in life skills, especially interactive and experiential teaching methods
- Practice effective modeling of the professional behaviors and attitudes expected in the workplace²⁵

In order to complete the TOT, you will need to provide trainer candidates with a copy of the curriculum that they will ultimately use when working with youth cohorts. The printed curriculum should be practical, detailed, and easy to follow. It should include the following sections at a minimum:

- **Facilitators' Guide:** A general introduction that gives an overview of the training's goals and objectives, as well as pedagogical approaches and learning styles.
- **Lesson Plans:** Detailed plans reflecting the various lesson elements (objectives of the lesson, main definitions for the instructor, materials needed to teach the lesson, demonstration of the topic with basic information and examples, suggested group activities, and exercises for personal application). These should include suggestions as to how long each activity should last to help the trainer structure the lesson.
- **Training Cues:** The curriculum should be laid out with clear visual cues to assist trainers. Consistency is key – structure, icons, signs, and color schemes used to format the lessons should be the same throughout the curriculum. Ensure that in every lesson, each type of activity is graphically introduced by a special icon to easily catch the trainer's eye.

During the TOT, trainers should learn and practice newly acquired skills under the supervision of Master Trainers. It is essential that the TOT workshop reflects the interactive and participatory pedagogical methods that the trainers will be expected to use when they are working with youth. Therefore the TOT should encompass an instructional phase led by the Master Trainers, followed by a practicum phase where each trainer candidate has the chance to lead at least one life skills lesson in front of the group. The key components of these phases are outlined in **Table 6** below.

24 UNICEF (2012). Evaluation Report: Global Evaluation of Life Skills Education Programs, p. 25.

25 Honorati, Maddalena and Thomas P. McArdle (2013). The Nuts and Bolts of Designing and Implementing Training Programs in Developing Countries, pp. 36-37.

TABLE 6: Basic TOT Components

Training phases	Minimum training elements
Initial instruction phase by Master Trainers	Definition of life skills and the program’s goals
	Introduction of effective facilitation skills, with a focus on participatory and interactive methods
	Demonstration of one or more model life skills lessons by a Master Trainer
Practicum	Facilitation of at least one life skills lesson by each trainer candidate, with other trainees taking part as participants
	Provision of feedback to trainer candidates by Master Trainers on the practicum and their individual performance

Because the TOT can be rather intensive – typically six to nine hours of training per day – it is important that trainer candidates have the time to process and reflect upon the information learned from the Master Trainer before engaging in the practicum sessions where their newly acquired skills will be tested. The TOT schedule should also allow for preparation time, when participants can work together to prepare the lessons they will be teaching in front of the group.

Assessing TOT participants’ progress

The final practicum component of the TOT is an important time to observe and evaluate trainer candidates and confirm that they are qualified to deliver the life skills curriculum. The practicum will help assess the level of knowledge and abilities that candidates have acquired during the initial instruction phase, whether they can perform successfully in the framework of a “live” life skills session, and whether they are able to take upon the various roles of a life skills trainer (presenter, facilitator, skill demonstrator, and participant in discussions).

Only trainer candidates who successfully complete the TOT should become certified to implement life skills training in the classroom and hired as a part of your program. Thus, Master Trainers should evaluate and assess candidates’ progress both during and at the end of the training. Through all these exercises, the following competencies should be systematically assessed:

- Ability to consistently deliver the life skills content as outlined in the lesson plan
- Ability to manage group activities used in the life skills curriculum
- Ability to demonstrate and serve as a role model for the skills being taught
- Ability to give short presentations to explain life skills concepts
- Ability to facilitate dynamic group discussions

Moreover, because of the importance of all training phases, attendance and participation in all TOT activities should be required from all trainer candidates. Master Trainers should keep an attendance list and a log of notes on each trainer candidate to facilitate the evaluation process. At the end of the TOT, each candidate should receive feedback

on their assessment, with a clearly formulated list of their strengths and areas for improvement. Because Master Trainers often act as mentors for life skills facilitators (see **Section 5**), this interaction will likely be the beginning of a long-term learning relationship.

Upon successful completion of the TOT, new trainers should be assigned to work with a youth cohort as soon as possible to benefit from their learning experience and ensure that the instructional methodologies are fresh in their minds when they enter the classroom. Ideally, you will want to establish a system to ensure regular post-training observation of instructors' training in the classroom (see **Section 5**).

Additional TOTs and refresher training

Additional TOT workshops can be held based on available program resources and needs, and depending on the number youth cohorts you plan to train. It is recommended not to train more facilitators than are really needed, as many facilitators who stay inactive too long lose the benefits of the TOT and may need to be re-trained or participate in a refresher training course prior to entering the classroom.

For your organization, refresher trainings can maintain the quality of the life skills program by ensuring that training content and training methodologies are uniformly implemented by all trainers. It also provides an opportunity to introduce new content or skills and reduces the attrition rate among trainers, as they feel that they are supported by your organization and belong to a network of trainers.

For trainers, follow-up training reinforces the importance of an interactive methodology, allows them to ask questions, and builds their confidence in their teaching skills. They can regularly reflect on their experience, and adapt the curriculum and examples they use to real-life situations.

Depending on your capacity, refresher training can take place on a quarterly basis or at the end of each full life skills training cycle. During the refresher training, make sure to cover essential topics such as interactive methodologies and any updates to your curriculum, but also to allow time for trainers to share and discuss the challenges they have encountered so far. While the former can be organized in typical classroom sessions, the latter can be structured more informally, for example in two-hour open discussions forums either virtually or face-to-face.

Once new trainers have completed the TOT process, they are ready to move into the classroom and begin teaching. As they begin working with youth, they will undoubtedly meet unexpected challenges and difficulties, which a strong mentoring relationship with a more experienced Master Trainer can help them to overcome. This mentorship process will be discussed in the following section.

Section 5: Mentoring Trainers

Life skills trainers who have completed the TOT will benefit greatly from continued support and mentorship as they begin facilitating training for youth cohorts and encounter challenges in the classroom. In the long run, mentoring benefits both the trainers and your organization by increasing the quality of life skills training delivery and the impact of the program for youth. A formalized mentoring system should be created to ensure that all trainers receive regular visits and support. This type of system “nurtures” the trainer candidates and newly certified trainers, and engages mentors in the overall success of the program.²⁶ It will also create a sustainable and trust-based relationship among training staff and your organization.

This section will provide an overview of how to set up an effective mentorship program that provides a positive experience for both mentor trainers and their mentee trainers, and allows new life skills trainers to receive constructive feedback on their classroom performance.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #5

A mentoring system is created to support life skills trainers’ continuing development

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To plan how to effectively provide support to trainers as they grow within the life skills program

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess the ability of grantee organizations to support their trainers and continually improve their skill set

Benefits of an effective mentoring system

Mentoring increases trainers’ motivation and promotes their commitment to the program, youth, and your organization as trainers feel listened to, valued, and respected. For the trainers, mentoring:

- Enhances their direct skills acquisition²⁷
 - Supports their use of interactive pedagogical methods, which improve youth participants’ learning
- Allows them to discuss questions and resolve challenges they may face in the classroom
- Allows them to engage in open discussions about their own psychosocial needs and reflect upon their experience
- Facilitates progress in their careers as trainers, coaches, or in other positions

Additionally, life skills donors, particularly from the corporate side, are often very receptive to this type of mentoring as they see the value in developing a professional cadre of trainers in the program impact on trainee as well as in overall program quality.

As for the mentors, they are given the opportunity to interact personally and professionally with colleagues who bring a fresh outlook on life skills programs and methodology.

²⁶ Jones, Kathleen W., Hardcastle, Valerie and Laura Agnich (2007). A Guide to Mentoring, p. 4. The authors refer to Wright & Wright (1987).

²⁷ IYF (2013b), p. 8.

Finally, your organization benefits from an effective mentoring system as it helps reduce trainer attrition, improve overall training capacity, and allows for a constant flow of feedback and dialogue within the organization.

Choosing a mentoring approach

There are two types of mentoring relationships that are typically used for trainers in life skills programs.

- Traditional mentoring is typically defined as a somewhat hierarchical and career-focused relationship between a senior member of an organization and a junior, less experienced member. This relationship focuses on passing along knowledge and experience and may support the junior trainers during the TOT and their first life skills training with youth participants. It also maintains traditional institutional structures and is more change-averse, as it is up to the mentees to adapt their behavior based on feedback and suggestions made by the mentor.
- Collaborative mentoring and coaching has both mentor and mentee engage in a more reciprocal relationship; it can be a more fluid relationship as both will benefit from each other's feedback. This type of relationship is often referred to as coaching. For instance, with this methodology, your organization can adapt the program content with the help of the mentors, as they will hear back from junior trainers who may have new perspectives on challenges in the classroom or aspects of the curriculum that need revision²⁸.

Skills and Qualities of Good Mentors

The following are key skills and qualities that good mentors exhibit in their mentoring relationships. You may want to use the following as criteria for selecting mentors for your mentoring pool.

- Attentive listener
- Available and invested in the process
- Non-judgmental
- Knowledgeable about life skills
- Able to give targeted, constructive feedback
- Interested in learning and teaching
- Flexible and encouraging

Ideally, the best mentoring system involves a combination of both approaches highlighted above. Having an experienced mentor who can offer valuable insight to a more junior trainer is critical. But at the same time, mentees will be more invested in the entire process if they feel they have some control over the process and can help shape the direction of areas for improvement.

Assigning mentees to mentors

Depending on your resources, you can organize either individual or group mentoring arrangements. The group mentoring approach multiplies exchanges and alleviates potential tensions or shortcomings of a one-on-one mentoring relationship.²⁹ On the other hand, having an individual mentor for each mentee allows for more personalized feedback and gives more space to the pair to develop clear action plans for improvement and follow-up.

Regardless of the mentoring protocols that you design, each mentor should oversee several trainer candidates, not to exceed 10 mentees as to not overstretch the mentors' capacity and to allow for frequent and high-quality contact with mentees. Keep in mind that a mentoring relationship evolves over the long term, so you must ensure that each mentor is able to develop a meaningful relationship with each mentee, in addition to their other training, coaching, or mentoring responsibilities.

²⁸ Jones et al. (2007), pp. 4-5.

²⁹ Jones et al. (2007), pp. 5.

Identifying and training mentors

As the mentorship system is developed, the mentors themselves will need support and training in order to take on their new role. Ideally, your organization will be able to develop a “mentoring support team” consisting of education experts, senior trainers, and staff from another youth organization – stakeholders that your organization works with or engages with frequently – to support the mentors. A team approach allows for mentors to learn from each other and also ensures that mentors consistently use constructive feedback methodology and stay focused on the primary objective of mentoring – that is, to support their mentees in improving their ability to facilitate life skills training.

Mentors will ideally all be certified through your life skills program, regularly update their own training abilities, be well versed in interactive pedagogy, and have worked with or taught life skills to youth. They should be familiar with your organization and your specific life skills curriculum. To establish best practices in mentoring and to ensure mentors can fulfill their role properly, they should receive at least a one-day training led by your staff and educational or mentoring experts. The mentoring training should include the following elements:

- Your organization’s mentoring philosophy and guidelines
- Mentoring roles and responsibilities in the context of your organization
- Mentoring techniques and best practices for both mentors and mentees, focusing on how to give and receive constructive feedback
- Opportunities to practice mentoring in context through role-plays and situational discussions

As with your training staff, mentors should attend periodic refresher training – at least once per year – to enhance their skills, share experiences with other mentors, and receive updates from your organization on mentoring guidelines and best practices.

Mentoring guidelines and protocols

To ensure the most successful and high-impact mentoring relationship, your organization should consider developing mentoring guidelines for both mentors and mentees, potentially in partnership with mentoring experts if feasible. These guidelines will help frame the mentoring relationship while at the same time allowing mentors and mentees the freedom to develop their individual interactions in the manner that is best suited to their relationship.

Mentoring guidelines should be communicated in writing and explained during training for mentors and on the first day that mentors and mentees meet together. If possible, the mentoring relationship and expectations should also be discussed during the TOT for new life skills trainers.

Below are some best practices and tools you may want to consider while developing your organization’s mentoring guidelines:

- **Standards of professionalism:** A mentoring relationship should be characterized by standards of professionalism that are to be maintained at all times, including appropriate forms of communication, appropriate meetings times and places, set frequency and duration of mentoring sessions, etc.
- **Communication rules:** Mentees should have formal contact with their assigned mentor via email, phone, or in person at least once every two weeks during the first two months of training and on a monthly basis for the rest

of program. Mentees should feel comfortable contacting their mentors between scheduled meetings as needed. Mentors should reach out to their mentees to determine a first meeting time and location, with subsequent meetings agreed up on together.

- **Classroom observation:** Mentors should observe at least one of their mentee's youth training sessions during each full life skills training cycle in order to provide constructive feedback on their mentee's performance in the classroom. It can also be helpful to have a guiding document, such as an Action Plan, that mentors and mentees can complete together during their sessions to jointly identify areas for improvement and set concrete steps to achieve those performance goals.
- **Constructive feedback:** Both mentors and mentees must be able to give and receive constructive criticism in a civil and collaborative manner. They should be honest in their communication towards each other without being hurtful. Mentors in particular should be positive and reinforce achievements, yet also clearly delineate areas for improvement. While mentors should be ready to share suggestions for improvement based on their own experience, mentors and mentees should work on solutions collaboratively and with mentees' input.

Assessing your mentor program

To ensure that the mentorship program fulfills its objectives and remains a valuable experience for all parties involved, mentors and mentees should provide your program staff with regular feedback on their mentorship experience.

They should be able to provide feedback anonymously in the form of a survey as well as, for those who are comfortable, share more public feedback in a focus group setting. You should ask mentees for their feedback once to twice a year. This will allow you to adapt your mentoring system based on their feedback and comments as new entrants undergo the Training of Trainers process.

The establishment of a strong mentorship program will allow your life skills trainers to continue and grow in their work with youth. A key component of the training for new life skills facilitators, which must be actively reinforced through mentors' feedback, is the use of interactive teaching methodologies. This important topic will be covered in the following section.

Creating a complaint mechanism

If either mentors or mentees are not satisfied with the mentoring relationship, they should be able to reach out to your organization to share grievances or present their concerns. Your organization's responsibility is to listen to both parties separately and in good faith.

In case of a failing mentor-mentee relationship where trust or rapport cannot be reestablished between the two parties, the mentee should either be reassigned to another mentor or join a "mentoring team" that includes a second mentor. If it comes to your organization's attention that a Master Trainer has failed more than once in his/her mentoring role, this is a serious problem that must be discussed. If it cannot be resolved, that person may no longer be able to serve as a mentor. Similarly, if a mentee has failed to work well with more than one different mentor, their certification as a trainer may need to be reevaluated.

Section 6: Interactive Teaching Methodologies

Once trained, life skills facilitators should be committed to applying interactive teaching methodologies consistently in their classrooms. The use of these approaches can greatly affect the success of your life skills training and the impact it can have on young people. Interactive and hands-on pedagogy is a fundamental element of a life skills training which, by definition, requires that participants are actively engaged in practicing their new skills both inside and outside the classroom to change their attitudes and behaviors.

These pedagogical techniques are crucial to engaging and retaining youth participants. However, they can be difficult for trainers to learn, and even more difficult to consistently put into practice. This section will allow you to understand these important methods and foster their use among your trainers.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #6

Interactive, participatory, and practical teaching methodologies and tools are used

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To understand the variety of pedagogical methods available and how they apply to different learning styles
- To encourage the consistent use of varied interactive teaching methodologies among all life skills trainers

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess the awareness and usage of interactive teaching methodologies by grantee organizations

Importance of interactive teaching methodologies

When it comes to life skills training, merely sharing information is not sufficient for youth to discuss, question, and internalize the competencies taught in order to use them in their own lives. Youth will quickly lose motivation and cease attending training if they are not engaged in the lessons and able to see the direct connection with their personal experiences. Hence, participatory training pedagogy is key to inspiring youth and increasing your life skills training's impact. Most widely used life skills curricula are built upon these general principles of education.³⁰

To be highly effective, life skills training methodologies should be flexible enough to adapt to the many learning styles and speeds that exist in any classroom. Training design should reflect the educational principle that “learning is both an individual and a group process,” providing a blend of small-group activities and space for individual reflection.³¹ Most importantly, in-class life skills instruction should be complemented by opportunities for youth to practice their skills outside of class and in real-life situations.

Unfortunately, these teaching methodologies can be difficult to adapt and use consistently for many trainers who are used to a more traditional lecture-based education system. Through consultations and assessments, IYF and other

30 See for example: PeaceCorps (2001). Life Skills Manual. Information Collection and Exchange, Publication No. M0063. Washington, DC: Peace Corps; IYF (2008). Passport to Success: Leaders' Guide. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.

31 See Hansen, Rick (2006). British Columbia Life Skills Organizer: An Introduction to B.C. Life Skills Program – A Resource to Support Personal Planning K to 7 and Career and Personal Planning 8 to 12. British Columbia: The Rick Hansen Foundation. Web: http://www.rickhansen.com/Portals/2/Documents/LifeSkillsProgram/Introduction_Book.pdf, p. 7.

international organizations have found that many life skills programs around the world continue to rely on passive, didactic teaching strategies.³² In many cases, this is because facilitators have not received training in participatory methodologies or are not aware that these techniques exist. Additionally, ingrained social and cultural norms can make it challenging for adult instructors to encourage youth to express their opinions and take an active role in their learning.³³ Trainers may find it easier to simply lecture for an hour than to plan an interactive and activity-filled lesson plan.

“What I like most about the classes is that they are workshops rather than lectures. We discuss a lot; everyone can speak their mind, share views and impressions...The meetings made me change my mind about group work, which in this case is not a nuisance and does not mean that only one person does the job, but everyone is involved and we work together.” – Alicia, a PTS participant from Russia

Applying interactive learning methodologies

To be most effective, your life skills lessons should be designed as workshops, where every participant plays an active role, rather than lectures, which typically revolve around the instructor. Participants learn best and are more likely to change their own behavior if they see a role model – in this case the trainer – modeling each life skill in his/her interactions with youth during the lesson. Youth benefit most from instruction involving peer learning, practical application of skills taught, and self-reflection.

Therefore it is highly recommended that each life skill lesson be articulated around the following three main pillars:

- **Information:** The first segment of each lesson should focus on giving youth basic information about the “behavior of the day” or life skill that will be covered in that lesson.³⁴ This should grab participants’ attention, contextualize the specific life skill in the framework of their daily life, and show how it can influence their behavior.³⁵ However, facilitators should keep the information segment quick, simple, and engaging in order to move on to more participatory activities. It is also important to choose positive messages over negative ones, as fear and negativity do not encourage positive change in participants’ behavior.³⁶
- **Practice:** Youth participants should be given in-class time to grapple with the ideas, terminology, and behaviors related to each skill. They should also be able to brainstorm and discuss the implications of a life skill for themselves and others in order to fully internalize its meaning and importance. Trainers should facilitate in-class discussions and practice, while participants take center stage and become the main actors in their own behavior change process. In-class practice prepares youth for real-life situations in a safe and comfortable environment.
- **Self-reflection:** Finally, participants should have time for personal reflection and analysis to help them transition from the classroom context to how they will apply their new knowledge in their own lives. Youth participants should take what they have learned and practiced, reflect on it, and imagine how they could use it in their lives.

32 UNICEF (2012), pp. viii and 67.

33 UNICEF (2012), pp. 26, 67, and 80; IYF (2013), p. 11. UNICEF concludes that participatory methodologies are generally acknowledged as the most effective and are included in the design of life skills programs, but they are not properly implemented for all of the reasons cited above, thus limiting the impact of many programs.

34 Peace Corps (2001), p. 10.

35 In IYF’s Passport to Success® program, the information section is divided into two parts: a very brief introduction to the lesson’s topic (an attention-grabbing activity) and a trainer-led demonstration of the skill. See IYF (2008).

36 Peace Corps (2001), p. 10.

There are a wide variety of participatory and interactive teaching methodologies that can be used in life skills training. Ideally, a number of different techniques will be used in every lesson to appeal to a wide variety of learning styles and personalities in the classroom. In concrete terms, some of the interactive teaching tools that can be used are:

- **Skill demonstration by the trainer**, who will play the role of a person performing all the steps to implement a skill – this should be supplemented by questions to participants and group discussion to ensure that the demonstration remains interactive.
- **Short lecture by the trainer** to give key information about a skill – again, this should be made as interactive as possible, for example through discussion and use of visual aids.
- **Small group work** such as exercises in pairs or small group discussions, ensuring that group composition changes from lesson to lesson and different roles are assigned to each person within a group (leader, note-taker, spokesperson, etc.).

Example of delivering a small group practice activity on 'Making a Positive First Impression':

In groups of four, give each group one of the following scenarios that are appropriate culturally:

- Visiting a sacred place
- Visiting a friend's home
- Applying for work as a laborer, such as a construction worker or dish washer
- Applying for work in a retail store, such as a grocery or clothing store
- Visiting a sick grandparent or neighbor

Have each group draw a caricature of a young person, showing how one would dress and present oneself to make a favorable impression in their assigned situation. Each group should address all four senses and will present their poster with the whole group.

- **Group discussions** facilitated by the trainer and/or by youth, ensuring that all participants take on an active role in the discussion
- **Personal reflection activities** that provide quiet time for individual thought, reflection, or journaling
- **Role plays** where one participant practices the life skill being taught, while another participant (or the facilitator) plays a friend, family member, or coworker

Conducting a role play to practice 'Effective Team Work Behaviors in the Workplace'

Invite a participant who has agreed to role play with you to come to the front of the room. Explain to participants that you are both employees in a store who will act out a scene. The participants are to listen for good and poor team player habits. Conduct the role play twice—first demonstrating poor team habits and the second time showing helpful team work. Act out the following situation:

The volunteer is having trouble keeping up with their work in the store. He or she is not as fast as you (the trainer) and is slowing things down for the entire class (or store). He or she asks you for advice.

After the role play, ask the whole group if they felt the employees in the role play demonstrated good team

player behaviors. Have them share what they could have done to be better team players. Be prepared to point out any poor habits the participants missed and to highlight how they could handle the situation more positively. Conduct the role play a second time. This time demonstrate good team player habits.

- **Use of visual aids** such as flip charts, chalkboards or whiteboards, color-coded flash cards, or handouts
- **Use of computer-based resources** such as PowerPoint presentations, YouTube videos, or other websites – when they can be used in an interactive rather than passive manner

Most importantly, in all situations, trainers should remember that their primary role is as a facilitator, not a teacher. There are a number of techniques that can be used to successfully facilitate discussions and encourage all members of the class to participate, including using open-ended questions, waiting silently for several seconds after asking a question to encourage reflection and response, and giving equally positive feedback to all participants regardless of whether responses are correct.

Engaging all learners

Trainers will quickly find that not all youth learn at the same pace or in the same manner. As a result, each life skills lesson should encompass activities that appeal to different types of students. Educational experts generally group students into three general types of learners:³⁷

- **Auditory learners:** Those who learn best by hearing information and instructions
- **Visual learners:** Those who need first to see words or pictures to associate them with ideas and concepts
- **“Kinesthetic” or tactile learners:** Those who will learn best through being actively involved in doing, moving, and working with the information and the skills taught

That is why, to facilitate the active participation of all youth, it is important that you incorporate and utilize a combination of the above styles in each session to capture the attention of each type of learner. Table 7 provides some information on which types of interactive teaching tools apply to each learning style.

TABLE 7: Instructional Tools by Learning Style

Instructional tools	Auditory Learners	Visual Learners	Kinesthetic Learners
Demonstration of skill being taught	X	X	
Short lectures	X		
Large and small group discussions	X		X
Role plays	X	X	X
Personal reflection	X	X	X
Use of visual aids		X	X
Use of computer-based and animated presentations		X	X

Adapted from IYF (2008), p. 4.

37 IYF (2008).

Engaging difficult participants

Having trainers that are skilled at facilitating and managing large groups of youth is key to delivering life skills trainings. Your trainers should be capable of working with many personalities, engaging every participant, and diffusing tensions that may arise, even when a participant challenges what is being taught or seems to resent being present in the training.

During the training process, you should help new instructors brainstorm and think ahead about challenging situations that may arise in the classroom and how to best handle them. Below are a few common challenges and recommended actions for trainers to take:

- **Resistant or disruptive behavior:** This type of behavior often arises from a young person's fear and anxiety of not fitting in or not understanding the content, as well as from a lack of self-confidence. The trainer may need to speak to the participant individually outside of class. In addition, trainers should continue to engage that participant directly during class, asking them to share their point of view and helping them to integrate with the class by offering them a leadership role in an activity.
- **Timid behavior:** If, on the other hand, a participant does not speak or participate in class at all, the trainer may want to talk to them privately to identify the underlying issue and address it by setting short-term goals. The trainer should also keep in mind that it is much easier for timid participants to express themselves in small groups or pairs than in front of the entire class.
- **Bullying:** Because this is a very serious problem, trainers and participants should have a venue to report such behavior, and your organization should take immediate steps to remedy the situation. See **Section 8** for more information on how to establish a mechanism for reporting complaints within your organization.

Offering practical and project-based learning opportunities

Hands-on activities outside of the classroom allow youth to practice their newly acquired skills in real-life situations and to observe the value and the “how-to” of life skills such as teamwork or personal responsibility in various settings. Depending on the type of activity, they may also allow youth to gain an insight into the world of work and how their skills can be applied to a professional setting.

Some types of activities your organization can offer to complement in-class life skills instruction include:

- **Inviting guest presenters** such as local employers or entrepreneurs to talk with youth about their personal experience and career path
- **Organizing field visits** to local businesses to allow youth to discover hands-on the requirements and expectations of a workplace – this also serves the purpose of further engaging potential employers in supporting your program
- **Facilitating service-learning projects** such as volunteer work to put youth in direct, active contact with their community, offering them a sense of purpose and accomplishment while also providing a chance for others to see youth as “agents of change” who can make positive contributions to society
- **Encouraging student-led afterschool clubs** in the case of life skills training in schools or vocational training centers, to facilitate additional practice for youth who want to develop their organizational, teamwork, and communication skills

Service Learning in Poland

As part of a life skills intervention in Poland, vocational and technical secondary students lead, organize, and implement their own service-learning project in small groups following life skills training. Students present written program and budget proposals to the managing organization, and are given small amounts of funding to carry out their projects. Previous projects included organizing activities at a women's shelter, renovating play rooms at an orphanage, or production of a community play on stress management.

Students demonstrated considerable pride in their projects and so did their teachers. Some students felt that their teachers and community members had changed their attitudes about youth because of the projects, realizing that students could shoulder responsibilities and manage complicated tasks. Indeed, teachers expressed some surprise at what youth had been able to accomplish, pointing out that participants had no trouble approaching decision makers to get approval for their plans. The best indication of the positive role of projects in young people's lives is that some students continue to volunteer with the organizations.

By consistently using appropriate interactive methodologies and tools, and being prepared to address various learning styles, your trainers can ensure that life skills are taught in a hands-on and practical manner. Thanks to the experiential design and, above all, delivery of your curriculum, youth will be able to draw more directly from their in-class training to understand how to apply these skills in their daily lives and future roles as employees or entrepreneurs.

Once trainers have successfully completed the TOT workshop and received training in interactive teaching methodologies, the next step is to establish a training schedule that sets the time parameters of your program. This topic will be discussed in the following section.

Section 7: Training Schedule

Before beginning training, your organization will need to develop a schedule for your life skills program that specifies the duration and frequency of individual lessons, as well as the overall training length. Having an adequate number of interaction hours between trainers and youth participants is imperative to maintain quality performance by the trainers, keep beneficiaries focused and interested, and achieve the goals of the training. However, at the same time, if lessons are packed too closely together, youth will not have the chance to fully absorb information and integrate new life skills into their personal behavior.

Remember that for most youth, a life skills course is the first time they have been exposed to interactive training techniques and been encouraged to express their opinions and explore their own feelings. Lessons can be interesting, but it can also be exhausting to participate interactively for a prolonged period of time, both for trainers and for participants. In addition, young people can only concentrate a certain amount of time on the same topic.

These are important issues that must be taken into consideration when determining the duration and intensity of your training schedule. This section will help you make these decisions and allocate time efficiently.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #7

Adequate time is allowed for each life skills lesson within a well-paced schedule

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To establish a training schedule that fits the needs of their life skills curriculum and their target youth population

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess whether grantee organizations' training schedules are realistic, appropriate, and adapted to program needs

Duration and spacing of lessons

Frequent and iterative contact time with participants is critical to allow young people to acquire minimum competencies in life skills, and eventually to allow for change in attitudes and behavior. Your program can achieve these goals by giving youth time between lessons (or series of lessons, if more than one is taught in a day) to reflect and practice their newly acquired life skills knowledge in real-life situations, with their family, friends, community, school, or during their job search.

Too often, youth organizations are forced by various circumstances to offer “one-shot” programs that deliver an excess of lessons over the course of a few days, with many life skills taught each day.³⁸ Studies of surveyed youth show that “one-shot” training is overwhelming, as they discover the concept of life skills for the first time, have to

³⁸ Peace Corps (2001), p. 13; IYF (2013a), p. 13.

get acquainted with experiential learning techniques, learn to manage their own emotions, and try to change or adapt their behavior in an extremely short period of time.

A life skills lesson schedule that is longer, but remains frequent and regular – for example, a minimum of one lesson per week – encourages strong group dynamics among learners and between participants and trainers. Offering your program over an extended period of time ensures that participants have time to reflect upon the life skills and transform them into practice with genuinely changed behavior outside of the classroom. On the other hand, you do not want to space lessons too far apart from each other, as you will risk losing momentum. In sum, it is best to maintain a weekly regularity that allows time to reflect and practice the skill while still maintaining young people’s motivation.

For these reasons, you may want to consider the following guidelines in your program design:

- **Establish the principle of “one life skill per lesson”:** This is important to allow youth to address each new skill independently, and should generally be followed. However, if you decide to combine two life skills into one lesson in your curriculum design, you should ensure that these life skills work well together (for instance, listening skills and communication skills) and develop examples and activities where the two life skills can be practiced together.
- **Provide a minimum and maximum duration for all life skills lessons:** Typically, a minimum of 45 minutes provides learners with enough time to discuss the topic and engage in various activities. It is recommended that a life skills lesson does not exceed 75 minutes, so as to not surpass participants’ attention spans.
- **Limit the number of life skills lessons delivered in the course of a day:** You should try to limit life skills instruction to no more than three hours per day and to interweave it with other types of educational, technical, or vocational instruction where relevant. If there are more than three sessions on a given day, you should allow participants a minimum of 15 minutes break between each session to digest the newly learned information and to re-focus their energies before moving on to the next skill.
- **Space lessons appropriately across the training period:** Life skills lessons should be stretched across several weeks (or months) to build trust within the classroom and allow for reflection, practice, and behavior change. There should be a maximum interval of one week between life skills sessions to maintain interest and momentum among participants, but at the same time there should be no more than eight lessons per week to allow for self-reflection and practice.
- **Add some flexibility in your program structure:** You may want to consider shortening or lengthening lesson times, or restructuring your weekly schedule, after you have received feedback from youth participants or the trainers on each lesson.

The timing and frequency of lessons will also depend on the environment in which training takes place. Table 8 provides some examples of how life skills program structure may vary by the context in which it is implemented.

TABLE 8: Life Skills Program Structure by Delivery Type

	Within a vocational training program	Within a traditional education system (age 15-18)	Within university-level education	Stand-alone training for unemployed youth
Duration	Aligned with vocational training program length	Aligned with school terms (one semester or full year)	Aligned to university term (typically 3-6 months)	Maximum of 6 months to maintain momentum, increase focus, and allow accompanying career counseling activities
Scheduling	Life skills planned around technical training hours; before technical practicum is undertaken	Life skills planned around traditional educational curriculum hours	Life skills ideally taught during term preceding graduation to accompany active job search	Whenever possible, accompanied by other employability training modules
Frequency	2 to 3 times a week	1-3 times a week	Twice a week	Every day or several times per week, depending on other training activities
Active interaction	2-3 lessons per day	2 lessons per day	1-2 lessons per day	Up to 3 lessons per day

Overall duration of the life skills training

The other important scheduling decision is the program duration, defined as the total instructional hours a life skills program participant will receive. The overall instructional time devoted to life skills training is critical to allow youth participants to acquire minimum competencies in life skills and create a lasting change in their behavior. It will in large part be dictated by the number of lessons in your curriculum, as each lesson will take a fixed amount of time (typically one hour).

Program evaluation results from around the world have shown that the more participants are taught in life skills, both in terms of the variety of lessons and in terms of instructional hours, the greater the programs impact in terms of awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and improved behavior. For example, comparing two youth cohorts in Poland and Hungary receiving 30 and 15 hours of life skills instruction respectively, an IYF-led study concluded that the level of competency post-training increased in nine out of 12 life skills for the Polish cohort, but in only two out of 12 life skills for the Hungarian cohort. Also, Hungarian youth who received both 15 hours of instruction and completed a service-learning project – and hence got more contact-hours with their trainers – demonstrated greater life skills competencies than youth receiving only 15 hours of training. Thus, there seems to be a threshold of minimum life skills hours of instruction around 30 hours which ensures statistically measurable and relevant, consistent behavioral change.³⁹

39 IYF (2007), pp. 2-9.

Scheduling constraints

Ideally, life skills lessons should be taught over an extended period of time with only a few hours per day devoted to life skills programming.⁴⁰ However, the realities of your organization, program requirements, and the environment you work in may place constraints on the training schedule. Some constraining factors you will need to take into consideration when designing the training schedule include:

- **Youth availability:** You should consider and accommodate other commitments young people may have outside of training, such as school, work, family, and community obligations. This is important to ensure that the life skills training program is seen as a benefit – and not an additional burden – for your participants.
- **Training environment:** When life skills is not a stand-alone training, but rather a component of a broader youth program – for example, within school-based instruction, as an afterschool program, or within vocational or non-formal education programs with set durations – these overarching programs will likely dictate the availability of youth. However, in many cases, life skills can be very successfully interwoven to complement school lessons, vocational training, internships or apprenticeships, and other types of employability or entrepreneurship training.
- **Youth learning pace:** Youth participants will need varying amounts of time to process, reflect upon, build on, and practice their newly acquired knowledge and skills. This may depend on their level of education and a variety of other characteristics of the target population.
- **Organizational resources:** Your organization may face limitations in terms of availability of training venues, trainers, and staff to monitor and oversee the program. There may also be programmatic requirements in terms of the number of youth cohorts to be reached or training cycles to be completed in a given time period.

The recommendations in this section should allow you to create a realistic and appropriate schedule for your life skills training program. Another important consideration as your program begins implementation is creating a comfortable classroom environment for participants, as will be discussed in the following section.

40 IYF (2013a), pp. 13-14.

Section 8: Classroom Environment

A comfortable training environment is important to make sure that participants feel safe expressing themselves and trainers are able to effectively lead all interactive activities. There are four key considerations to create an environment that is positive and conducive to learning:

- Ensuring an optimal cohort size for participants
- Creating a comfortable classroom setting and atmosphere
- Making relevant training materials available to both participants and trainers
- Implementing an accessible, functioning, and fair complaint mechanism

This chapter will provide a number of useful suggestions related to each of these four components, so that you can create the best environment for your trainers and participants.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #8

An effective and comfortable learning environment is created for all participants

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To create a positive, safe, and comfortable learning environment for youth in life skills training

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess whether grantee organizations have considered the learning environment in their program design

Ensuring an optimal cohort size for participants

Class size can have a profound impact on how well participants absorb and retain information in life skills training. How frequently youth have the opportunity to exchange ideas, to practice self-expression, and to engage in group-work and exercises depends on the size of the group. Youth react and interact in instructional settings according to their level of comfort within a group – often very large groups inhibit participants’ ability to express themselves. Moreover, the larger the group, the less room and time there is for dialogue and, too often, trainers tend to resort to traditional instructional methods such as lectures because group work or interactive discussions are more difficult to facilitate.

On the other hand, while a large group is not conducive to participation, very small groups do not provide for the best allocation of your resources. Small class sizes limit the possibilities for a trainer to organize the group into various smaller-group configurations for a variety of exercises. Additionally, groups with fewer than 10 participants may lack the diversity of opinions and ideas needed to stimulate fruitful discussions.⁴¹ However, a higher student-teacher ratio means the trainer can devote more time to each participant or group of participants during various activities, thus engaging each learner in the most appropriate way. Therefore, the ideal class size for life skills instructional setting is between 15 and 25 participants.

41 IYF (2008), p. 11.

Creating a comfortable classroom setting and atmosphere

Your organization may have its own training venue with classrooms, which is optimal in terms of convenience and cost. In many cases, however, you may need to utilize training space offered by your partners (schools, vocational training centers, municipal spaces, or other youth organizations' facilities) for a limited period of time. A safe, comfortable, and welcoming training venue will facilitate learning and make participants feel respected – all important factors in motivating continuing and consistent attendance.

As such, an adequate training venue must:

- Be easily accessible to all participants, ideally by various means of transportation
- Include accessibility features for participants with disabilities
- Have operational and separate restrooms for males and females
- Be of adequate size to allow students to move around and complete small group work comfortably
- Be sound-proof and prevent outside noise from disturbing lessons – or the sounds of a busy life skills classroom from disturbing others
- Be a comfortable temperature during all seasons of the year
- Have walls with chalkboards/whiteboards or stands that can be used to hang flip charts
- Include required training materials and tools such as pens, cards, markers, flip chart boards, paper, tape, etc.

Within each classroom, seating arrangements should be conducive to interactive teaching methodologies and various types of group work. Ideally everyone should be able to choose where they will sit, with chairs arranged in a circular formation where everyone can see and address everyone else and open discussions are possible. This also ensures equality among participants, rather than having the trainer stand in front of the classroom throughout the session. If available, small tables on the sides of the room are convenient for small group work activities.

Establishing trust within the classroom is essential to enabling learning and exchange. Participants should feel at ease and comfortable enough to express themselves, even on difficult topics. To create such an environment, ground rules of civility should be set collaboratively by the trainer and the participants at the beginning of the program. During the first lesson, the facilitator can lead a large-group activity to establish a classroom code of conduct. Rules might include listening to other participants without regard to social or gender difference, not interrupting other participants, not being judgmental of other people's ideas, and respecting each other's privacy. Once the collaboratively defined code of conduct is agreed upon, it should be written on a poster and remain hung on the wall throughout the duration of training. Both trainers and participants can refer to it at any time, particularly if the rules are not being followed, to diffuse tensions between participants and maintain positive teamwork.

“The relationship with students is based on mutual respect and equality. Students see the instructor as a friend who deserves their trust, and as someone they can count on to give them guidance.”

— PTS Coach in Fès, Morocco speaking about an IYF program

In addition to establishing classroom norms, trainers play an important role in creating and maintaining a respectful learning environment. As sensitive matters may be discussed or arise during life skills lessons, trainers should be

ready to deal with them with empathy and be careful to not let their own personal emotions cloud their response.⁴² The trainer should listen carefully and actively to each participant and show respect for their opinions at all times.

Making relevant training materials available to both participants and trainers

Written materials are useful for participants to have a record of what they have learned in each lesson, particularly for those youth who are visual learners. For participants, materials such as articles and handouts should be shared to support learning acquired through the life skills lessons. Depending on program design, your organization can add textbooks, exercise books, or personal journals to reinforce learning as appropriate. All training materials for participants must be appropriate to your target audience's literacy level and should be highly contextualized.

Because printing and copying can become costly for your organization, trainers should plan ahead what written materials they want to use. If your target youth population has a good level of information technology literacy and internet connectivity, you may want to create computer-based materials or share documents online by posting them on a secured part of your website or emailing them to participants.

As discussed in Section 4 of this guide, trainers should have a full copy of the curriculum that includes a Facilitators' Guide and detailed lesson plans to assist in planning activities and ensure a high level of teaching quality across all trainers. If possible, handouts for participants should be included in the curriculum so that trainers can make photocopies directly from there.

Implementing an accessible, functioning, and fair complaint mechanism

The trainer is responsible for the well-being of every participant during each session, as well as during any training-related activity, even outside of the classroom. Learning how to diffuse conflicts between participants, identify and stop any psychologically or physically dangerous behavior or gender-based discrimination, and respond to other negative situations should be an integral part of your TOT workshop. However, trainers should also always have the possibility to turn to your organization and Master Trainers for advice, support, and mediation when necessary.

In cases of disputes between youth participants or more severe issues such as bullying, or in case participants have complaints about unsatisfactory trainers or staff misconduct, your organization should have a protocol in place allowing each party to bring a complaint and have their perspective heard in a fair manner.

Ground rules for such a dispute settlement mechanism include:

- Informing participants and trainers about the existence of this protocol and their rights;
- Designating a small panel of staff members, Master Trainers, other trainers, and youth participants to hear each case; and
- Ensuring accessibility to the complaint mechanism at all times, fairness in handling each case, and discretion.

Based on the guidelines in this section, you should be able to create a trust-based and comfortable classroom environment, ensuring optimal conditions for youth to learn and practice life skills. At this point in the guide, your organization should have all the information it needs to design and implement a high quality life skills training program. The final section of the guide will cover the monitoring and evaluation of such a program.

⁴² Hansen (2006), p. 14.

Section 9: Monitoring and Evaluation

Once your life skills program is underway, you will need to closely monitor program activities and outcomes to ensure that your program is producing the expected results. By monitoring your life skills training and evaluating its impact on youth, their employability, and their communities, you can ensure that you are having a meaningful effect on the population you serve. This requires the continual collection and analysis of data, and the incorporation of lessons learned from this data back into program design and implementation to correct any problems that have been identified. In sum, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system will help you to identify issues and improve practices based on evidence.

Monitoring allows you to assess program performance while it is ongoing by collecting and analyzing information about program activities and outcomes on a periodic and regular basis.

Evaluation helps you to measure the immediate and long-term impacts at the end of your program, as well as to address issues of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.

It is, however, very challenging to accurately measure changes in life skills competencies and changes in youth behaviors as a result of these competencies. Even more challenging is demonstrating a direct link between life skills training and employability outcomes (such as employment rates).⁴³ But through a carefully designed M&E system and clear indicators to measure outcomes, your organization can move toward measuring the impact of life skills training for youth participants.

STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE #9

Life skills training is adequately monitored and evaluated to improve program outcomes

How youth organizations can use this standard:

- To monitor program implantation while in progress and take action to remedy any problems encountered
- To evaluate program outcomes against initial objectives in order to improve future life skills programming

How donors can use this standard:

- To assess whether grantee organizations are capable of implementing an effective M&E system for their life skills program
- To evaluate program outcomes against initial objectives in order to improve future life skills programming

Common challenges for life skills M&E

In IYF's capacity building work with partner organizations around the world, M&E is often a key area where difficulties are encountered – particularly for life skills programs.⁴⁴ It can be an intimidating topic for many organizations due to its complex and technical nature. There are quite a number of challenges that organizations may face in setting up an effective M&E system, including:

43 See UNICEF (2012), pp. 26-28; IYF (2013d), pp. 19-21.

44 See IYF (2008b). Final Report of the entra21 Program Phase I: 2001-2007. Baltimore: International Youth Foundation.

- It is hard to establish a direct cause-and-effect link between life skills training and behavioral changes or employment patterns
- For programs that combine multiple trainings, it is difficult to separate the effects of the life skills training component from other program components such as the vocational training
- Reliance on youth self-evaluation of life skills competencies before and after training is challenging due to the subjective nature of this assessment⁴⁵
- Program designers often fail to determine quantifiable objectives at the start of the program with all stakeholders, and hence do not allocate enough resources to M&E, or do not establish a clear M&E timeline
- Some organizations may not have the human resources capacity to track M&E data because staff and trainers are not formally trained in these methods or are overburdened with other responsibilities⁴⁶
- It is time-consuming and costly to follow up with youth beneficiaries after the program's completion to gather information on their employability outcomes

However, with proper planning and investment, your organization can overcome these challenges and utilize basic M&E tools that will allow you to effectively track program progress and effectiveness.

Preparing an M&E system

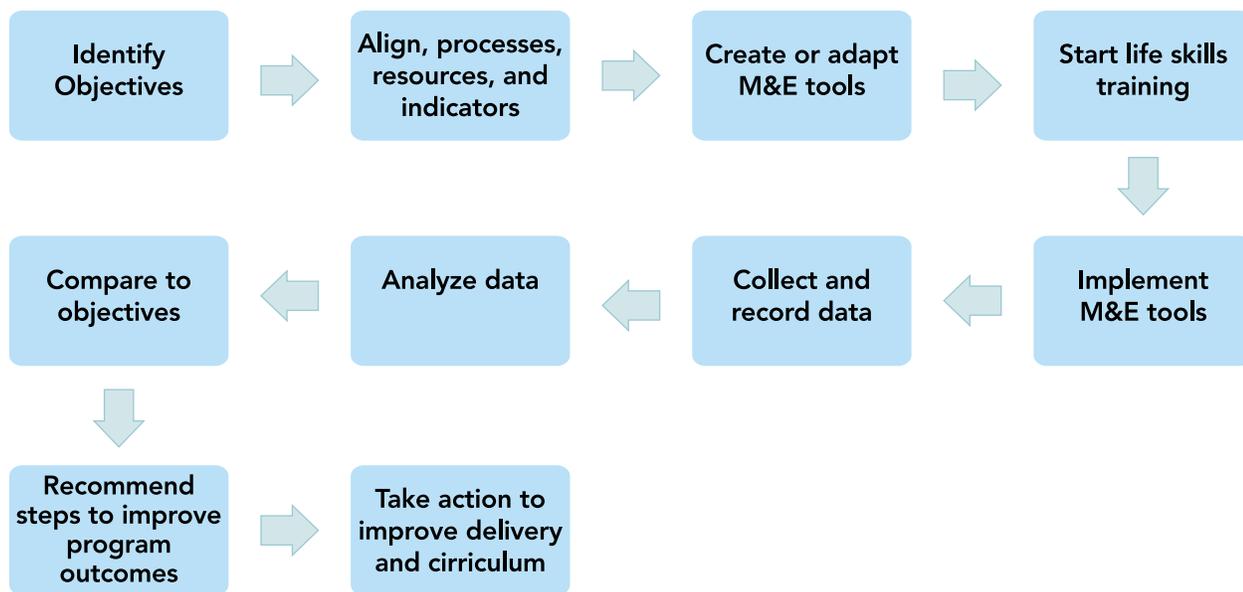
To create an effective M&E system, your organization should allocate staff, financial, and time resources in the same manner that you would for any other program component. Organization and consistency are of the utmost importance for successful M&E. Thus your organization will need to create a formalized protocol regarding who is responsible for data collection, how often data will be collected, and how it will be stored (either in an Excel spreadsheet or using specialized M&E software).

M&E tools and protocols must be embedded into the program from its very inception, not after its completion, when it is too late to capture relevant data. Your organization should ensure that information gathering and feedback take place regularly throughout the life skills training cycle, as shown in **Table 9** below. In fact, M&E data can be used as an important management tool and will assist your organization in timely decision-making as the program progresses.⁴⁷

45 IYF has found that in many cases, as youth develop a better understanding of themselves and their weaknesses through the training, they will often rate their life skills competencies lower at the end of training than they did at the beginning, resulting in the appearance that youth have weaker skills than before they entered the program.

46 Mincemoyer, Claudia C. and Daniel Perkins (2005). Measuring the impact of youth development programs: A national on-line youth life skills evaluation system.

47 Honorati et al. (2013), p. 51.

TABLE 9: M&E through the Program Life Cycle

Adapted from Honorati (2013), p. 51

Make sure to involve all stakeholders, especially employers and donors, from the very beginning in identifying their needs in terms of data collection and analysis (see **Section 1**). You may also want to invite them to join your staff on an M&E Committee that would be tasked with managing the M&E system and discussing the conclusions and recommendations identified to improve the program.

As program assessments and impact evaluations demand resources, organization, and expertise, you may want to consider whether you will manage the process from within your organization or enlist external support in the form of independent consultants or evaluation firms. If you do decide to manage the process yourself, it is important to make sure that the scope of your M&E system is in line with the experience and availability of your staff to manage the process. It should enable you to gather meaningful information, without overburdening staff or taking away from program activities.⁴⁸

Many employers IYF has worked with have noted the value of life skills training and some are starting to change their HR policies as a result. For example, a Recruitment Manager of a large hotel in Morocco shared, “The experience with the youth from your center has forced us to change our HR management practices. The youth display specific life skills that are very important to us and in fact necessary in the hotel field.” Likewise, employers can assess whether a life skills program is effectively developing the company’s human resources, improving efficiency, profits, and/or serving orientation training needs

Creating effective M&E tools

In order to maximize its utility, your M&E system should use a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures to monitor effective program implementation. These indicators should encompass both program outputs (for example, the number of youth graduating from training) and program outcomes (for example, the number of youth having employment six months after graduation).

⁴⁸ Jacobs Foundation (2011), p. 29.

Therefore, your M&E system should gather data that enables you to:

- Measure youth attendance
- Measure changes in participants' knowledge, behavior, and attitudes regarding the set of life skills taught
- Measure youth satisfaction with the program's content and delivery
- Assess program efficiency in terms of design, delivery, and costs
- Determine whether the training has met the needs identified by all stakeholders, including youth, parents, trainers, employers, partners, and donors
- Assess the link between participants' life skills and employment/entrepreneurship outcomes
- Determine whether the program achieved its intended objectives and/or had a significant return on investment⁴⁹

SMART Indicators

To ensure data collection is feasible, indicators in your M&E system should have the following characteristics:

- S – Specific
- M – Measurable
- A – Achievable
- R – Relevant
- T – Time-bound

The M&E Tools and Performance Indicators resource at the end of this section can help you to determine the specific quantitative and qualitative M&E indicators you may want to use to measure program outputs and outcomes.⁵⁰ For those organizations that wish to pursue M&E in more depth, IYF and the World Bank have written a guide (available online in English, French, and Arabic) (<http://library.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/library/gpye-m%26e-report.pdf>).

While some data collection methods are low-cost, such as gathering feedback from trainers and employers on youth behavior, they might not provide as much information as analysis of pre- and post-training assessments for youth or focus group discussions. These latter methods are more complex to organize, but cover more topics and ensure that outcomes are compared to the needs identified by the various stakeholders.

It is also important to remember that due to the complexity of most training programs and the lack of a “control group” (a second group of youth who do not receive training but have their outcomes measured for comparison purposes), it is usually not possible to establish a true cause-and-effect relationship between life skills training and improved employment/entrepreneurship outcomes.⁵¹ However, through effective use of quantitative and qualitative M&E data, your organization can create a strong narrative regarding the importance and impact of your program on youth participants' lives. Success stories where individual youth describe their path and how life skills training allowed them to make progress personally and/or professionally are an excellent example of qualitative data supporting program impact.

In summary, an effective M&E mechanism is a central piece of your life skills program, as it will ensure that program outcomes and objectives stay aligned and that there is a relevant and measureable return on investment from your and others' investments into the training. Use of evidence-based decision-making, drawing on lessons learned from your M&E system, will ensure maximally positive outcomes for youth and also build your program's reputation and long-term sustainability.

49 Honorati et al. (2013), p. 54.

50 For further examples of tools and performance indicators, see: Angel-Urdinola et al. (2010), p. 28; Honorati et al. (2013), pp. 53-54; IYF (2013), pp. 45-47; Mincemoyer et al. (2005); Jacobs Foundation (2011), Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.

51 Angel-Urdinola et al. (2010), p. 27.

M&E Tools and Performance Indicators

Note that all indicators should be disaggregated by gender, age, and socioeconomic status wherever possible or applicable.

TOOL	OBJECTIVE	SAMPLE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
MONITORING		
Program applications and enrollment	Quantitative assessment of youth interest in the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of applications received • Number of youth enrolled in the program
Attendance records	Monitor students' attendance, determine if participant met minimum hours' requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average number of lessons attended by participant • Average attendance for each lesson • Program completion rate • Drop-out rate
Trainer feedback on youth progress	Qualitative assessment to capture how much youth have integrated the life skills taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainer records and observation of each participant
Mentorship support to new life skills trainers	Qualitative and quantitative assessment of support provided to trainers by their mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency and duration of mentoring sessions • Mentor records of classroom observation and mentoring sessions
Monitoring of trainers by organization's staff, mentors, and Master Trainers	Quantitative and qualitative assessment of trainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of trainers • Number of trainers using interactive training methodology • Frequency of use of interactive training methodology by trainers
Monitoring of classroom environment and grievances	Quantitative and qualitative assessment of classroom environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of training materials and handouts • Number of complaints by training cohort • Categorization of grievances by nature

TOOL	OBJECTIVE	SAMPLE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
EVALUATION		
Pre- and post-training life skills competency tests	Quantitative assessment of changes in knowledge, behavior, and attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed pre/post-test measuring mastery of each life skill taught
Youth and employer satisfaction surveys	Qualitative assessment of the degree to which stakeholders' identified needs are met by the life skills training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth satisfaction surveys • Employer satisfaction surveys (regarding youth employees who are program graduates) • Number of youth/employers who would recommend the training to others
Focus-group discussions with youth participants	Qualitative assessment of life skills training's effectiveness according to youth themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for satisfaction • Reasons for dissatisfaction • Suggestions for program improvement
Focus-group discussions with other interested stakeholders (i.e. other trainers, parents, employers) at least once a year	Qualitative assessment of youth behavioral changes by those around them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of youth showing improved behaviors • Suggestions for program improvement to increase impact on youth behaviors
Post-program follow up with youth participants	Quantitative and qualitative assessment of training impact on participants in the longer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer survey of youth behavioral changes at work (being on time, teamwork) • Number of youth with jobs or internships 6-12 months after training • Number of youth with jobs in formal vs. informal sector • Number of youth entrepreneurs with their own businesses 6-12 months after training • Average earnings of youth graduates

Conclusion

With this guide, which draws on extensive research and the experience of IYF and its partners, we hope that you and your organization now have the tools to be part of the global movement to improve life skills training. Together we can make a difference in the lives of youth and help them to become productive and engaged members of their families, communities, and countries.

The nine Standards of Excellence covered in this guide are designed to specifically address the major decisions and challenges youth organizations will encounter when designing their own life skills training program or adapting an existing one. Thus, each of these nine standards is part of a comprehensive approach to ensure consistency and quality throughout the design and implementation of life skills training.

Using these standards as a benchmark and guide, your organization will be able to:

- Systematically create or adapt your life skills curriculum and overall program to address the needs of the youth you are serving
- Involve all of your partners and stakeholders – youth, parents, trainers, partner organizations, educational institutions, government representatives, and employers – in each step of the program process
- Select, train, and support talented life skills facilitators to successfully engage youth
- Use experiential and interactive teaching methodologies in an environment that is safe and friendly for youth
- Establish an effective and transparent quality-control mechanism to monitor and evaluate your program and adapt its content to your objectives and the objectives of your stakeholders

By the same token, donors using this guide should be able to:

- Incorporate the Standards of Excellence in life skills programming through requests for proposals
- Evaluate the quality of potential grantee organizations' proposals
- Ensure that funding is allocated to the most effective and impactful life skills programs that are being developed

Because the majority of life skills programs are designed with the ultimate goal of improving employability outcomes in mind, it is critical that your organization engage local networks during the initial curriculum design and program implementation phases. Local employers, along with other stakeholders, can identify which skills are most needed for youth to gain employment and to keep their positions. They can also provide valuable feedback to improve training as the program is ongoing. Local entrepreneurs can validate or suggest key personal skills youth will need to start their own businesses. Moreover, by playing an influential role in the local network of organizations and businesses, your organization can help to provide opportunities for your youth to succeed in the workplace and in their communities.

When it comes to life skills training, the methods of delivery are as important, if not more important, than the curriculum itself. The Standards of Excellence in this guide highlight the importance of having trainers who are properly trained and consistently use experiential teaching methodologies with youth. Participants should have the

opportunity to practice the skills they are learning in groups and individually in the classroom, as well as outside the classroom, in their community, with their friends, family, and at work.

Depending on your level of experience and comfort with life skills programming, you may find this guide useful as a starter guide for developing a new program, or as a checklist to review and improve an existing program. These universal best practices are relevant to all types of life skills trainings with diverse youth cohorts and in diverse settings. We hope that they will help your organization to become even more successful in providing life skills training and improving the lives of the youth that you serve.

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