



## Creating an Effective Learning Session for Adult Learners Checklist

**Purpose:** This checklist is for facilitators designing a learning session by way of a presentation (virtually or in-person), a workshop, or training for adult learners. This checklist will help ensure that your learning session will create an engaging, effective, and powerful learning experience for participants. The purpose of DOL YouthBuild webinars and learning events (i.e. Regional Peer-to-Peer Convenings, New Grantee Orientations, Multi-Site Collaboratives, Construction/Safety Train-the-Trainer sessions, and MIS trainings) is to provide participants with clear, actionable practices and strategies that they can implement into their YouthBuild program. This compendium of best practices includes some concepts that may be very familiar but also may include new ideas to be incorporated into future content.

**Overview:** Learning sessions are a critical component of a comprehensive technical assistance (TA) model. Learning sessions are delivered via virtual or in-person convenings, performance coaching, electronic resources, and/or MIS support. Facilitators must design and deliver effective learning sessions that positively impact adult learners and their program practices. This checklist includes learning design best practices, recommendations for facilitators to implement these practices, and additional facilitator resources.

### Learning Session Design Best Practice Checklist

Best Practices	In Action
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Why?</b> The very first step of designing a learning session is to consider <u>why</u> these groups of people are being brought together. What needs exist among programs that justify their and your time spent on attending a learning session? What are the objectives you hope to achieve through a learning session? These are the overarching goals of the learning session, and often arise from DOL YouthBuild grant requirements, performance coaching, and other programmatic trend needs.</p>	<p>Create broad learning session goals that address what you hope attendees will take away. Here are examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Example 1:</u> This learning session is intended to provide a basic understanding of DOL YouthBuild grant requirements, common challenges that may arise, and best practices to address those challenges.</li> <li>○ <u>Example 2:</u> Placement has been identified as a regional challenge. This learning session will provide best practices and resources for successful placement in career and post-secondary education.</li> </ul>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Who, What, When, and How:</b> It is important to identify <u>who</u> your target audience is, because this will inform <u>what</u> topic(s) you will cover, and <u>how</u> you will deliver the content. To adequately plan your learning session, create a planning timeline that allows you to be prepared <u>when</u> you are expected to deliver the learning session.</p>	<p>Learners want their time respected (as do other presenters.) Prepare, prepare, prepare. There is no substitute for fresh thinking in designing a training - take into account the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The attendees' knowledge and experience;</li> <li>○ The size of the group; and</li> <li>○ The duration of the session.</li> </ul>

<p>□ <b>Clear Learning Objectives:</b> When designing your session, clearly identify what participants will know and/or be able to do as a result of attending this session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These objectives should include the specific knowledge, strategies, and practices that participants will walk away with upon leaving your session.</li> <li>○ Objectives need to be attainable considering the allotted time, the target audience, and the size of the group.</li> </ul>	<p>Clear learning objectives should always be part of the planning. Below is an example.</p> <p>After this session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assess the effectiveness of existing partnerships.</li> <li>○ Identify 2-3 areas of improvement for placement partnership development.</li> <li>○ Implement 2-3 strategies to develop or strengthen placement partnerships in their local community.</li> </ul>
<p>□ <b>Learning Session Agenda Design:</b> Present information in a logical sequence, in an organized structure, and with ample chances for interaction and assimilation. People come to trainings for information, solutions, inspiration and support. Learning sessions should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Blend new, practical information to help participants improve their work, improve their operations, and best support their target audience (students, staff, partners, etc.); and</li> <li>○ Make peer sharing of experiences and solutions the focus.</li> </ul>	<p>Provide an appropriate pace – do not over-pack an agenda. The agenda should have these core elements with adequate time allocation to move through the learning session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An opening (introductions, expectations, objectives, agenda review);</li> <li>○ The content (new information with a clear delivery process); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Check for understanding;</li> <li>○ Actively involve the audience through peer sharing, problem solving, case studies, games, applications, and activities to practice new concepts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Debrief, reflection, and application of content (summarize learning and create space for participants to identify action steps to strengthen their practices);</li> <li>○ A closing (final questions, comments, and completion of an evaluation form).</li> </ul>
<p>□ <b>Assessment of Audience Needs:</b> In the opening segment of the learning session, ask questions that gauge participants’ needs, experiences, and challenges so that you can share and discuss content that specifically addresses these needs.</p>	<p>Here are some examples of effective activities to assess the needs of participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Example 1:</u> As an opening brainstorming activity, ask participants what they hope to gain from the session. After this brainstorm, review the learning objectives while naming ways this session may or may not address all of the identified needs expressed in the brainstorm.</li> <li>○ <u>Example 2:</u> Before sharing strategies to build effective placement partnerships, ask participants about their current partnership work and their greatest areas of challenge. This helps the facilitator highlight content and strategies that directly address those challenges.</li> </ul>
<p>□ <b>Consider Various Learning Styles:</b> Adult learners have different primary learning styles: aural, visual, physical, logical, verbal, social, and solitary. Use a mixture of methods and tools in each workshop: lecture,</p>	<p>Some examples are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Visual learners prefer to learn by seeing things processed on paper. They tend to watch facial and body language very closely.</li> </ul>

<p>interactive activities, flip chart/note-taking, handouts, videos, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Aural learners prefer stories with detail and having information explained out loud.</li> <li>○ Physical learners prefer to be active and engaged in doing the work. They prefer to move around and use their hands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>□ Participant Sharing and Reflection:</b> Ensure your session provides space in which participants can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflect on and/or share prior knowledge, challenges, and promising practices.</li> <li>○ Learn strategies, practices, or concepts from other participants.</li> </ul>	<p>The perspectives of the adult learner and the young people they serve is essential. Whenever possible, try to incorporate program staff and student perspective into your session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Example:</u> While discussing placement partnership development practices, the facilitator asks participants to engage in a think-pair-share activity to highlight key techniques that they have used to build strong, trusting relationships with other postsecondary partners.</li> </ul>
<p><b>□ Application of Content:</b> The session should allow opportunities for participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Think about how the content presented applies to their current practices.</li> <li>○ Actively practice the strategies and concepts presented. If time or modality does not permit this, then the facilitator could share practice and application suggestions in the closing segment of the learning session.</li> </ul>	<p>Applying the content in the learning session solidifies the concept and ensures the participants' understanding of the applicability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Example 1:</u> The facilitator presents effective classroom questioning techniques and then provides opportunities for participants to practice these questioning techniques with each other. Allowing participants to practice these techniques will help them become more comfortable applying them back at their YouthBuild programs.</li> <li>○ <u>Example 2:</u> The facilitator has explained the process of entering a data point in the MIS data system and how that data point captures a program outcome. Ensuring participants practice entering the data point in the learning session and then running a report to see the outcomes solidifies the learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>□ Talking Less Is More:</b> Research shows that people often disengage after hearing 10 minutes of talking. Plan to integrate opportunities for participant reflection, discussion, Q and A, and/or other interactive activities to break up presentation time.</p>	<p>Information grounded in the experience of the field increases attendees' understanding and connection to the content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Devise a variety of ways to incorporate YouthBuild stories, experiences, and teachings into the workshop.</li> <li>○ Utilize case studies, team up with a presenter from a YouthBuild program, and/or draw on the experience of the audience during the training.</li> </ul>
<p><b>□ Depth Versus Breadth:</b> In most sessions there is a need to balance the breadth of information that needs to be covered with the practical application needs of the adult learner to explore ways to apply the information or to</p>	<p>Participants come to trainings for informal learning, peer networking, and to be a part of a larger national community. Allow ample time for peer connections. Strategies to support depth versus breadth in the session include:</p>

<p>inform the current practices of the learner. A well-designed session will include an opportunity for the participants to take a deeper look at a specific set of strategies or a reflection activity to identify action steps to inform current practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Content overview - this should provide an overview of practical information. Include specific resources the participant can reference for additional information.</li> <li>○ Do not overcrowd the agenda – keep the overall learning objectives in mind when you prioritize content for a session. If the session is to improve a programmatic strategy, go deep into a specific set of strategies and provide additional resources that may include other content you reference but did not cover in depth.</li> <li>○ The breadth of information that needs to be covered can vary depending on the learning objectives of the session. If the session needs to cover a broad range of information, keep in mind the various learning styles of participants when providing information.</li> <li>○ Structured peer sharing - include a peer presenter to share specific applications of a strategy covered in the session. This can be woven into session to balance depth versus breadth.</li> <li>○ One-on-one sharing or group discussions - allows participants to reflect on the content and possible ways it can personally and programmatically impact practices and strategies in their work.</li> </ul>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Supplemental Materials:</b> Consider that a single learning session is not sufficient to change a practice. Learning sessions plant seeds and provide resources for programs to investigate or follow-up further on strategies provided.</p>	<p>Offer handouts, tools, websites, and other materials that help participants successfully implement the strategies presented after they have returned home.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Strategic Use of Multimedia:</b> Videos, pictures, and music can serve as great tools to engage participants and provide examples of strategies in action. However, media should be directly tied to content and should usually be 10 minutes or less. Presenters should also consider building in time for attendees to reflect on how the media relates to the concepts and strategies presented.</p>	<p>Be intentional and clear about how the multimedia used links to the learning objectives. Some ways that multimedia use in a session can support learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Video vignettes of a practice or strategy in use - e.g., share a clip of a teaching strategy in practice with students.</li> <li>○ Virtual peer presenter(s) – using WebEx or Skype video, this can be a cost-effective way to include peer or youth sharing in the session.</li> <li>○ Videos with storytelling - stories contextualize content and what is possible with the suggested promising practice or strategy. Stories bring ideas and concepts to life. This can be a creative way to include youth perspective in the session.</li> </ul>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>PowerPoint as a Supplement, Not a Crutch:</b> Effective Power Point (or Prezi) presentations should be used to supplement and guide the conversation, not drive it. Keep it simple. Effective PowerPoints usually contain relevant visuals, graphic organizers,</p>	<p>When designing your PowerPoint:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use required PowerPoint Template, if provided.</li> <li>○ Use appropriate font size – 16 pt font or larger.</li> <li>○ Use no more than 3 different font sizes on your slides.</li> <li>○ Paraphrase and use bullet points.</li> </ul>

<p>and limits the text on the slide (consider providing a detailed handout if necessary).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do not read your slides verbatim. You may lose the attention of participants</li> <li>○ Use animation sparingly. It should never detract from the content.</li> <li>○ Organizational charts, data charts, tables or graphs should contain limited data so the message is clear. Use a circle or arrow to draw attention to a specific header or section. Provide a handout of the graphics that may include more details that did not fit on the slide.</li> </ul>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Make Thinking Visible:</b> Use flip chart paper to write down audience ideas and key concepts from your session. Use symbols (pictures) to represent key concepts. Keep these flip charts present throughout the presentation so that you and participants can continually make connections to these ideas.</p>	<p><u>In-person:</u> The facilitator can use the space in the room to make thinking visible. Be prepared with enough flipcharts, markers, painter’s tape (to protect walls), post-it notes, and other materials that allow the facilitator and participants to interact and to capture thinking during the session. Make sure the instructions are clear for these interactive activities - brainstorming, think/pair/share, small groups, etc.</p> <p><u>Virtual:</u> In the selected virtual platform for the learning session, utilize interactive features to connect and check in with participants (polls, chat features, virtual flipcharts and whiteboards, breakout rooms, etc.). Virtual learning can be dynamic and engaging with preparation, co-facilitator(s), and technology support during the session.</p>

## Resources to Help You Create Strong Learning Sessions

[Effective Adult Learning: A Toolkit for Teaching Adults](#) - this resource was developed by Northwest Center for Public Health Practice at the University of Washington School of Public Health. The toolkit includes an in-depth overview of adult learners, tips for developing learning objectives, and provides tools and templates to support effective training design that is applicable across a variety of content.

[The Role of a Facilitator: Guiding an Event Through to a Successful Conclusion](#) - this article is from Mind Tools, which provides a skill-building resources and providing on-demand learning solutions. This article provides tips and strategies for effective facilitation.

[Delivering Training and Technical Assistance](#) – this collection of e-learning resources was created by the Compassion Capital Fund National Resource Center as part of “Strengthening Nonprofits: A Capacity Builder’s Resource Library.” This guidebook offers tips for in-person trainings, blended training, and online training.

[Virtual Training for Modern Learners](#) – written by Cindy Huggett, a Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP), this white paper outlines strategies for engaging adult learners in virtual training modalities.

[Best Practices for Delivering Virtual Classroom Training](#) – this resource is available from eLearning Guild, which provides a variety of tools for e-learning professionals. This white paper provides tips for successful and engaging virtual trainings.