

Open Call for Funding New Networks

Learning Needs
Analysis Guide

Skillnet Ireland Open Call for funding New Networks Learning Needs Analysis Guide

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1. Learning Needs Analysis

The Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) provides information on the skills development requirements of the businesses within your sector/region or industry group. A comprehensive LNA is required as part of the Skillnet Ireland Application in order to make informed decisions about the direction of the Network, based on concrete data and information. If you are using a Consultant ensure they are experienced at conducting LNAs, are well briefed on the Skillnet Ireland Training Networks Model, and have clear objectives and timeframes agreed at the outset.

2. Why do a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)?

A LNA is one of the key steps in preparing a training plan and will provide you with information on which to base your Network's training plan. It enables you to:

- Determine the key business challenges facing the sector/region and individual companies.
- Identify gaps between current and required levels of knowledge, skills and abilities.
- Identify what the general content of training should be.
- Ensure that appropriate and relevant training form part of the training plan.
- Determine the most effective learning methodologies.
- Maximise use of network resources.
- Ensure the continuing motivation, interest and satisfaction levels of network companies.
- Provide a baseline for the evaluation of a training plan.

3. What is a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)?

A LNA is the systematic investigation of learning needs within an organisation or group of organisations. This provides an analysis of any gaps in knowledge/skills/abilities and identifies what the workforce will need to learn in order to be fully competent in the jobs they are doing now and will be doing in the future. It is part of a process which integrates training with the business plans of such organisations.

There is no point in training for training's sake. It must be relevant to businesses within the sector/region to meet their needs and build on their existing skills levels. It is a tool utilised to identify what training courses or activities should be undertaken to enhance management and staff capacity. For this purpose, the focus should be placed on the common needs identified by the companies that would participate in the network that add value and impact on their competitiveness.

The LNA will demonstrate the learning needs of your companies, gaps in provision in the sector/region and areas in which to develop new training. The LNA needs to address the following questions:

- What are the key business challenges and skills needs in this sector/region?
- What are the competitive issues facing the companies?
- What impact will training have on the productivity and competitiveness of businesses?
- What level and type of training are these companies currently delivering?
- What are the specific training needs in each company?
- What are training budgets of these companies?
- Who are our target participant group/s?
- Which training programmes should be given priority?
- What is the level of demand for certified training within this sector/region?
- What length of courses should we offer – how much time will staff be released for?
- What method/s of delivery shall we use? What new courses will the Network develop?

The LNA would also provide answers to the following for each company:

- What are the key roles/areas in the Company?
- What are the key skills linked with each of these roles/areas?
- What are key skills gaps?
- How many people need to be trained?
- What is the time frame/critical milestone dates?
- Has the company the financial capacity and willingness to invest in training?
- Does the company have a dedicated training manager/function?

4. What are the key steps in conducting an effective LNA for a learning network?

Planning is integral to a successful LNA. Before you start:

- Prepare thoroughly.
- Follow a structured methodology.
- Link business learning and development needs with the objectives of the Network.
- Gain commitment from companies to participate in the LNA.
- Communicate regularly with all those involved.

5. Collecting information for a Learning Needs Analysis

There are various ways to collect information which can be utilized individually or in combination with each other. It is advisable to use more than one tool in order to enhance the validity of the results.

Typical methods that can be conducted virtually include:

- Surveys;
- Focus group meetings;
- Individual interviews;
- Meetings with the Steering Group;
- Discussions with relevant bodies and industry groups; and
- Reviewing national skills policy and specific strategies and policies for the sector/region.

5.1 Surveys

Surveys are beneficial because many people can be polled in a short period of time. Electronic surveys are cost effective and can be easily analysed. However, response rates may be low, as it can be difficult to strike the balance between gleaning sufficient information without making the length of the survey a deterrent.

Things to consider:

- Keep surveys brief. More companies will be willing to complete them and tallying the results will be more manageable.
- Surveys can provide first level data which can then be explored in-depth with focus groups.
- Include a realistic deadline for completion, in order to encourage companies to respond promptly to the survey.
- Request that the person completing the survey on behalf of a company consults others within their organization to ensure that all learning and development needs are identified.
- Inform companies about when they will receive the survey.
- Ensure the survey meets any GDPR requirements and respondents are assured of confidentiality.

See Appendix One for tips on developing an effective survey

5.2 Virtual focus group meetings

Virtual focus groups with small groups allow for small group interaction, allowing the Network to uncover details about their target audience and their requirements. Brainstorming is encouraged as it allows for an exchange of new ideas.

Focus groups need to be carefully planned, facilitated discussions that obtain views from participants to identify areas such as the:

- Challenges faced by businesses within the sector/region.
- Learning and development needs and skills gaps within the businesses.
- Common training and development needs of businesses and the workforce in this sector/region.
- Review of what types of training works best for this target group/sector.
- Any gaps in current training provision and any new training the network could develop.
- Extent of accredited learning and development in demand from companies.
- Review what learning and development needs identified are to be prioritized.

5.3 Virtual individual interviews

These can be an efficient, flexible and rewarding way of gathering information on each company. The most valuable interviews are those held with senior decision-makers who understand key business requirements and challenges faced. A brief review of the company's past performance and future plans may reveal valuable information for training. A comparison should be made of what employees are currently doing and what will be expected of them in future. Follow an agreed interview format with each company to ensure a common approach and for ease of collation and subsequent analysis.

5.4 Research on enterprise and skills policy

By researching the needs of the sector/region, Networks can gain an insight into emerging trends and policies which will have an impact on these companies in future. This research may include reviews of sector-specific reports, national skills and employment plans, and Government policies relevant to the sector or region.

5.5 Virtual meetings with the Steering Group

These meetings will be vital in determining the strategy employed in conducting your LNA, in determining the core objectives of the Network and ensuring that the LNA captures as much information as possible. Steering Group meetings also play a key role in reviewing the results of the LNA and determining what learning and development needs will be prioritised and presented in the training plan.

5.6 Discussions with relevant bodies

It is often beneficial to consult with other industry bodies or agencies which have a high-level view of the industry and future skills needs of your sector/region to identify the key areas that the Network Strategy and Training Plan will prioritise.

6. Setting training objectives and goals

Upon analysis and review of the comprehensive LNA findings, the Network can then develop the network strategy, objectives and training plan.

Assess the needs of the companies and see what training can be achieved and fits within the overall vision of the Network. Ensure that the training proposed in the training plan can be delivered and will attract match funding as the training proposed in the Skillnet Ireland Application Form informs the targets set for the Programme.

Set SMART targets – ensure they are stretching yet realistic:

- S** - specific
- M** - measurable
- A** - achievable
- R** - realistic
- T** - timed (defined deadline)

When developing the training budget, conduct research in the training market to ensure that your budget is also realistic and achievable e.g.

- How much does training design and delivery cost?
- What courses are available in the market?
- Are there costs associated with certification?
- What are the other training costs need to be considered as part of this plan?



7. Preparing a Summary Report of the LNA

It is very important that networks provide a clear summary of the actions taken as part of the LNA to demonstrate that the Network business case and training plan proposed is enterprise-led and companies within the sector/region have had an opportunity to participate in identifying the training plan proposed. This will be requested in the word document of the application.

The application should outline the:

- LNA Strategy;
- Summary of specific methods employed and numbers of companies surveyed/interviewed etc.;
- Quantitative summary of any LNA results; and
- The key findings of the LNA.

APPENDIX 1

How do you create a good survey to generate the results you are looking for?

1. Be concise.

Keep it brief. Brainstorm and write and down all the questions you might want to ask, then review the list and select the most important.

2. Avoid two-part questions.

When creating a question, include only one topic at a time and split the question into two separate questions if necessary.

3. Keep each question as brief as possible.

Long sentences run the risk of losing your respondent's attention and potentially cause confusion.

4. Avoid leading questions.

Construct the question in such a way that respondents will be free to answer honestly.

5. Provide clear, to the point, instructions at the top of the survey.

Don't assume that the people filling out the survey know exactly what you are looking for. Make it clear from the beginning otherwise your results may not be accurate.

6. Do not limit yourself to one type of question throughout the entire survey.

Utilise varying formats to extract the appropriate information. Types of popular survey questions include:

- a) Rate the topic on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least likely and 5 being the most likely.
- b) Tick all that apply.
- c) Choose one of the following.
- d) Open-ended questions.

7. Provide the survey in a way that is most convenient to the companies within your sector/region.

There are several ways to have a virtual survey completed. There are many survey websites available to help you to create surveys easily. One of the primary benefits of using these virtual tools, is that the software automatically tallies results, making data analysis a much more straight-forward exercise.