Maximizing Return on Your Training Investment:
A Reference Guide for Managers

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Introduction

Ask workers in any child welfare or human service agency why training is important and they invariably answer that training is supposed to "improve their skills" or "make them more effective workers." Ask why that matters, and they will be quick to tell you that it matters because it will result in better outcomes; that is, better lives for their children and families. Unfortunately, these same workers will probably also tell you that the majority of the time they spend in training does neither of those things. And they will not be alone.

According to a recent study conducted by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD, 2003), American companies (not including government and the military, which spend even more) spent over $700 million on training during 2000, and over 75% of the U.S. workforce participated in training during that year. Yet, in spite of these huge investments in worker training, there is significant evidence that it produces little real impact on worker job performance. In fact, a number of researchers (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Broad & Newstrom, 1992; Ford & Weisbein, 1997) have come to the conclusion that most of the money currently spent on training is wasted, since as little as 10%-15% of what is learned in training ever finds its way to the job.

At first glance, such woeful outcomes would seem to suggest that training is an ineffective strategy for improving worker performance and that, perhaps, we should abandon our training programs and departments altogether. But even the experts who cite the data do not believe that such a drastic step is warranted. The problem with training isn't that it's inherently ineffective. The problem lies, instead, in the manner in which most training is designed, delivered, followed up, and evaluated. When training programs operate in isolation from the everyday work environment, they produce little impact on worker performance. When they are comprehensive and carefully integrated into an overall agency professional development program, the results can be very different.

There is ample research to demonstrate what is necessary for training to have significant impact on worker performance. Put simply, an effective training program must:
1. Focus instruction on the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that workers need to do their jobs well.

2.   Deliver training in ways that effectively address the training objectives and are sensitive to the learning needs of the participants.
3.   Explicitly focus on the transfer of learned skills to the work environment.
4.   Evaluate the impact of training on worker job performance and desired client outcomes and ensure that evaluation data are used to identify areas where improvement (and perhaps more and better training) is needed.

While the importance of these four areas seems self evident, experience tells us that it is a rare child welfare or human service agency that can claim even a modicum of success in accomplishing them. In our field, scarcity of resources, time, and professional development expertise makes most training an isolated event that, at best, provides an interesting respite from employees' day-to-day work and, at worst, frustrates them by wasting time they could have better spent with their children and families.

Most child welfare and human services agencies will never have the resources necessary to develop a completely integrated professional development program that successfully addresses these issues in a comprehensive way. But there is much these agencies can do to increase the return on the time and money invested in training programs. The goal of this reference guide is to help agency managers and administrators implement training programs that produce the maximum impact on worker performance and the best possible outcomes for children and families.

The guide is organized around the four primary components of a comprehensive system: design, delivery, transfer, and evaluation. For each component, we will describe the essential elements, suggest strategies for implementing them in agency settings, and provide tools for evaluating how well they are being implemented. Chapter One outlines critical issues to consider in designing and delivering training. Chapter Two focuses on strategies that can help ensure that learned skills are transferred to, used, and improved in the actual work setting. Chapter Three discusses evaluation strategies that provide feedback on the ways training programs affect worker performance and, ultimately, child and family outcomes. Chapter Four addresses whether and how to utilize external professional development consultants and training tools.

We hope that agency administrators and managers will use this guide to identify opportunities for immediate improvement in their training and to help them implement a more comprehensive, integrated, competency-based and performance-driven professional development system.

Chapter One

Designing and Delivering
Effective Training Programs

Training professionals cannot deliver effective training without the ongoing involvement and commitment of agency managers. Managers must become more informed about the principles of effective staff training design and delivery so that they can become critical consumers of training, whether it is designed and delivered by professional development staff within their agencies or by external consultants. Managers do not need to become training designers in order to understand the factors that determine training effectiveness and to make better choices about how to use their training resources.

This chapter presents key questions that managers should consider when they are determining the types of training their agency needs and helping to guide the training design process. These questions are adapted from principles that guide professional training developers in designing and delivering effective training. At the conclusion of this chapter is a checklist that managers can use to help them decide whether current or proposed training programs/events are likely to significantly enhance the performance of their staff and improve the outcomes they achieve with their clients.

1. Are the current performance issues we need to address best resolved through training?

Training is only one of many possible ways to improve individual and organizational performance. Before deciding that training is essential to solving performance problems in an organization, managers should begin by conducting an analysis of the factors contributing to the performance gap (i.e., the difference between the agency's standards of practice and employees' actual performance). Such an analysis may reveal that identified performance problems may be best addressed through changes in policies, procedures, and work processes as opposed to, or in addition to, the implementation of expanded staff training programs (Clark & Estes, 2002; Mager & Pipe, 1983). In other words, it makes no sense to attack a performance problem with additional training if staff already have the skills they need, but fail to use them due to other organizational problems. Tool 1-1 provides a brief summary of many of the individual, systemic, and external factors that can and do impact employee performance. If a "performance gap analysis" reveals that staff training is an essential strategy for improving staff or organizational performance, then managers should collaborate with training designers as they develop an optimal training process for the agency and its staff.

2. What are the competencies that we would like our staff to acquire or improve through training?

Training design should begin with identifying the competencies needed by the proposed training participants to perform their job tasks. Defining needed competencies requires that the

objectives of particular jobs and how these contribute to the goals of the organization be clearly defined. Then, tasks that staff must perform to achieve desired outcomes can be identified. Competencies essential to performing the required tasks can be grouped into categories (e.g. assessment, case planning) that can be arranged in sequence according to when they must be learned and the fundamental knowledge and skills they require. Training should be designed based on the identified competencies and staff should be selected to participate in training programs based on individual learning needs assessments related to the competencies required to perform their jobs.

3. Are the learning objectives for the training program or event clear and meaningful?

A set of learning objectives should be developed for each competency that is to be addressed in a training program. These learning objectives should describe specific and measurable outcomes that the training program will enable participants to accomplish. Objectives must offer no opportunity for alternative interpretations, and they should describe the learner's performance goals rather than the trainer's performance objectives.

Meaningful objectives state what learners should be able to do as a result of participating in training, describe the conditions in which they will accomplish these performance goals, and establish criteria for acceptable and competent performance (Mager, 1997). An example of a clear and meaningful learning objective is as follows:

> Participants will be able to "conduct a comprehensive assessment" (**performance goal**) **"**at intake to the agency" (**condition**) "that identifies the client's strengths and needs" (**criterion**).

Learning objectives may be cognitive (emphasizing information recall or problem-solving), affective (attending to attitudes, beliefs, values and interests), or operative (focusing on behaviors and skills).

4. Are fundamental learning principles reflected in the training design?

Training programs for adult learners should take into account the following principles:

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something before learning it.
- Adults' self-concept depends greatly on autonomy or self-direction.
- Adults' prior experiences provide a rich resource for learning.
- Adults typically become ready to learn when they must cope with a changing situation or perform a new task.
- Adults see education as a process of developing increased competency levels to achieve their full potential.
- Adult learners' motivation is internal rather than external.

But all adult learners are not the same, and training programs are most effective when they are designed with these differences in mind. Characteristics of prospective learners should be identified as part of the learning needs assessment process.

Learning styles describe the ways that individuals process and remember new and challenging materials. The four most widely recognized learning/perceptual styles are visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactual. Classroom or group training designs should include a mix of methods that appeal to a variety of learning styles.

Adults also may have preferred learning styles based on the generation with which they identify. Each age group brings its own view of the work situation based on their shared generational values and experiences.   For example, the learning preferences of the four generations that comprise our workforce are:

- The *Silent Generation*, born 1925-1945, prefers straightforward presentation of information and opportunities to build skills privately. They tend to be more "left-brained" and logical, and like training materials organized in summary form.

- *Baby Boomers*, born 1946-1964, prefer interactive training activities (icebreakers, team activities and discussion) but cringe at the very thought of role-plays.

- *Generation X*, born 1965-1982, prefers to sample and learn by doing and responds best to training materials that are less wordy.

- The *Millennial Generation*, born 1983 to the present, enjoys training that incorporates interaction with their colleagues, prefers activities that are entertaining, and likes training materials that are lively and varied.

Adult learners also vary in their emphasis on theory versus practice, their need for factual evidence, their resistance to change, their attention span, their expectations, their level of interest in training, and their self-confidence. Trainers should incorporate a variety of instructional methods that target the most prevalent learning styles of participants while also remaining responsive to individual preferences and capacities.

5. Does the training design incorporate a variety of training methods?

There is not a "one-size fits all approach" that can achieve consistent return on an agency's investment in training.   In selecting training methods, managers and training professionals should take into account organizational readiness, learner preferences, management commitment, organizational environment, and available incentives for applying lessons learned. All these factors will have a significant impact on whether chosen methods will work as intended.

There are four basic ways that people learn:

Providing Information: This is accomplished most often through one-way communication from senders to receivers, who must accept and absorb the information. Written materials available in print or through websites are the best examples of these methods.

Education: This is a "give and take" approach that encourages feedback in which learners explore concepts, constructs and content. Techniques may include guided learning, case studies, games, short lectures, and expert panels.

Training: An instructor helps learners acquire new capabilities through interactive learning such as role-playing, group exercises and discussion.

Learning: This is something that individuals do for themselves, absorbing information and testing what it means, as well as practicing behaviors and internalizing them. On-the-job training accomplished through structured assignments and job rotation are methods consistent with this approach.

It is important to think strategically when choosing training methods to maximize results. For example, studies show that people usually remember only five percent of what they hear, but when listening and reading is combined with audiovisuals, retention increases to 20%.

Another important consideration is the sequence in which topics or subjects are presented in training. Training participants should first be given an overview of the training agenda, which may be constructed based on the sequence in which tasks occur on the job, or which may prioritize skill or knowledge areas essential to completion of critical tasks.

There are numerous resources available that describe training methods, how to develop and use them, and their respective advantages and disadvantages (Cohen, 2002; Cram, 1975; Mager, 1997; Newstrom & Lengnick-Hall, 1991). The focus of these resources runs the gamut from how to use "ice-breakers;" how to construct case studies, role plays, and power point presentations; and even how to welcome and say good-bye to training participants.

6. What resources will be required to develop and deliver the desired training?

Managers should recognize that the resources needed to develop and deliver high quality training programs are almost certainly more than they initially imagine. The amount of time spent, either by internal training staff or external consultants, to develop training programs or events is the primary determinant of the cost of training. The amount of time needed to design classroom training will vary according to:

- The content and length of the training program;
- The learning methods to be utilized;
- The availability and role of subject-matter experts to assist;
- The amount of already-developed learning methods and resources;
- The experience of the instructional designer;
- The role and expectations of curriculum reviewers;
- The format of the instructional guide, training resources, and participant resources;
- The extent to which video and other technology will be used; and
- The availability and role of support staff.

In order to help ensure that training programs are consistently delivered over time, it is essential that a training guide or manual be developed for each training program. A training guide is an invaluable aide in training trainers to deliver the program consistently and effectively and should include at least the following:

- The purpose of the training program (i.e., a description of how it will improve performance);
- A list of the competencies and learning objectives to be addressed;
- A description of how learning will be evaluated;
- A description of the target audience;
- A list of the equipment and materials needed;

- An overview of how the training is organized;
- Copies of all the participant resources (e.g., handouts) and audio/visual resources; and
- A step-by-step description of what the trainers should do throughout the training program.

In spite of the difficulty in estimating development time due to the above variables, Armstrong and Zemke (1997) have estimated that an "average" formal training course requires between 5 and 15 hours of development for one hour of classroom instruction. Arney (1997) suggests an even higher estimate (10 to 20 hours per hour of classroom instruction). Using these figures, it would not be surprising for a one-day (6.5 hour) course to require more than 80 hours of development time.

7. How will we review the training development and design process and assess the results of trainings?

Organizations that invest in designing training programs or events should establish a process to pilot the training curricula as part of assessing whether the training design is likely to achieve desired results. Beyond the practical considerations of readability and "flow" of written materials, it is essential to determine whether the training as designed will achieve its intended purpose. Pilot testing with target populations can answer key questions, including:

- Does the training meet audience expectations and enhance participant abilities?

- Has the training met its intended purposes in accordance with instructional design principles?

- Are the materials technically correct and complete?

David Cram (1975, reprinted in 1990) in his article "How to Design the Ideal Training Course, offers the following twelve characteristics of an ideal training course or program as the basic criteria for assessing training curricula or programs. According to Cram, an ideal training:
- Makes clear the intended end product or skill,
- Lets everyone know how training objectives will be tested,
- Takes advantage of what learners know when they arrive,
- Gives learners many choices through paths of instruction,
- Provides a range of instructional media,
- Allows enough time for any qualified individual to complete the training,
- Provides a training map that informs the learners about their progress,
- Furnishes opportunity to practice skills being taught,
- Gives learners feedback on their practice,
- Tests often in non-threatening ways,
- Solicits feedback from learners to improve the training experience, and
- Is non-competitive.

Tool 1-2, which summarizes the critical areas of training design outlined in this chapter, provides an easy-to-use checklist that managers can use to evaluate the adequacy of agency training programs.

Factors to Consider When Conducting a Performance Gap Analysis

Individual Factors

Knowledge and Skills
Motivation, Willingness, Attitude
Capacity to Do the Work
Work Ethic, Self Esteem
Shared Agency Vision
Professional Values
Perceived Incentives, Rewards, Consequences
Educational Background
Professional Experience
Life Experiences
Biases, Assumptions, and Expectations
Personal Issues (e.g., safety, health, stress,
Family demands)
Job Satisfaction

Systemic Factors

Staff Coverage
Administrative Support
Organizational Structure
Caseload Size, Equity, Complexity,
and Distribution
Personnel/Labor Relations
Recruitment/Selection
Retention/Promotion
Integration of Programs, Services,
and Initiatives
Rules & Procedures
Job Aides, Performance Tools
Rewards, Incentives, Consequences
Performance Data Reports

External Factors

Personal On-the-Job Safety
Local Court Practices & Protocols
Client Services & Resources
Interagency Relationships
Community Attitudes, Expectations,
Supports and Demands

Assessing a Training Design

YES   NO

___   ___ 1. A "performance gap analysis" has been conducted to determine if the identified performance problem can be successfully addressed through training.

___   ___ 2. The competencies the training is designed to address are clearly stated and directly related to the employees' job functions.

___   ___ 3. A set of clear and meaningful learning objectives has been developed for each competency addressed in the training.

___   ___ 4. Learning objectives address cognitive, operative and affective domains.

___   ___ 5. The training design adheres to the principles of adult learning.

___   ___ 6. The training includes a variety of activities and media that match the diverse learning styles of trainees.

___   ___ 7. The training design is flexible so that it can be modified to meet the learning needs of individual participants.

___   ___ 8. A variety of training methods are used (i.e., providing information, education, training, and learning).

___   ___ 9. The training methods used are appropriate for the objectives being taught (e.g., skill objectives such as "conducting an initial interview" are practiced during training, not only discussed).

___   ___10. The agency has devoted sufficient time and resources to developing the training program.

___   ___ 11. A comprehensive training guide exists for each training program.

___   ___ 12. Trainers are systematically trained to teach the curriculum.

___   ___ 13. All training programs are "pilot tested" to evaluate their effectiveness.

___   ___ 14. There is a structured process for reviewing and evaluating all training programs to ensure that they meet their designed purposes.

___   ___ 15. Learners are an integral part of the evaluation process.

Chapter Two

Supporting the Transfer of Learning

Careful attention to curriculum design and delivery, as outlined in the previous chapter, are essential prerequisites to maximizing performance improvement as the result of training. Unfortunately, they are not enough. The research cited in the introduction to this guide suggests that even expertly designed and delivered training programs often fail to produce significant improvements in worker performance. Based on these findings, two of the nation's largest organizations devoted to professional development, the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI), have emphasized that classroom training is only one step (though an extremely important one) in the overall process of improving organizational performance. It is equally important for organizations to take steps to ensure that knowledge and skills learned in training are transferred to the work site. That is, organizations must explicitly address programming that facilitates workers' ability to apply their new skills and knowledge to their everyday work assignments.

Transfer of skills and knowledge to the workplace is a complex process in which managerial support is a vital element. Managers and supervisors are uniquely positioned to shape the work environment for successful transfer of learning (TOL). To do so effectively, however, they must understand and be actively involved in all phases of staff training (i.e., planning, delivery, follow up, and evaluation). There are many things an organization can do to increase the transfer of specific trained skills to the work place and to create an organizational culture that supports TOL and a learning environment. The chapter is designed to: (1) outline a number of strategies for increasing TOL as the result of specific training programs, (2) describe organizational components that facilitate transfer of learning more generally, and (3) provide tools for facilitating both processes.

1. **What can supervisors do to facilitate TOL as the result of specific training programs?**

Because of their central role in both service delivery and staff development, supervisors play a critical role in helping workers transfer skills and knowledge learned during training to the work site. Simply put, supervisors facilitate TOL by: (1) getting trainees ready for training, (2) supporting trainees during training, (3) preparing for trainees return from training, and (4) supporting trainees on the job following their return from training.

- **Getting trainees ready for training**
  - Supervisors must first make sure they are intimately familiar with the training content.
  - Supervisors should discuss the training content with workers.

- Supervisors should convey enthusiasm for the training, emphasize that it is a high priority and an opportunity for professional development, and set a clear expectation for active worker participation.
  - Supervisors and workers should work together to identify specific target skills from the training for transfer to the work site.
  - When possible, supervisors should enroll groups of their workers in the same training programs.

- **Supporting trainees during training**
  - Supervisors should minimize distractions for trainees by ensuring that they will not be called or given assignments that could compete with training participation.
  - If possible, supervisors should check in with workers between sessions or during breaks to see how the training is going and to stimulate thinking about transfer possibilities.
  - If possible, supervisors should attend a portion of the training to demonstrate their belief in its importance and their interest in learning what is being taught.

- **Preparing for trainees' return**
  - Supervisors need to plan, in advance, multiple opportunities for workers to practice and use their new skills and knowledge.
  - Supervisors need to plan multiple opportunities to observe the trainees using their new skills.
  - Supervisors need to plan strategies that will support and reinforce trainees' use of their new skills in the work setting.

- **Supporting trainees after they return from training**
  - Ask trainees to present what they have learned to others.
  - Discuss the importance of the new skills at a staff meeting.
  - Encourage trainees to work in teams to implement the new skills.
  - Assign peer mentors/coaches to assist trainees with applying knowledge and skills acquired through training.
  - Ensure that staff have the tools, authority, and time to use the skills and knowledge acquired through training.
  - Provide group supervision focused on specific learning objectives, and use individual supervisory sessions to reinforce learning transfer.
  - Recognize and reward desired performance resulting from participation in professional development activities.

Transfer of learning from training to the work site does not occur by accident. Supervisors must begin planning well in advance of the training and must follow through systematically both during, and after the training. In addition, training designs should also include explicit reference to the importance of TOL, as well as opportunities for participants to discuss with trainers the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills in their job environments.

2. How can appropriate transfer of learning structures and activities be designed?

The most effective way to ensure that TOL activities are systematically implemented is to develop a TOL Guide for supervisors and staff for each training module. TOL Guides provide supervisors with ideas for effective transfer activities, as well as a structured process to follow so they do not have to "make it up as they go." Such a guide provides a number of specific on-the-job-training (OJT) activities for each of the critical learning objectives from the training, along with instructions and resources for easy implementation. Tool 2.1, *"Proposed Organization of an OJT/TOL Guide,"* provides managers and supervisors with an outline of the content of a TOL Guide.

OJT and TOL activities should not be designed simply to provide staff with "things to do" to increase their general work experience, but rather should be tied to the particular competencies that supervisors wish to support and reinforce. Whether supervisors design the activities themselves or are considering using some designed by others, the value and appropriateness of OJT/TOL activities can be assessed by considering the following criteria:

1. Are the activities designed to reinforce the desired level of the identified competency(ies)?

2. Do they provide the worker with opportunities to perform the kind of behavior and activities defined by the learning objective(s)?

3. Is the worker capable of performing them?

4. Do they consider the individual's preferred style of learning?

5. Do they build on past experiences?

6. Are they interesting and do they permit the learner to obtain satisfaction from carrying out the kind of behaviors and activities required?

7. Are they achievable within the available time?

3. How can the partnership between learners and supervisors be structured to promote successful transfer of learning?

Successful professional development and TOL require a partnership between learners and supervisors that should be formalized through a written agreement developed prior to training. Tool 2-2, *"Planning and Implementing TOL Performance Objectives,"* can serve as a guide for developing such agreements. It provides a place for both learners and their supervisors to plan for TOL (and record those plans) both before and after a worker participates in a professional development program.

The "Worker's Plan" encourages workers to reflect on the need for this training program and its desired impacts, helps them prepare for participation, and establishes their own performance objectives. Workers also are asked to identify potential barriers to learning transfer and the supports and resources that will assist them in overcoming these challenges.

The "Supervisor's Plan" asks supervisors to define their performance objectives for the worker and for themselves. In particular, supervisors are encouraged to clarify how they will help the worker prepare for training, how they will prepare for the worker's return to their job, and how they will know whether their efforts to support TOL have been successful.

4. How can the success of transfer of learning efforts best be assessed?

One way to assess TOL success is to determine whether the objectives established in the partnership agreement between worker and supervisor (see Tool 2-2, described above) have been achieved. Another method is to design a worker survey that gathers information on the impact of the learning on job performance, the barriers/problems faced in trying to apply what was learned, and the supports/resources that were used to assist the learner in applying new knowledge and skills on the job. Tool 2-3, *"Professional Development Activity Follow-Up Survey,"* (adapted from work done by Clark, 1986) is one example of such a survey. A similar survey could be developed for supervisors, based on their role and responsibilities in the TOL process. Whatever survey formats are used, both learners and supervisors should agree to their use and establish a timeline for completion, analysis of results, and responses to the findings.

5. How can changes in organizational climate (i.e., structures and processes) enhance transfer of learning?

Removing obstacles to the successful transfer of learning may require changes in an organization's beliefs and practices. For TOL to be successful, managers and supervisors must embrace three fundamental beliefs about the link between supervisory functions and professional development:

- Professional development activities are vital to prepare staff to perform their job responsibilities.
- Supervision provides the forum for connecting job performance and learning needs.
- Managers and supervisors must guide staff in a needs assessment process that will help them design their professional development plans.

Acting on these beliefs may require changes in managers/supervisors' roles, particularly if they have traditionally seen improving employees' job performance as primarily a training department responsibility, dealt with job performance only during employee evaluations, and/or regarded professional development as solely the employees' responsibility. Managers and supervisors should reflect on their beliefs and, if they find they need to make some changes to ensure successful transfer of learning, they should ask themselves two questions:

a. In what concrete ways would this change my supervisory practice?

b. What resources and support do I need to help implement this change?

Based on answers to these questions, managers/supervisors can act to change their beliefs and practices to better support their employees in applying newly acquired knowledge and skills to enhance their job performance.

Many barriers to transfer of learning can be traced to a non-supportive organizational climate. Managers must identify the environmental factors that support or hinder their organization's capacity to support ongoing professional development, continued learning, and the transfer of learning from training to the work place (Wright, 2003). It is also essential that managers recognize the indicators of how well their organization is supporting TOL.

Tool 2-4, *"Assessing Organizational Culture in Relation to Transfer of Learning,"* provides a checklist that can be used to assess the strengths and needs of an organization in supporting TOL. It includes three types of performance indicators: *organizational, supervisory and worker*. The instrument summarizes, in each of these dimensions, the factors that should be present in an organization that supports continued learning, professional development, and application of learned knowledge and skills on the job.

By using such a checklist, managers can determine which factors their organization does not incorporate or practice, and consider the types of changes that must occur to create a more favorable organizational climate. Although changing organizational characteristics is primarily the responsibility of managers, supervisors and staff also have important roles to play in ensuring that TOL successfully contributes to enhanced organizational and individual job performance.

Proposed Organization of an OJT/TOL Guide

Part One - The Supervisor's Guide

Targeted Learning Objectives from the Training

Description and Purpose of the Activity

Materials Needed

Implementation Instructions
- Pre-OJT/TOL Activities (preparation)
- Directions to the Trainee
- Questions to Ask the Trainee
- Recommended Follow-up
- Summary

Part Two – OJT/TOL Resources and Worksheets

Relevant Classroom Resources from the Training

Worksheets (to assist in implementation)

Part Three – OJT/TOL Log Sheets

Trainee's Log Sheets (for recording implementation efforts)

------WORKER'S TOL/OJT PLAN-----

BEFORE THE TRAINING

1. This training is necessary because I need to learn…

2. This learning will help me do a better job of…

3. I intend to get ready for participating in this program by…

4. From the information I have, I believe reasonable objectives (**Participant-initiated**) for what I intend to apply are…

AFTER THE TRAINING

1. The ideas, information and skills I learned that I will apply to my work are…

2. The outcomes I expect to achieve through the application of what I learned include…

3. Barriers/problems I might face in trying to apply what I learned to my job include…

4. The supports and resources that could help me apply what I learned to my job include…

5. The indicators of performance outcomes that will help me determine if I have been successful in applying what I learned to my job include…

BEFORE THE TRAINING

1. Based on the information I have about this training program, I believe reasonable objectives (**supervisor-initiated <u>for trainee</u>**) for this worker's behavior(s) which I intend to ensure are…

2. I will prepare the worker for participation in this program by…

3. Tasks I will perform to prepare for this worker's return include…

AFTER THE TRAINING

1. My objectives (**supervisor-initiated <u>activities I will perform</u>**) for promoting the application of learning by this worker include…

2. The indicators of performance outcomes that will help me determine if I have been successful in promoting the worker's application of what he/she learned to the job include…

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Professional Development Activity Follow-Up Survey

Program Title: Dates Attended:

A. At the end of this program, to what degree did you feel that you achieved the learning objectives?

    Very little   Moderately   Very Much
    1   2   3   4   5

B. Since completing this professional development program, how often have you used the skills you learned in the program on your job assignments?

    Rarely/Never   Occasionally (monthly)   Frequently (daily)
    1   2   3   4   5

C. As a result of this development program, how much improvement have you experienced in completing your job assignments?

    Little/No Improvement   Some Improvement   Major Improvement

    1   2   3   4   5

If you answered Questions B or C with a 3 or greater, go on to Questions D, E, and F.
If you answered questions B or C with less than a 3, then go on to question G.

D. Describe at least two typical ways that you have used the skills you learned in the professional development program and how your job performance has improved as a result.

E. Provide an example of how the application of what you learned to your job tasks has resulted in a positive outcome for your clients and/or agency.

F. Place a check next to each reason below that might explain why you **have applied** the skills you learned to your job assignments.

___ Before I participated in the professional development activity my supervisor and I discussed how I would apply the learning to my job tasks.
___ My supervisor identified what he/she could do to help me transfer my learning to my job functions.
___ My supervisor discussed with me how my new skills would be used on my job assignments.
___ My supervisor and I developed a written plan for how we could ensure the transfer of learning to my job tasks.
___ My supervisor required me to use the new skills.
___ I received help from others in my work area.
___ I worked in partnerships with others who participated in the same professional development activity.
___ I was given necessary time and/or tools to apply the skills.
___ I participated in the program at the right time to provide me with the skills when I needed them on the job.
___ The skills I learned applied directly to my job functions.
___ Other: Please list other factors that helped you apply these skills to your job assignments.

G. Place a check next to each reason below that could explain why you **have not been successful in applying** skills learned to your job assignments.

___ My supervisor and I did not discuss how I would use the skills before I participated in the program.
___ My supervisor did not identify what he/she could do to help me transfer my learning to my job functions.
___ My supervisor did not require me to use the skills.
___ My supervisor was not aware of what skills I learned.
___ I was not given the time/tools to implement the skills I learned.
___ The skills did not seem to apply to my job functions.
___ My job tasks changed so these skills did not apply.
___ The program was not timed right for my job tasks.
___ Other: Please describe other reasons you did not apply the skills to your job tasks:

Assessing Organizational Culture
in Relation to Transfer of Learning

Agency Performance Indicators

Yes   No

___   ___   1.   The supervisor's role and expectations related to assisting staff
with the transfer of learning is listed on the supervisor's job description.

___   ___   2.   The supervisor's role and expectations related to assisting
staff with the transfer of learning is discussed with personnel during the
job interviews for the supervisory position.

___   ___   3.   The supervisor's role and expectations related to assisting staff
with the transfer of learning is listed on the appropriate performance
appraisal tool and is used to give the supervisor feedback on this task.

___   ___   4.   An agency task force or committee that focuses on supporting the
transfer of learning exists and meets as frequently as expected.

___   ___   5.   Supervisors participate in professional development activities
designed to enhance their capacity to assist staff with the transfer of
learning.

___   ___   6.   The Employee Handbook (or similar tool) contains information on
management's support of the transfer of learning, and the expectations and
tasks for supervisors and workers related to the transfer of learning.

___   ___   7.   All "classroom" professional development activities have
complimentary OJT/TOL activities.

___   ___   8.   All professional development tools (e.g., self-instructional,
distance learning, etc.) have complementary transfer of learning activities.

___   ___   9.   All classroom-training designs include activities and opportunities
for the participants to discuss how they will apply what is being learned to
their jobs

___   ___   10.   Rewards and incentives are provided to learners for using the skills
gained through participation in professional development activities.

___ ___   11.   The performance tools necessary for the transfer of learning are provided.

___ ___   12.   Obstacles to the transfer of learning are identified through discussions with learners and other evaluation efforts.

___ ___   13.   Obstacles to the transfer of learning are removed.

___ ___   14.   Necessary changes in the system that will facilitate the transfer of learning are made.

___ ___   15.   Professional development plans are tailored to each individual based on his or her preferred learning style.

___ ___   16.   Professional development events and activities are not offered as special benefits or limited to a special few.

___ ___   17.   Coaches/mentors are used to assist the learners with skill application.

___ ___   18.   The highest administrative levels sanction and support the role of professional development specialists (trainers) as organizational consultants and performance improvement specialists.

___ ___   19.   Professional development specialists are involved in ongoing strategic planning and are asked for their input on significant organizational issues.

___ ___   20.   The highest administrative levels have realistic expectations of what professional development activities can accomplish, based on an understanding of all the factors that affect one's performance.

___ ___   21.   Management understands that evaluations reflect not only the quality of the professional development program, but also other factors within the organization.

___ ___   22.   The entire organization practices the belief that satisfying client needs is the highest goal of professional development activities and overall performance improvement tools and initiatives.

___ ___   23.   Performance appraisal processes and instruments are designed to identify the knowledge and skills that can be enhanced through participation in professional development activities.

Yes	No		
___	___	24.	Internal organizational reports and reviews are used to identify professional development needs and other interventions designed to improve performance.
___	___	25.	Information from external reviews and formal and informal feedback from clients is used to identify performance discrepancies that can be addressed by professional development activities.

Supervisory Performance Indicators

Yes	No		
___	___	1.	Acts as a role model in providing leadership that promotes an expectation for continued learning, and that supports continued learning and on the job training.
___	___	2.	Guides a learning needs assessment process with staff to determine their ongoing professional development needs and to develop professional development plans.
___	___	3.	Conducts a pre-training conference with learners designed to focus on the three categories of OJT Performance Objectives.
___	___	4.	Ensures that staff have no distractions while they participate in professional development activities.
___	___	5.	Discusses training and application with staff between sessions, if it is a multi-day program.
___	___	6.	Promotes transfer of learning in the unit meetings so staff members, as a group, understand the concept and will support each other's efforts.
___	___	7.	Designs OJT activities that involve pairs or groups of workers, thus using peer relationships to enhance learning.
___	___	8.	Encourages staff to help one another in designing and implementing OJT opportunities.
___	___	9.	Enrolls the entire unit in a training program and lets them develop their own plans for transferring what they learned in training to the job situation and works with them as a group to implement the plans.
___	___	10.	Identifies and spends time with key peer leaders to engage them in realizing the importance of OJT activities.

___ ___ 11. Becomes familiar with the training staff attends so that their learning can be reinforced.

___ ___ 12. Creates and maintains a climate in the unit that encourages on the job learning.

___ ___ 13. Ensures that staff has the tools, authority, and time to use the skills learned during the professional development activity.

___ ___ 14. Recognizes and rewards desired performance attributable to learning gained through participation in professional development activities.

___ ___ 15. Leads the unit in developing team activities to forward on the job learning.

___ ___ 16. Provides group supervision focused on specific learning objectives.

___ ___ 17. Models to the managerial staff a commitment to continued learning in the workplace.

___ ___ 18. Uses supervisory sessions to discuss the importance of transfer of learning.

___ ___ 19. Educates the administrative level of the agency about transfer of learning and the need to support this concept in the agency.

___ ___ 20. Suggests that an agency task force be established to evaluate the degree to which transfer of learning occurs and to identify ways to improve this process.

___ ___ 21. Tries to initiate an agency plan to coordinate OJT activities.

___ ___ 22. Uses mentors/coaches to assist learners with the skill application.

___ ___ 23. Uses agency administrative meetings to identify ways supervisors and managers can work together toward creating and implementing a climate that supports continued learning in the workplace.

Worker Performance Indicators

Yes   No

___   ___   1.   Develops OJT Performance Objectives prior to participating in
professional development activities.

___   ___   2.   Identifies potential barriers/problems that might impede the
application of learned skills.

___   ___   3.   Identifies supports and resources that could assist in applying what
was learned to the job tasks.

___   ___   4.   Identifies indicators of performance that will help determine if
there has been successful application of learning in the job environment.

___   ___   5.   Applies learning successfully to the job.

___   ___   6.   Completes all tasks (e.g., assignments with peers, presentation on
what was learned given to unit) identified in the pre-training transfer of
learning plan.

Chapter Three

Evaluating Professional Development Programs

Professional development personnel have long been interested in measuring the value of their work to individual employees and the organizations of which they are a part. Most trainers have developed and utilized evaluation instruments that permit tracking learners' satisfaction with training events and measuring how much they learned as a result of their participation in training. Performance improvement specialists have advocated for an evaluation process that can also measure the extent to which individuals apply what was learned in the work setting, as well as document resulting impacts on organizational performance. Unfortunately, these types of evaluation are rare. For the most part, the worth and utility of training programs continues to be measured only by the degree of participant satisfaction and how much participants learned.

As agencies face the challenge of having to accomplish and produce more with shrinking resources, managers need to know that training makes a measurable difference in organizational performance in order to justify investing in professional development. Simply using "happy face/smiley sheets" and cognitive tests at the conclusion of training programs does not provide evidence that employees will transfer what they have learned to the workplace, and does not demonstrate that organizational performance will improve as a result. Without such evidence, professional development programs may be among the first targets for budget reductions in times of fiscal crisis or agency downsizing.

Donald Kirkpatrick (1959, 1994) has proposed a four-level model for evaluating training that has become the "gold standard" in the field. According to Kirkpatrick, a training program is effective when the trainees are satisfied (Level 1); they learn what they were intended to learn (Level 2); they behave differently (i.e., more effectively) on the job (Level 3); and their organization benefits from their use of what they learned (Level 4). Although more than four decades have passed since Kirkpatrick first framed these levels of training evaluation, most evaluations are still conducted only at Levels 1 and 2. The American Society for Training and Development's (ASTD) 2003 State of the Industry Report summarized the results of a survey of 276 US organizations regarding their evaluation of training programs at each of the four levels. According to the report, 75% used participants' reactions to evaluate their training programs (Level 1) and 41% reported that they evaluate participants' learning (Level 2). Only 21% measure behavior change due to the training (Level 3), and just 11% evaluate whether training positively affects their business results (Level 4).

Bowsher (*Training,* December, 1998) lists possible reasons why most organizations have not attempted to evaluate their training programs at Levels 3 or 4. These include a lack of managerial knowledge of or interest in these levels of evaluation, the pace of change in business, the sheer number of factors that would have to be measured and analyzed, and the significant resources required to evaluate at Levels 3 or 4. Other surveys confirm that managers and trainers

are deterred from assessing the impact of training on organizational performance (Level 4) by the enormous complexity of the task.

Without comprehensive evaluation, however, the likelihood is that training will have little real impact on the organization and its ability to improve performance over time. Harrell (2001) asserts that training is incomplete without an evaluation, for evaluation is what gives training meaning. Managers and supervisors should become familiar with all four levels of training evaluation, and learn how the information gathered from each type of evaluation will not only enable trainers to improve their professional development programs, but also provide managers with feedback that can help them improve transfer of learning (TOL), enhance their employees' and organization's performance, and make greater progress toward achieving organizational goals. To increase an organization's capability to achieve the desired return on its investment in training, managers must be able to answer the following five key questions.

1. What is the role of evaluation in a performance improvement system?

Evaluation should be seen as a valuable force that drives your organizational performance improvement system, <u>not</u> as something to fear, avoid, or minimize. Data obtained from effective evaluation processes can provide vital feedback regarding a training program's objectives/content, materials, instructional methodologies, facilitator performance, program length, learning environment, logistics, and transfer of learning expectations, thus providing the basis for program improvement. With a well-conceived evaluation plan, evaluators can provide quantitative and qualitative data regarding the use of learning on the job and the impacts that the learners' changed behaviors have on achieving organizational goals.

Spitzer (*June, 1999)* offers six basic principles that can help managers and trainers understand and make a commitment to evaluation "as a powerful means to improve our training" and its impacts:

- *Evaluation begins at the beginning.*
Formulating an evaluation and measurement plan should be an integral part of the training design process. Instructional objectives describe the intended outcomes of training, and trainers should determine early on how they will assess whether these objectives have been achieved. Managers should also specify what levels of training evaluation they expect and will support. An evaluation design should be a road map to achieving training and organizational goals, not just a last-minute add-on to an already-completed training program.

- *Evaluate based on what your organization values.*
Training programs should be evaluated not only in terms of training values (e.g., receiving glowing reviews on the happiness sheets), but also with regard to the mission and values of the larger organization. Training should help people overcome the challenges they face on the job and enable them to achieve concrete results that are important to them, their clients, and to their organization.

- ***"Impact" is not synonymous with the financial benefits of training.***
When documenting the impacts of training on organizational results or outcomes (Level 4 evaluation), managers should look beyond the "bottom-line" financial figure (increase in revenue or cost savings matched against the total cost of training) to examine other indicators of organizational effectiveness. Such indicators could include an increase in staff or caregiver retention, greater efficiency in service delivery, and improved outcomes for children and families (e.g., enhanced safety and well-being).

- ***You need evidence, not proof.***
Rather than assuming that training must be proven to have an impact on organizational results, managers should understand that it is more reasonable to adopt a "preponderance of evidence" criterion in assessing training impacts. Managers should expect that evaluators will be able to present evidence that a training program is more likely than not to produce specified effects. It is also important for managers and trainers to remember that it is unlikely that training, in and of itself, will be the sole cause or source of individual or organizational performance improvement. There is a big difference between "contributing to" and "causing" results, and it should be sufficient to demonstrate that training has made an important contribution to an organization's effectiveness.

- ***Use 'causal chains' to trace training's impact.***
Trainers and managers should use "causal chains" to map the relationship between training and its organizational impacts. For example, training for child welfare workers on conducting family assessments with prospective foster parents could be linked to an increase in foster parent retention and recruitment using a causal chain. Given that training improves workers' performance during the mutual family assessment process, this can help foster parents more clearly identify their strengths and needs, which can lead them to make more informed decisions about their willingness and ability to foster. Trained workers are also more likely to effectively convey their respect and appreciation of potential foster parents and help to empower them as team members, which will enhance the foster parent's confidence and commitment even during the most challenging times. This in turn should lead to an increased retention of foster parents. Further, the foster parents who have these positive experiences will be more likely to tell other friends or relatives about their "job satisfaction," which may lead to a larger number of families being interested in becoming foster or adoptive parents, resulting in a positive impact on recruitment. All these links in the causal chain can be considered "interim indicators" of training impact, and can be measured and analyzed as part of the overall Level 4 evaluation design.

- ***Partner up.***
Managers and supervisors must work in partnership with professional development staff to define causal chains and identify performance measures that are consistent with organizational values. Professional development staff must remain committed to helping managers solve their highest priority organizational problems, and these partners should share the credit for training successes with training participants.

2. What should be measured?

The purpose of the training evaluation will dictate the questions to be answered, and the factors that must be assessed or measured. The four-level model of training program evaluation suggests that there are four basic questions to be addressed.

Level 1: *Reaction*   Did participants react favorably to the training?

Level 2: Learning   Did participants learn the skills and knowledge presented in the training?

Level 3: Behavior   How well are participants applying what they learned in the training program to the job?

Level 4: Results   What is the impact of the training program on the organization's achievement of its desired outcomes ("business results")?

At each of these levels, the evaluation design should identify **what** is being measured, **who** should be involved in providing the data; **when** each step in the evaluation process will occur; and **how** the basic concepts (reaction, learning, behavior and results) will be measured. Tool 3.1, "*A Glance a Measuring Training Results,*" provides a brief summary of how these issues can be addressed.

Level 1

Level 1 evaluations help ensure that training programs are efficient and effective by gathering specific information to assist professional development personnel in making necessary revisions and improvements in the training programs. Level 1 data are most often obtained by having participants complete a questionnaire at the end of the training program. These are sometimes referred to as "happiness" or "smile sheets." Participants' reactions to all aspects of training programs can be evaluated in this way, including program objectives and content; relevance and applicability; facilitator/trainer effectiveness; quality of written materials; training methods; program length; the learning environment; and training logistics. The most useful Level 1 evaluations collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative information from training participants (Lee & Pershing, 1999). Quantitative data, collected through using close-ended or forced-choice questions, can be reported numerically (e.g. "75% of participants strongly agreed that the content of the training program was relevant"). Qualitative information, collected through open-ended written questions, structured interviews or focus groups, highlights both common themes and unique responses to training programs (e.g., "many workers said that the training gave them good ideas about how to take what they learned back to the workplace, but a few workers remarked that by the end of the training they didn't have a clue as to how to apply what they had learned").

Tool 3-2, "*Dimensions for Level 1 Evaluations,*" summarizes the dimensions of training programs that can be assessed and offers some sample questions for each dimension. Managers may wish to have some input into the selection of dimensions that will be included in questionnaires, but no matter which dimensions are selected, the questions used to gather

information should be written and formatted to provide evaluators with the maximum amount of information while requiring a minimum amount of time/effort for participants to complete. There are many approaches for improving the response rate for questionnaires and surveys, and keeping them concise and focused is one of the most important strategies (Phillips & Phillips, 2004).

Structured interviews and focus groups can be used in Level 1, 2 and 3 evaluation designs to gather information about training participants' level of satisfaction, degree of learning, and application of knowledge and skills back on the job. In interviews and focus groups, evaluators ask open-ended questions that yield qualitative information. Interviews can be conducted by phone or in person, while focus groups are facilitated discussions focused on selected topic areas or themes. There are many resources available to assist in designing effective interviews and focus groups (American Public Human Services Association, 2003; Bader & Rossi, 1998; Morgan, 1998). As with other evaluation techniques, planning for their use should begin as the training program is being designed, and the questions they incorporate should be compatible with the program's learning objectives.

Level 2

Training programs achieve results when participants apply what they have learned during training to their jobs and improve organizational performance as a result. Clearly, though, these types of improvement are strongly influenced by the degree of learning (Level 2) that occurs during training. If the knowledge and skills are not learned during training, workers will have difficulty applying them in the work setting. Given this connection, it is essential that organizations measure the type and amount of learning that can be attributed to the training programs in which it invests its resources.

Level 2 evaluations are designed primarily to determine if training participants acquired the knowledge and skills the training program was intended to teach them. Stated learning objectives serve as the basis for developing both the evaluation process and tools. Depending on the training program's objectives this level of evaluation may involve administering written tests; assessing participants' demonstrated knowledge and skills before, during, and after the program; role plays and simulations; and/or interviewing learners after the training program.

Testing can serve a number of interrelated purposes:
- Providing participants with affirmation of what they have learned.
- Offering learners opportunities to apply their knowledge to practical problems.
- Giving trainers feedback on whether participants learned what they intended to teach.
- Assessing whether the training program design and materials were effective.
- Confirming that an organization received value (participants' learning) for its investment.
- Certifying employees' competence in specific knowledge or skills.

To make the best use of written tests, it is important that they be constructed during the training design process by staff or consultants with expertise in test development and validation. There are four types of questions that are most commonly used (fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, true/false and matching), and since they each have their strengths and limitations, test designers

may want to use a combination of question types. Test designers should also consider whether they want to use self-report questions that ask participants to rate their knowledge and skills in addition to objective items that directly test competencies. Evaluators may also be interested in assessing whether participants' expressed values and attitudes change as a result of training.

Although some organizations test participants only at the conclusion of training, it is best to test both before and after training to determine what and how much participants have learned, and to be able to attribute observed changes to the training. Depending on the learning objectives, tests should be constructed to assess changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and/or participants' perception of their competencies.

Another way to assess the participants' acquisition of knowledge and, especially, skills is for trainers to observe participants' application of the target skills during the training program. If observation is to be used to evaluate participants' learning during training, it should be woven into the training design from the outset. Using previously prepared observation checklists and rating scales, trainer(s) can observe the participants' application of knowledge and skills during structured activities such as role plays, simulations, and case vignettes. These evaluative activities can be sequenced throughout the program or conducted at the conclusion of the training. Activities observed should be designed to assess learning in relation to specific instructional objectives, and any feedback given to the participants should be related to the competencies the training is intended to enhance. Tool 3-3, *"A Checklist to Guide the Use of Observation as an Evaluation Method,"* provides guidance in incorporating observation into Level 2 evaluation designs. Because the observation process may affect the behavior of persons being observed, it should always be used in tandem with other evaluation methods (e.g., testing, interviewing, focus groups). On the positive side, because observation and other performance measurement techniques tend to encourage learners to use their new knowledge and skills, evaluation can enhance the probability of learning transfer.

Level 3

At this evaluation level, the goal is to determine whether and to what extent trainees are using their newly acquired knowledge and skills in their day-to-day work (transfer of learning or TOL). Chapter 2 describes many techniques and tools that can be used to assess the degree of learning transfer and examine the organizational factors that may be supporting or impeding it. Level 3 evaluation results should be considered in the context of Level 2 findings regarding the degree to which participants have learned new skills and acquired new knowledge that can be applied in the workplace.   Curriculum developers and trainers can help to design TOL evaluation tools and strategies, but the primary responsibility for conducting Level 3 evaluations rests with the managers and supervisors of trainees.

A Level 3 evaluation should not be conducted until sufficient time has passed to allow trainees time to demonstrate their learning on the job. Kirkpatrick (1959) recommends that TOL evaluators wait three to six months after the conclusion of training, depending on the type of training that was delivered. Because trainees change behavior at different rates, TOL evaluation should be repeated three to six months after the initial evaluation.

Methods typically used to collect information relevant to TOL are questionnaires, attitude surveys, competency tests, interviews, focus groups, observations, and performance reviews. Harrell (2001) offers other innovative options that can enrich a TOL evaluation:

- Pre-/Post-training Video Evaluation
  Participants make videos of themselves performing key tasks (e.g., conducting an interview with a client) related to the training content before and after the training program, and view them with an evaluator to determine whether participants' behavior changed as a result of the training.

- Follow-up Assignments
  On a post-training date specified while they are in training, participants receive an assignment to reinforce their acquired skills and provide opportunities to measure the extent to which participants are applying them in their work situation. This can be part of a TOL/OJT plan developed by manager/supervisors for their employees who have participated in training.

- Unobtrusive Monitoring
  Archival information related to participants' performance, and obtained from periods before and after training, is compared to assess their use of knowledge and skills gained from the training program. Written reports, case plans, or other documentation of participants' work or performance, such as formal appraisals, can all be examined to determine the extent to which participants apply what they learned to specific job tasks.

Level 4

Level 4 evaluations are conducted to determine if staff training has enhanced an organization's capacity to achieve its goals. Managers and supervisors clearly hope that their staff will apply the skills and knowledge learned through training to their day-to-day tasks. However, if this transfer of learning cannot be shown to result in improved organizational effectiveness, managers may question the value of training.

Managers of child welfare agencies would like to know whether training has increased the organization's capacity to achieve safety, well-being, and permanency for the children and families it serves. Other potential training impacts that managers might like to explore include a greater ability to comply with standards set by funding or regulatory agencies, increased efficiency, and reduced staff turnover.

It is important to recognize that factors other than training always contribute to observed impacts on organizational performance. For example, to reduce staff turnover, an organization may choose to do three things simultaneously: raise staff salaries; provide a monthly staff recognition event; and train supervisors and managers in coaching/mentoring their workers to manage the stress of work-related traumatic events. If staff turnover lessens following these actions, how much of the change can be attributed each of the three? Were there other gradually evolving factors that also contributed to the reduction in staff turnover (e.g., a downward trend in the

number of new cases, decreases in unemployment throughout the region, or changes in case management policies or practices due to new leadership)?

Organizational factors may also impede workers' application of learned knowledge or skills, thereby attenuating or even preventing positive organizational results from training. Evaluators must work with managers to understand and assess all the internal and external changes an organization is experiencing, as well as the barriers and supports affecting TOL, in order to trace the specific contribution of training to the organization's accomplishments.

Cost-benefit analysis is an important part of Level 4 training evaluations. A comprehensive cost-benefit study entails tracking all the costs (management and employee time, materials, equipment, facilities, consulting fees, and travel and other employee expenses) for each training program during a specified period of time, and also measuring the organizational benefits achieved following this period. Costs of training should be assessed for the entire process, from design through delivery to evaluation. Although some of the organizational and individual benefits from training programs can be translated into dollars saved or costs avoided, many other potential benefits are not quantifiable (e.g., changes in staff attitudes or morale, and improvements in quality of life for their clients). Managers should consider both the tangible and intangible benefits resulting from training in determining whether they are getting the best possible value for their professional development dollars. Cost-benefit analysis can also help agency managers assess whether it is more beneficial to use internal professional development staff to design and deliver training programs, or to purchase training curricula and/or trainer/facilitators' services from an external vendor (see Chapter 4 for other factors that affect this decision).

3. What are the challenges and benefits of conducting Level 3 and 4 evaluations?

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, most organizations are more likely to conduct Level 1 and 2 evaluations of their training programs than they are to invest in Level 3 and 4 evaluations. Harrell (2001) believes that many view evaluation as a problem, not a solution, and as an end rather than as a means to an end. Some trainers may fear that poor evaluation results will result in the curtailment or termination of their programs, while trainees may view testing and observation of their knowledge and behavior as in indication of supervisors' mistrust, rather than as a means of supporting their performance improvement efforts. Managers may be reluctant to invest the resources, particularly their time, necessary to conduct meaningful Level 3 and 4 training program evaluations.

Rigorous Level 3 and 4 evaluations are time-consuming and expensive (Gerber, 1995). Measuring changes in on-the-job behavior and determining if training has an impact on the organization's "bottom line" can be very challenging. Both types of evaluations can consume a significant portion of an organization's professional development budget, and if managers are not persuaded that they will learn something of value from these evaluations, they are reluctant to increase the training budget to encompass these levels of evaluation.

One reason that many believe evaluations at Levels 3 and 4 are so challenging, time-consuming and expensive is because ". . . they're coming in after the fact to fish for results. We don't know

what we're doing, so now let's find out if anything happened" (Gordon, 1991). Evaluation is much more efficient and effective if it is incorporated into the training design process from the beginning. If a causal link between knowledge/skill deficiencies and specific business outcomes is established as the training program and evaluation are developed, then the evaluation process is much more likely to yield information useful to agency managers and supervisors, as well as trainers (Robinson & Robinson, 1989). Clearly, an organization that systematically measures its critical outcomes on an ongoing basis will have a significant head start in developing Level 4 evaluations of its training program.

According to Brinkerhoff and Dressler (2002), Level 3 and 4 evaluations are not just evaluating training, but also "the larger performance improvement process in which training plays only a small role." As discussed earlier, training can rarely be credited with being the sole cause of performance improvement, at either the individual or organizational level. Managers and supervisors control or influence many of the policies, practices and organizational culture factors that affect transfer of learning and organizational performance, and these factors must be taken into account when evaluating the impacts of training and working to improve its effectiveness.

Brinkerhoff and Dressler (2002) recommend that performance development system evaluations (at Levels 3 and 4) focus on three questions:
1. How well is our organization using learning to drive performance improvement?
2. How can we maintain and strengthen those things our organization is doing to facilitate performance improvement from learning?
3. How can we remedy those things our organization is doing, or not doing, that impede performance improvement?

To successfully conduct Level 3 and 4 evaluations that can answer these questions, organizations must either have staff or hire external consultants that possess the expertise necessary to design the evaluation, assist in its implementation, and analyze the data collected in collaboration with trainers and managers. Also, it is helpful if organizations either have ongoing assessment and record-keeping systems that can support Level 3 and 4 evaluations, or are willing to invest in developing and maintaining such systems.

There are many benefits of conducting Level 3 and level 4 evaluations, a number of which have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Knowledge gained through these types of evaluations can help strengthen training programs and enhance their credibility with both managers and trainees. Evaluation can also help to identify individual, systemic and external factors supporting or impeding transfer of learning that can lead to positive organizational results. And, when conducted respectfully and responsibly, Level 2, 3 and 4 evaluation activities such as testing, interviews, focus group discussions and observation can encourage and support trainees at all organizational levels in applying what they have learned in training and, ultimately, in improving outcomes for the children and families served.

4. How can organizations determine when it is appropriate to conduct each of the four levels of evaluations of training programs?

Given that organizations have limited resources, it is essential that managers, supervisors, trainers and evaluators work together to determine which training programs will be evaluated at which levels, and their decisions should be incorporated into the organization's strategic plan. These choices should always be made prior to designing and delivering training programs.

Because of the wide variety of easy-to-use Level 1 evaluation methods, *every training program should assess trainees' reaction to and perceptions of training*. If managers, supervisors and/or trainers feel that it is important to ascertain whether participants have learned what the training was designed to teach and/or if the training program is part of a certification process, then Level 2 evaluations should also be conducted.

Several factors should be considered by managers, evaluators and trainers in determining whether to conduct more complex and resource-intensive Level 3 and level 4 evaluations. Training programs that should be evaluated at Level 3 (transfer of learning) and/or Level 4 (organizational impacts) include those that:
- Have impacts on learners that can be more readily measured (e.g., tracking acquisition and transfer of technical skills is easier than discerning whether changes in trainees' attitudes resulting from training have positively affected their work performance),
- Are more costly to design and deliver (including staff time devoted to training participation), or
- Are highly valued by managers because of clear implications for continued funding or achievement of organizational priorities.

5. What are the optimal ways to evaluate trainer/facilitator performance?

Since competent trainers are more likely to promote learning, which in turn motivates behavior change on the job that can lead to enhanced organizational performance, managers must ascertain whether the trainers they are relying on meet accepted standards of performance in their jobs. Most Level 1 evaluations ask for participants' reactions to the trainers, but the performance of trainer/facilitators that are part of an agency's staff should also be periodically assessed by trained observers using protocols designed specifically for that purpose. Such protocols should address at least the following major areas:
- Effectively addresses adult learning issues.
- Uses a range of effective teaching methodologies.
- Follows the training guide.
- Effectively organizes the environment and uses a range of teaching aids.
- Actively encourages participation, questions, and diverse opinions.
- Effectively manages group dynamics.
- Communicates effectively in written, verbal, and non-verbal modalities.

Specific tools conducting such evaluations have been developed by both the National Staff Development and Training Association (2001) and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services for their PRIDE trainers (2003). Assessment of trainer/facilitators employed by external vendors under contract to any agency is discussed in Chapter 4 of this report.

A Glance at Measuring Training Results

	What is Being Measured?	Who is Involved?	When Will it Occur?	How Will it be Measured?
Level 1	**Reaction:** Did participants like it, find it helpful?	Participants	Usually at the end of the program	"Smile sheet," survey, focus group
Level 2	**Learning:** What knowledge and skills did participants acquire?	Participants, trainer, other observers (Managers/ Supervisors)	Before, during, and after training program	Pre-test/post-test, interview, observation of skills application via role play, simulation, case study
Level 3	**Behavior:** How are trainees performing differently?	Participants, managers/ supervisors, peers, control/ comparison groups	3-6 months after program completion	Survey, action plan, interview, focus group, observation, performance review
Level 4	**Results:** What is the impact of the program on the agency's "business?"	Participants, managers/ supervisors, evaluators	After completion of the level 3 follow-up	Tracking changes in key indicators of agency performance, cost/benefit analysis

Dimensions of Level 1 Evaluations

Dimension	Purpose	Sample Questions
Program Objectives/Content	To evaluate how well the program's performance objectives were met & the participants' reaction to the structure, level and timeliness of the content	Did the program content/methodologies meet the stated objectives? Were the topics effectively sequenced?
Materials	To determine the effectiveness, efficiency, and usefulness of the participant resources	Were the participant resources consistent with the training objectives? Was the content and format of the resources easy to understand?
Delivery Methodologies	To assess the appropriateness & effectiveness of the delivery methods, including A/V technologies	Were the visual aids helpful? Were the presentation technologies used effective?
Trainer/Facilitator	To rate the preparation, ability, and effectiveness of the trainer	Did the trainer present content clearly? Was the trainer responsive to participants' questions/concerns?
Instructional Activities	To evaluate the appropriateness and helpfulness of the classroom & and out-of-class activities	Were the activities relevant to the learning objectives? Did the activities contribute to the development of your competencies?
Program Time/Length	To assess the sufficiency of the length of the sessions/entire program	Was there enough time to assimilate the course content? Was the length of the program appropriate to meet the course objectives?
Learning Environment	To evaluate the adequacy of the physical environment, including the classroom, dining, lodging, & leisure facilities	Were the environmental conditions (e.g., comfort, air temperature, level of noise, visibility) conducive to learning? Was there enough workspace for learning activities?

Transfer of Learning	To evaluate the participants' plans/expectations & anticipated barriers re TOL	What supports do you need to transfer your learning to the job? What factors may inhibit you from applying what you learned?
Logistics/Administration	To evaluate the efficiency & effectiveness of the scheduling, registration, and other logistical and administrative issues	Was the registration process administered efficiently? Were you provided with sufficient information re directions to the site?
*Co-training	To assess how well the trainers co-facilitated the learning process	Did the trainers demonstrate an effective co-training approach to facilitating your learning?
Overall Evaluation	To determine overall participant satisfaction about the program	Did the program meet your intended needs? Would you recommend this program to others?
Suggestions for Improving the Program	To acquire information on how to improve similar or future training programs	What would you suggest to improve the program?

* Used when two or more people facilitate the training.

A Checklist to Guide the Use of Observation as an Evaluation Method

1. _____ The decision to use observation as an evaluation method is supported by the organization's management team.

2. _____ It has been determined that observation will be used as the sole method of evaluating learning, or in conjunction with other methods such as testing, self-reporting, etc.

3. _____ All members of the performance improvement system (curriculum developers, trainers, evaluation personnel, supervisors, professional development unit manager, and QA/QI) have been informed about the use of observation as an evaluation method.

4. _____ A decision has been made regarding when the observation will occur (e.g., within the training at designated times, as part of the conclusion of the program, or some time later back on the job).

5. _____ A plan (tasks, timeframes, etc.) has been developed for how the curriculum developers, trainers, and evaluation personnel will accomplish the development and implementation of this evaluation method.

6. _____ A decision has been made regarding how the data collected will be used (e.g., as a formative and/or summative evaluation, as a part of the person's professional development plan, as a component of job certification, as a tool to enhance transfer of learning, etc.).

7. _____ Potential training program participants are informed, prior to their enrollment in the training program, that observation will be used to evaluate their learning.

8. _____ The observation evaluation instrument has been developed.

9. _____ The observers (e.g., trainers, supervisors, or others) have been prepared to use the evaluation instrument and provide feedback about their observations.

10. _____ The observation evaluation instrument has been field tested to address rater reliability issues.

11. _____ A plan has been developed for assessing the use of observation as part of the training program, or as a follow-up back on the job.

Chapter Four

Using External Professional Development Consultants and Professional Development Tools

There is no shortage of individuals, not-for-profit organizations, universities, and corporations available to assist organizations in achieving their goals through the provision of staff training programs and through comprehensive evaluations of the impacts of these programs. They offer a continuum of products and services, and their titles include trainer, consultant, professional development specialist, performance improvement technologist, and evaluator. They may be employed by another public agency, a training academy, a university, a governmental branch, or by a private company that specializes in professional development and performance improvement. Some training providers are self-employed, and many of these individuals have retired following years of work as staff members in human service agencies. National resource centers and corporate foundations also provide training assistance to specific program areas of human services organizations.

These external vendors offer a variety of products and services, including:
- Training programs or curricula that they have developed,
- Assistance in developing training programs tailored to meet particular professional development needs,
- Training of trainers (TOT) for the professional development staff of one or more agencies,
- On-site training for an organization's staff in a particular job of functional area, or
- Training programs available to staff from a number of organizations.

Organizations may choose to explore hiring external vendors as part of their overall professional development strategy, or they may decide to hire vendors to deal with organizational performance problems as they arise. Regardless of the motivation for considering engaging external vendors to provide training materials, curricula, training delivery and/or training evaluation services, agency managers, trainers and evaluators must consider several factors to ensure the best return on their investment in external providers. Managers and internal professional development staff should consider the following questions as part of their decision-making regarding external training and evaluation vendors.

1. How can organizations determine if external vendors are needed to design and/or deliver training programs?

Organizations committed to creating and sustaining a learning environment for their workers usually employ a full-service professional development department able to meet the challenges

of an ever-changing human services delivery system. Some agencies with limited resources are not able to maintain their own full-service professional development unit, and so must rely on external vendors to meet most of their training needs. In times of crisis or rapid change, human services agencies may be called upon to respond with an array of performance improvement tools, including new training programs and approaches. This may in turn require retaining the services of external providers with specific subject matter expertise and/or the capacity to develop and deliver training on an accelerated schedule. Tool 4-1, *"Determining if External Vendors are Necessary to Design and/or Deliver Training Programs,"* provides a checklist of factors that should be considered in making this decision.

2. How can organizations determine if a proposed training program and/or curriculum, as described by a vendor, will meet organizational needs?

Although descriptions of the professional development services and products offered by vendors have improved over the past few years, managers and their training staff must "read between the lines," conduct follow-up conversations, and research external vendors' "track records" prior to purchasing their services. Tool 4-2, *"Analysis of Vendors' Training Descriptions,"* can help organizations determine if proposed training programs or curricula are likely to meet their needs. If any of the questions on this checklist cannot be answered affirmatively, managers or their training staff should contact the vendor to further explore these issues.

3. What criteria should be considered in selecting vendors based on their subject matter knowledge?

Vendors vary in the degree of subject matter knowledge they bring to training program development. Some are instructional design experts with little knowledge of the subject area, who rely on subject matter experts to supply the content of the program or curriculum. Others are subject matter experts who retain curriculum or program designers to format the content they provide. Conkright (1993) describes external training providers along the following continuum:

- The "*we don't know nuttin"* vendors are design and production specialists who glean training content from subject matter experts. They vary in how well and quickly they can learn the subject, integrate it with learning methodologies, and produce the desired program.

- The "*we know sumthin' about your subject area or industry"* vendors have developed a program for organizations similar to yours or have designed a program related to the one your organization is requesting. They <u>may</u> have learned something from these experiences that can be applied in developing the program your organization needs. For example, they may have developed a generic supervisory training program designed to enhance supervisors' ability to assist staff with the transfer of learning.
- The "*we know the specific topic*" vendors bring subject matter expertise to the development of the training program, but will still need your input on how their expertise should be tailored to meet the learning needs of your organization's workforce. For

example, though a vendor may have expertise in the treatment of persons who are chemically dependent, the vendor will need to work with your organization in order to apply this knowledge to developing a training program specific to your clients' needs (e.g., children who were exposed to alcohol or other drugs prior to birth, or who have parents in the recovery process).

- The "*we are the experts in the field*" vendors bring subject matter expertise as well as experience delivering training programs to organizations similar to yours.   Although this eliminates the cost of having to supply your own subject matter experts, it is important that these vendors be willing to listen to your input and avoid pushing preconceived solutions that may not fit with your organization's needs and priorities.

Vendor's subject matter and training program design expertise affect the time and resources required to produce, deliver and evaluate an appropriate training program. The ideal vendor is one that possesses knowledge of content and training methods, and can integrate past experience in designing training for similar organizations with the culture, policies, and processes of your organization.

4. What factors should be considered in selecting vendors based on their ability and willingness to customize their products and services to meet an organization's training needs?

When considering the purchase of a training program or curriculum, it is essential to consider the degree to which the vendor is willing and able to customize the program for your organization. Conkright (1993) offers another helpful continuum:

- The "*everything's new*" vendors will design an original program or curriculum to meet the specific needs of an organization's workforce.

- The "*here's a need: what do we already have that we can use?*" vendors work with an organization to 'borrow' whatever they can from existing programs, thereby quickening the development process. The resulting program is tailored to meet the organization's need, probably at a lower cost than a program that is entirely customized.

- The "*here's a solution: how much of what we have fits?*" vendors offer an approach that begins with an existing product and determines how much of it can be used to meet an organization's specific need. It may be quicker and less expensive than a customized training design, but the product may not adequately meet specific organizational needs.

- The "*we don't build anything*" vendors offer a packaged training program or curriculum with a personalized presentation of the material.

Although customized training materials are most likely to meet an organization's needs, smaller organizations may not be able to afford to purchase the design services necessary to produce them. Also, vendors that are protective of their intellectual property are generally reluctant to

make even minor modifications. When purchasing external training programs and services, an organization should choose the approach that best meets its needs within budget and time constraints, and then be sure to hire a vendor with the experience and qualifications that equip them to do the best job of implementing the organization's chosen approach.

5. What criteria and information should be used to assess the likely impacts of vendors' training products and services?

Vendors should receive the same scrutiny as prospective employees. Both are marketing their ability and willingness to help an organization achieve its desired outcomes. Organizations should evaluate prospective vendors' credentials and reputation by direct inquiry and by obtaining feedback from previous customers.

Organizations should question and ask for information from vendors, including:
- Why do you believe you (your group) are/is best qualified to provide training products or services to our organization?
- How do you evaluate your effectiveness? May we see examples of evaluations conducted at Levels 1 through 4?
- Please submit resumes for those who would be involved in providing proposed services.
- Please provide contact information for past or present clients for whom you have provided services.

Organizations should contact a vendor's references to evaluate the vendor's reputation and to better understand the positive impacts on organizational outcomes that vendor's training or products have previously achieved. Tool 4-3, *"Examining Impacts of Vendors' Training and Products,"* can guide organizations' exploration of the degree of satisfaction of past clients.

6. How can organizations assess the degree to which vendors' prepared curricula will meet their training needs?

Assessing the applicability of training products previously developed by vendors to your organization is a process very similar to evaluating the adequacy of an internally developed curriculum (see Tool 1-1). Tool 4-4, **"Criteria for Assessing the Appropriateness of a Professional Development Program or Curriculum,"** provides additional guidance in evaluating whether external professional development programs will meet a particular organization's needs. Particular emphasis should be placed on assessing the extent to which a prepared curriculum teaches specific knowledge and skills that are relevant to participants' duties and responsibilities, as well as the extent to which the organization will expect that those skills will be directly transferred to the work environment once they are learned.

7. How can organizations minimize the cost of developing customized training or performance improvement materials?

Designing a customized training program clearly requires more time and financial resources than purchasing a program "off the vendor's shelf," but the costs of this tailoring vary depending on the following:
- Length of the training program;
- Types of learning methodologies being developed;
- Availability and role of subject-matter experts;
- Amount of already-developed learning methodologies and resources;
- Nature of the content;
- Experience of the instructional designer(s);
- Expectations of the curriculum reviewers regarding their input and the tasks associated with the design process;
- Format of the instructional guide, training and participant resources; and
- Decision to include a field-test delivery of the curriculum.

Nixdorf (1995) offers a few suggestions to ensure an organization is getting the most from its investment in external vendors:
- Define the training project goals up front so that vendors have a clear concept of what is expected.
- Pay promptly, limit staff demands for "freebies," and maintain good relations with vendors.
- Allocate time and resources for staff to attend meetings with vendors, administer contracts, review deliverables, and help vendors navigate the organization.

Organizations should retain the right to cancel a contract with a vendor, but should exercise this right only when absolutely necessary.

8. How can an organization develop effective working relationships with external professional development vendors?

An effective partnership begins with establishing an agreement that specifies who will do what within a prescribed schedule. The process of negotiating such an agreement begins with a description of the need for training and the expected training outcomes. According to Mager (1992), the resulting agreement should answer the following questions:
- What services are we talking about?
- When will they be delivered?
- What will they cost?
- What will they be expected to accomplish?
- How will we measure results?
- What will our organization be expected to do, and when?

As external vendors design and deliver training programs, organizations can assist them by:
- Briefing them about the organizational culture/values/guiding principles and any distinctive policies, procedures, and "politics."
- Discussing how this program is related to any training that has already transpired and to what is planned for the overall professional development program.

- Preparing the targeted training participants, their supervisors and the organization at large for the delivery of this program.
- Letting vendors do the work that the organization has hired them to do without unnecessary interference (e.g., rewriting to reflect one's personal style, or requesting isolated changes in the design that do not consider the effect on the whole).
- Providing ready access to:
  o the organization's liaison for the project,
  o information (provided by the organization's subject matter experts, policies/procedure manuals, statutes and other background sources), and
  o the targeted participants (e.g., to field-test parts of the program, to obtain feedback on job-relevance, and to assess preferred styles of learning).

Organizations that contract with external vendors for training products and services should get what they pay for, and pay for what they get. An organization that works well with a vendor it has carefully selected and respectfully supported is more likely to get the best value for its investment, not only with the current vendor but also with others they may engage in the future.

Determining if External Vendors are Necessary to Design, Deliver and/or Evaluate Training Programs

YES   *NO*

___   ___   1. Do the results of the cause analysis and learning needs assessments indicate that a training program should be used as a performance improvement tool?

___   ___   2. Do the results of an assessment of the organization's capacity <u>to design</u> the needed training program reveal that assistance from an external resource is required?

___   ___   3. Has it been determined that the organizational capacity <u>to conduct</u> the training program cannot meet the expectations or requirements of the needed program?

___   ___   4. Have the results of the various levels of evaluation of the training programs designed and delivered by the organization's professional development personnel been used to determine the need for using external vendors?

___   ___   5. Does a funding or regulatory source require the use of subject matter experts (SME) outside of the organization to develop and/or deliver the training?

___   ___   6. Has a cost/benefit analysis been conducted to determine the difference between using the organization's resources versus contracting with external vendors?

Analysis of Vendors' Training Descriptions

YES *NO*

___ ___   1. Do brochures or other informational materials list the competencies that the service or products are intended to address?

___ ___   2. Are the learning objectives or expected outcomes listed?

___ ___   3. Are the objectives listed in behavioral terms that are observable, measurable, and achievable?

___ ___   4. Does the training program's announcement include a topical outline/agenda?

___ ___   5. Does the brochure specify the target audience that the training or other performance improvement tools is intended to reach?

___ ___   6. Are suggested pre-training activities listed so that the user can prepare for participating in the program?

___ ___   7. Are suggestions offered regarding how the organization can support the user's preparation for training and the application of what will be learned to the user's job tasks?

___ ___   8. Is there a reference to transfer of learning activities?

___ ___   9. Are the in-classroom learning methods identified?

__ ___   10. Is information included that establishes the credibility of the trainer(s) and the trainer's familiarity with your organization's overall mission and program operations?

Examining Impacts of a Vendor's Training and Products

In assessing the impact of a vendor's training and products (curriculum and other professional development tools) on another organization, ask the organization's representative:

1. How often have your participants used the information or skills they learned?

2. To what degree do you think the program (products) achieved the objectives?

3. How have the participants' performance changed or improved as a result of the what they learned through their involvement in the program/ use of the product?

4. What specific performance gap or discrepancy was solved as a result of using this program/product?

5. Has your organization amended/discontinued/instituted any new policies, procedures, or practices as a result of using this vendor's services/products?

6. What organizational outcome was achieved that could be attributed to the impact of this vendor's program/product?

7. If the need arose again, would you enroll people in this program (or purchase resources from this vendor)?

8. What suggestions do you have that could help us maximize the benefits that can be achieved by using this vendor's program/product?

9. How satisfied are you with the return on your investment (of efforts and funding)?

Criteria for Assessing the Appropriateness of a Professional Development Program/Curriculum

1. It supports the mission of the agency and illustrates how it contributes to achieving agency outcomes.

2. It responds to the training needs identified through the task analysis and the compilation of individual learning needs assessments.

3. It is competency-based and linked to defined outcomes.

4. It can be integrated with other staff development activities designed to address learning needs.

5. It acknowledges other factors affecting performance (e.g., motivation, standards, opportunity, means, feedback, etc.) and is compatible with the agency's approach   to responding to "non-training barriers to performance".

6. It reflects the principles of Adult Learning Theory.

7. It meets the criteria of an effective training design.

8. It addresses the considerations affecting curriculum design.

9. It provides a mechanism for the transference of learning.

10. It contains appropriate content on cultural issues and promotes culturally competent child welfare practice.

11. It is written in a manner suitable to the level of knowledge and skill of the trainers using it and for the learners for whom it is intended.

12. It is compatible with agency policy, practice, forms, and working conditions and with the regulatory standards promulgated by the agency's sponsor.

13. It reinforces and builds upon the goals of previously conducted training, consultation and technical assistance.

14. It provides a process for measuring the impact of the training based on Donald Kirkpatrick's four-level model (reaction, learning, behavior and results).

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