

COMMUNITY HOUSING EMPLOYER GUIDE – E-LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

July 2009 Version Two



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What is e-learning ?

E-learning is the use of technology for the delivery of education and training.

E-learning uses electronic media to deliver flexible vocational education and training. It includes:

- Access to , downloading and use of the web, CD-ROM or computer based learning resources in the classroom, workplace or home
- Online access to and participation in course activities (eg. online simulations, online group discussions)
- Directed use of the internet, mobile and voice technologies for learning and research purposes
- Structured learning-based email communication
- Online assessment activities

E-learning is most commonly used as part of a blended learning experience where it is embedded into teaching, training and learning. It does not necessarily replace face to face learning, particularly when peer to peer personal interaction is an important part of the professional learning process.

E-learning standards

There are national e-learning standards for training so that the delivery and implementation of e-learning is consistent across all providers.

<http://e-standards.flexiblelearning.net.au/standards.htm>

These standards inform the IT system requirements for e-learning in the workplace.

Industry Integration of E-learning – funding

The community housing e-learning project is funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework , which provides the vocational education and training (VET) system with the essential e-learning infrastructure and expertise needed to respond to the challenges of a modern economy and the training needs of Australian businesses and workers. The Industry Integration of E-learning business activity will support industry sectors to embed e-learning in industry –led workforce development. The goal of the industry Integration of E-learning business activity is to help industry sectors meet workforce needs through the use of e-learning.

For further information about this project please contact Laurel Draffen

laurel@communityhousing.org.au

Benefits of e-learning

Research suggests that there is no significant difference in educational outcome between e-learning and traditional classroom training, which means that your training goal can be reached irrespective of the training methodology. However, e-learning offers significant economic and social advantages over traditional classroom training. These benefits are listed below.

Anytime, anywhere, any place. Using CD-ROM or Internet technologies, e-learning can be delivered on-demand, when and where it is needed, both on-site and off-site.

Time reduction. Because of the nature of e-learning with its visual and auditory reinforcement of information, and individualised feedback mechanisms, the time taken to learn the information is significantly reduced. Research indicates time reduction of the order of 30–50% is common. Because employees spend less time training, companies pay less for lost productivity. E-learning also can be delivered as ‘just in time’ training, reducing the period between the learning and application of the knowledge or skills, which enhances the learning process. In some cases the e-learning course can be delivered while the learner is on the job.

Increased payback. E-learning is an investment that increases its payback during its lifetime, as its primary costs are incurred during development. Delivery and maintenance costs are relatively low. Therefore, unlike instructor-led learning or paper-based communication, the per user costs for e-learning decrease. Most research indicates an average cost saving on training is in the range of 25–65%.

Flexible access. One of the biggest challenges in implementing training within organisations is the scheduling of training. E-learning accommodates individual styles of working and learning, and allows learners to access and review the lessons they need at times convenient to them. This self-directed approach puts people in control of their learning. This equality of access by all involved in the training is one of the important and appealing aspects of e-learning. And unlike face-to-face training, e-learning can be revisited by the learner as often as they desire.

Reinforcement. Research indicates that 20% of information is retained after six weeks in a traditional classroom setting, but up to 70% is retained when e-learning approaches allow learners to ‘see, hear and do’. E-learning can result in a deeper understanding and positive attitudes towards the subject area. Learners participate where they live and work, retaining an orientation to their surroundings. They are typically more comfortable in expressing their opinions, leading to more frequent, yet higher quality discussions when compared to traditional settings.

Motivation. Interactive lessons are advantageous for skill building because the computer has the ability to provide immediate feedback to the learner’s questions or responses, and take the learner through the steps to find the right answer. Media elements, such as video, animation and sound, get the learners involved more quickly and keep them motivated to continue. Experience indicates learners who feel shy or intimidated in a traditional classroom setting, or

who may be resentful of their trainer, are more likely to participate in a virtual setting. There are similar benefits for minority groups.

Community building. Virtual learning communities can share vast knowledge and experiences that exist within their company or further afield, as well as motivate each other. Within an organisation, an e-learning program can be used to reinforce the culture and values of that organisation.

Time to market. Because e-learning can be distributed or accessed through the web, training can rapidly be shared with others, and can also be updated frequently and kept current.

Monitoring of the learning process. Most e-learning allows instant and easy monitoring of the progress of learners, particularly when it is combined with a learning management system. Such monitoring may be critical for areas where there may be legal implications, such as induction training and occupational health and safety training.

E-learning in the workplace –what to expect

Completing a training course using e-learning means that a participant may be involved in a range of activities. Traditionally we are used to staff attending a training session for a period of time – a full day, two days or half a day for example.

Using e-learning, you may see staff participating in any of the following learning activities:

- interactive sessions at their computer with other participants and an e-learning facilitator who are online, or communicating via the phone
- completing activities at the computer that are available from a structured learning site, designed specifically for the course
- downloading (and possibly printing) course material to read
- researching information from other websites
- listening to a podcast
- viewing a youtube video or similar
- posting comments to an online chat forum, such as a wikispace
- completing an assessment task online
- attending a face to face session facilitated by a trainer to further investigate course content and concepts
- discussing content or seeking advice from colleagues in relation to the course material

Staff can also access their e-learning course at home if they have the appropriate IT set up.

E-learning readiness – how ready is your organisation for e-learning?

A quick quiz about your organisation

The following is a quick quiz to help you understand the factors in your organisation that might indicate support for e-learning. Any tick in the No column suggests that the organisation may not be ready for e-learning, while ticks in the Yes column suggest that e-learning could be supported by management.

Question	No	Yes
The working hours are flexible.		
Employees are recognised as individuals and their diversity is accepted.		
There is trust of the employees.		
Management listens to its employees.		
Employees identify their own learning needs.		
Employees play a role in identifying their own learning solutions.		
Learning is embedded in the work environment.		
Learning is seen as a continuous process.		
There are many opportunities for employees to learn in the workplace.		

Cost of e-learning – what will it cost my organisation?

There will be a cost for e-learning as with any training. You will need to discuss with your IT support person that your IT system and software is appropriate to support e-learning. IT system requirements are included in Appendix A. Broadband internet connection is essential – a dial up connection will not provide the speed needed to experience interactive content.

E-learning for community housing will be nationally recognised accredited training. Funding has been received from the commonwealth through the Flexible Learning Framework to embed e-learning in community housing. A number of units from the Diploma in Social Housing will be piloted over the next three years - access to this training will be free. However additional accredited training needs to be completed with a recognised training organisation (RTO) and there will be a cost for the facilitation and assessment of this training. The cost per person will be no more than a face to face training session. However there will be travel cost savings or economies when a group participate in the training in the workplace. You also need to build in the cost of providing study time for employees.

Cost Benefits

There are two levels of benefits in implementing e-learning.

Level 1 benefits arise from the elimination of existing costs, such as reduction in travel expenses, reduction in training time, reduction in trainers and administrators, reduction in compliance breaches and lower customer support costs.

Level 2 benefits arise from leveraging e-learning to support changes in the strategic direction of the organisation that positively impact on the bottom line. There is, in fact, a direct relationship between an organisation's performance and spending on training (Patterson, West and Lawthorn, 1999).

Identifying the types of benefits you expect to achieve is critical in reaching a positive return on investment (ROI).

JA Cross (2001) suggests that the ROI varies depending on the level of management you are within your organization, as follows.

Function	Goal	Measurement
Training manager	Close skill gap	Individual performance
Business unit manager	Achieve business goal	Project goals, business metrics
Human resources manager	Choose best alternative	Financial metrics, business case
Executive management	Gain competitive advantage, business transformation	Business case, shareholder value

The ROI calculation

Return on investment (ROI) tells you the percentage return you have made over a specified period as a result of investing in a training program. The calculation is relatively simple (although the underlying calculations and assumptions are not).

$$\% \text{ ROI} = (\text{benefits} / \text{costs}) \times 100$$

The ROI can also be expressed as a 'payback' or 'break even' period

$$\text{Break even period} = \text{costs} / \text{monthly benefits}$$

An ROI calculator is provided on the following flexible learning page to assist you in assessing your ROI.

[http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/guide/4-5 Measuring return on investment.htm](http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/guide/4-5_Measuring_return_on_investment.htm)

E-learning glossary

Some useful terms:

Wiki: A collaboratively edited web page that are frequently used to allow people to write a document together, or to share reference material that lets colleagues or even members of the public contribute content.

LMS. A learning management system (LMS) is a computer program for tracking learners doing an e-learning course. The community housing elearning project uses Moodle as the Learning Management System. An LMS enables an administrator to track the progress of individual learners, their scores on assessments, and have an overview of the progress of any cohort of learners. Learning management systems can assist with scheduling, distribution of materials to learners, and provide a great deal of understanding of how well learners are coping with the course.

E-portfolios

Staff who participate in accredited training will be able to collect activities and evidence to store this online for use in workplace assessments.

How can my staff get involved?

Contact NSWFHA for further information about participating in e-learning for community housing.

Website address: http://www.communityhousing.org.au/T17_elearning.html

An application form is available at :

http://www.communityhousing.org.au/T15_Register_Online.html

How can I help create e-learning success in my organisation and the community housing industry ?

Strategies for success

Using e-learning in the workplace involves a culture change from traditional expectations of learning. As a leader in the organisation you can influence how e-learning is received and integrated into your organisation and each workplace. Here are some suggestions to encourage e-learning success :

Advocate for e-learning – be proactive in supporting e-learning as part of your organisation’s learning culture.

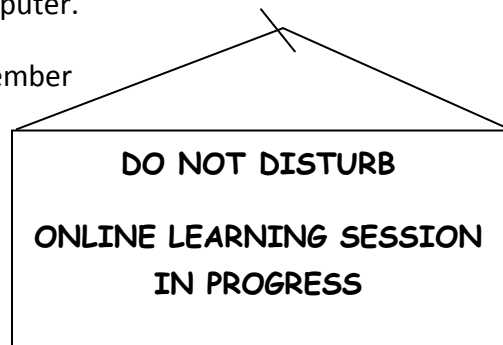
Make sure the board understands how e-learning is being used in the workplace – ask a staff person to demonstrate a sample of the course at a board meeting.

Include e-learning in your policies as an option for staff training and development. This should include a study time component.

Amend you existing procedures or develop new procedures to cover e-learning in the workplace . This should include how the everyday work environment will accommodate a staff member participating in learning activities at their computer.

For example prior to an e-learning session, the staff member

could send an email to notify other staff that they will be involved in studying for the next hour (see appendix for sample policy and procedure).



Ensure appropriate IT support – your IT support will need to know about and understand technologies being used and be prepared to support learners when there are technical issues – does this need a change in the job description for the IT staff? Does it mean there may be more enquiries initially until e-learning is more fully integrated.

Ensure appropriate equipment is available – staff need to have a desktop computer with the appropriate headphones – for the phone and the computer?

Recognise achievements when staff have been successful at achieving results through e-learning.

Talk to staff about what they are doing and ask them to demonstrate an example of the course at a staff meeting.

Include a photo of a staff member participating in e-learning in your Annual report and promotional materials.

Barriers

A major barrier to e-learning is the challenge of changing mind sets that are still locked into the traditional models of training delivery.

The main barriers to a successful e-learning program are the lack of a learning culture in the organisation, a lack of knowledge about e-learning, a lack of expertise in this area, a perception that e-learning will not add value to the organisation, and simple reluctance to change.

There are two main groups whose cooperation and support are critical for the development and implementation of e-learning: the management of the organisation, and the learners themselves. Taking the time to work with the learners to get their support and ownership will ensure success when the course is launched

Difficulty with IT – one of the biggest frustrations can be when IT systems don't work . There may be a period of time when new users experience difficulty in accessing the e-learning environment - good IT support in the early stages to support technical problems is important. Be prepared to support a certain level of frustration with IT in the early stages. Some staff may not be confident with new technologies or be prepared to spend the time required to ensure everything is working well. When technology is working well we can appreciate all it enables us to do. When it doesn't work smoothly we are tempted to get frustrated and dismiss the experience too readily. Remember this is a change process, so you need to support a period of transition.

IT support

Many community housing providers in NSW use an IT system that combines stand alone desktop computers with 'thin client' desktop computers. 'Thin client' computers are not computers with full capability but only access a terminal server which has Tenancy Management System (TMS), email and internet access. However staff will not be able to access e-learning on a 'thin client' computer or via their usual login to the terminal server. If staff have a real computer they will need to work locally rather than through the terminal server. TMS, email or other terminal server applications can be minimised to enable local access the web based e-learning site.

You may need to brief your IT support provider so they are aware that e-learning is a new function being provided in house.

Software analyser tool

This tool has been developed to assist you in identifying applications, plug-ins and settings on your computer so that you may successfully use e-learning content developed to meet the national VET e-learning content standards.

Any staff member can go to this web address and it will identify the software that exists on their PC.

<http://e-standards.flexiblelearning.net.au/tools/software-analyser-tool.html>

References

Content for this community housing Employer Guide has been sourced from the "Practical guide to e-learning for industry" found at:

<http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/Guide/default.htm#>

Appendix A E- Learning System Requirements

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It is preferred that students use Microsoft Internet Explorer. Mac users should use Mozilla Firefox.

You will need to make sure you have the appropriate hardware and software for your computer. The recommended minimum specifications are:

	PC Environment	Apple®
Processor	Pentium or equivalent processor	G3 or above
Operating system	Windows® 98, NT 4, 2000, XP or Vista	Mac OS 8.6, OS 9.x and OS X (10.1.4)
RAM	64 MB	64 MB
Web browser software	Microsoft Internet Explorer® v6.0 or higher Firefox™ v2.0x	Safari™ v2.0x Firefox™ v 2.0x
Modem	Recommended minimum of 56kbps	
Internet access	A connection to the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP)	
Screen resolution	A screen resolution of 1024 x 768 or greater is preferred	

You can download patches for the appropriate version of **Microsoft Internet Explorer®** * or **Firefox** web browsers from their respective sites.

You will need headphones with a usb connection to the computer for interactive online sessions



TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Special software

- **Adobe Acrobat Reader** to view and print most of the documents on this OLS website. If you don't have this, you will need to download it. You will then be able to open PDF documents.

[Download the free Acrobat PDF Reader](#)

- **Quicktime** to play media files. If you don't have this, you will need to download it.

[Download free Quicktime Media Player](#)

- **Adobe Flash Player** to play interactive, rich content with video, graphics and animation. If you don't have this, you will need to download it.

[Download free Adobe Flash Player](#)

System Configuration

Refer to [Technical Troubleshooting for PC Users](#) or [Technical Troubleshooting for MAC Users](#) for more information on configuring your system to.

- Disable Pop-up blockers
- Enable JavaScript
- Clear your cache
- Add the OLS as a trusted site
- Uninstall Yahoo 7 Toolbar

Appendix B: Sample E- Learning Policy

XXX community housing provider recognises and supports e-learning as a strategy for supporting staff professional development.

E-learning is the use of technology for the delivery of education and training.

E-learning uses electronic media to deliver flexible vocational education and training. It includes:

- Access to , downloading and use of the web, CD-ROM or computer based learning resources in the classroom, workplace or home
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- Structured learning-based email communication
- Online assessment activities

We will support staff to participate in training via e-learning where appropriate by :

- providing appropriate IT systems and software
- providing study time according to our study leave policy
- encouraging staff to participate in e-learning
- contributing feedback to the training provider about appropriateness of course content and activities.

PROCEDURE:

A staff member wishing to participate in an e-learning course will make a request to their supervisor, in writing (via email is acceptable) with details of the course , course cost , the anticipated time commitment and reasons for wanting to complete the course.

The supervisor will gain approval for attendance at the course according to the organisation's training and professional development policy

Conditions for participating in the course, including expectations for successful completion and implications for non completion of the course are included in the organisation's training and professional development policy.

Prior to accepting a place in the course, the IT support person for the organisation should be notified to check that the IT requirements for completing the course by e-learning are in place. IT requirements for

e-learning are available in the employer guide for e-learning which can be found on the NSWFHA website http://www.communityhousing.org.au/T17_elearning.html

If additional equipment, software or hardware is required, then a request will be made to the Executive Officer prior to any purchase. The Executive Officer will need to approve any expenditure within budgetary constraints.

E-learning will be supported in the workplace by all staff acknowledging e-learning as a legitimate activity in the workplace.

Staff members who are completing e-learning activities during work time at work will need to

- notify other staff of the time period they are spending involved with e-learning
- ask for a do not disturb time at their computer
- request that noise levels are kept to a minimum during their e-learning study period
- use additional signage if appropriate.

E-learning successes will be recognised at staff meetings and in our Annual Report.