



Effective Training: Essential Principles, Approaches, and Process

This guide provides training designers and trainers with the key principles, approaches, and a process that underlie effective training design and delivery.



Key Training Principles

IREX's training approach is characterized by six key principles – learner-centered, inclusion sensitive, actionable, experiential, active, measurable. These principles underlie training design and delivery.

1 Learner-Centered

A learner-centered training is an environment that pays careful attention to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that participants individually bring to the space. Training design and delivery starts with the consideration of the participant's needs ([National Research Council. 2000](#)).

- ▶ This starts with the consideration of the participant's context, knowledge and abilities – the Training Needs Assessment - which informs the design and delivery process as well as the approach to evaluation. From the culture of a participant to their race, gender, skills, and ability, trainings place emphasis on participants to ensure that the outcomes are responsive to their needs and realities. Acknowledging and respecting participant's prior experiences and understandings helps build a bridge to new learning.

2 Inclusion Sensitive

Inclusion sensitive trainings acknowledge that diverse participants bring different experiences and perspectives to a training that can enrich the training experience for all. Such trainings strive to overcome patterns of exclusion based on actual or perceived connection to a social identity group that may affect access to training and/or learning dynamics during and after a training.

- ▶ Differentiated approaches to training design and delivery ensure inclusion along locally relevant dimensions, from selection processes to evaluation questions. IREX follows inclusion sensitivity principles that build trust and safety among diverse participants, fostering conditions for all participants to contribute and engage in all training activities.

3 Actionable

Actionable trainings focus on knowledge, skills, and attitudes that have a practical utility and will help participants make an impact. Assessing the needs of participants before design allows for training content that is directly linked to realistic actions that participants can do post-training.

- ▶ Learning objectives are fulfilled via actionable knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be assessed. This enables participants to demonstrate desired competencies within trainings and apply the newly acquired learning after the training.

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Experiential

Experiential learning is “learning by doing.” Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is a holistic, cyclical process that emphasizes that effective learning occurs when direct experience is tied to personal reflection, opportunities to make relevant connections to the experience, and the ability to demonstrate the appropriate use of the knowledge or skill.

- ▶ Experiential trainings start with an analysis of participants’ needs then identify the appropriate activities for the training audience and content. Experiential activities can range from activities that are conducted within the training space as well as those that participants can do outside of the training space. Guidance on experiential learning activities is provided in Part 2: The IREX Training Manual.

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Active

A form of experiential learning, **active training enables a participant to engage with training content in an interactive manner.** What distinguishes active training is that it extends beyond “learning by doing” and uses formal training components to shape and support a participant’s learning processes. Activities are designed so that the participants acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes rather than simply receiving them.

- ▶ Several activities allow for an active training environment, including role-playing, pairing participants for activities, and movement exercises. These elements, when intentionally and appropriately used in trainings result in increased participation, enlivened learning, deepened retention, and meaningful application.

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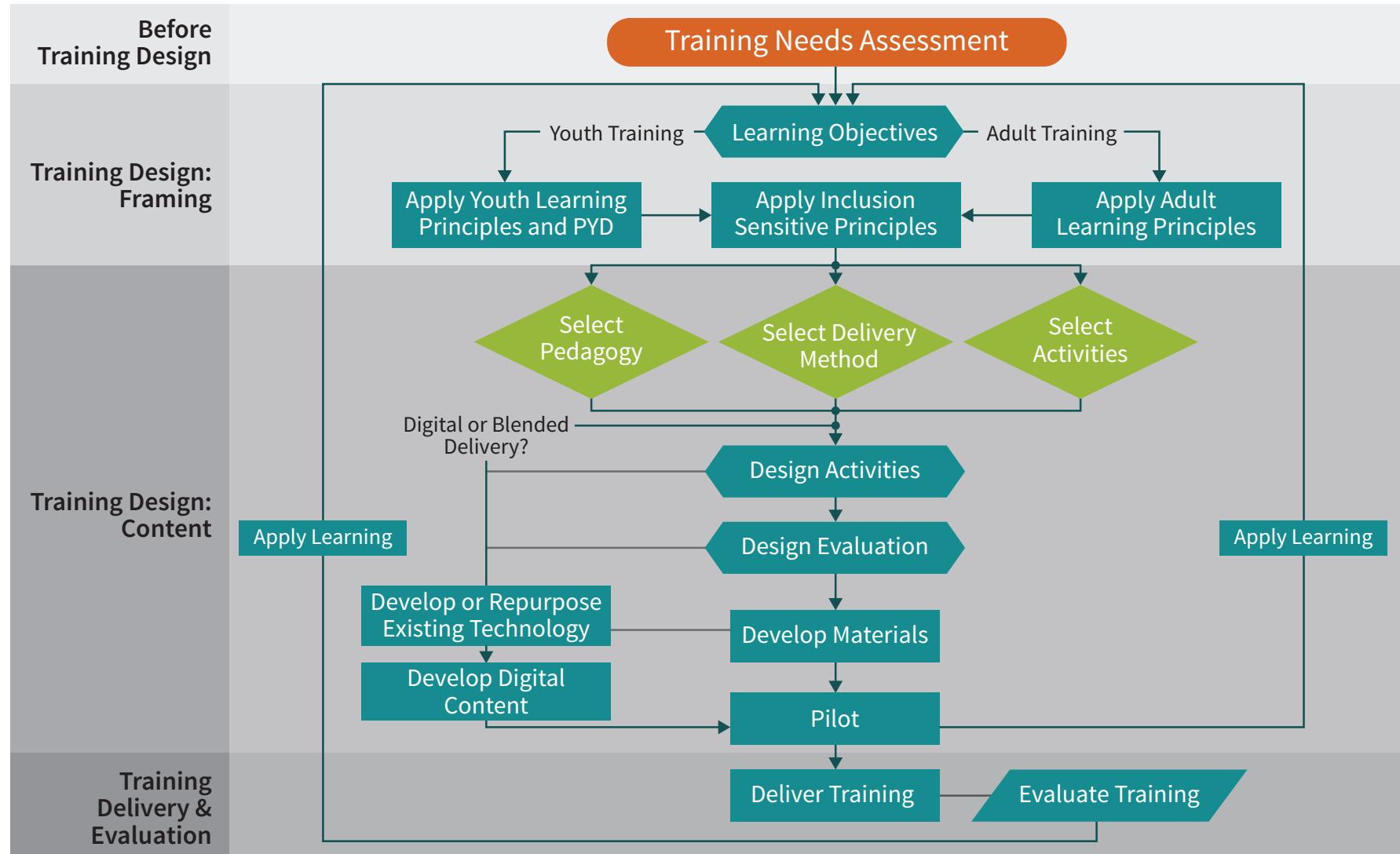
Measurable

Measurable trainings use learning objectives to develop appropriate evaluation plans and techniques that help extract learning which can be applied to training design and delivery. In the design process, the careful development of learning objectives that identify the knowledge, skills, or attitudes that will be gained by participants, allow for clarity in the measurement of a training’s success.

- ▶ Trainings are designed to lead to the impact that programs aim to make. The changes that result from IREX’s trainings are measured to evaluate and learn from each training experience. Formative and summative assessments help the organization strengthen its trainings to be effective at providing skills that lead to positive impact for participants worldwide.

2. Training Design and Delivery at-a-Glance

IREX's training design and delivery process involves key phases that result in a comprehensive, well-developed training program. This process involves reflecting and applying learning that is derived from the evaluation of a training. Learning from formative and summative evaluations should be applied to the framing; content; and delivery and evaluation phases of the training process.



3. Training Youth and Adults

IREX trainings target both youth and adults. These audiences are distinct in the way that they learn. This is because at different stages in life, brain development levels and life experiences factor into what is considered as effective learning. This section is divided into youth learning and adult learning and provides the principles that enable the best learning for both audiences. It is important to distinguish learning and training. **Learning is the process of obtaining increased knowledge, skills, or attitudes.** It is focused on the training participant's ability to acquire the content of the training.

3.1 Youth Learning

Youth¹ trainings make up a significant portion of IREX trainings, therefore youth-friendly environments that encourage positive development and use effective learning principles are important. Trainings that provide youth with the tools and abilities to learn, engage, and apply their skills meaningfully, contribute to productive citizenship.

Research shows that from age 14 to 18 and beyond, young people gain the ability to acquire advanced forms of reasoning and executive functioning. This is characterized by the ability to differentiate evidence from fact or analyze experiences. During this time, youth begin to understand and become more aware of how emotions disrupt attention and how they can inhibit unwanted thoughts. They also become more aware of the communities around them and the larger world and question their role and relationship in it. In addition, middle adolescents develop the ability to reason for planned action (Halpern, Heckman, & Larson, 2013).

This period in a young person's life requires learning approaches that are tailored to their needs. As new cognitive and social capacities are developed, there are effective learning principles that should be used in training.



Early Adolescent Learning (Ages 10 to 13)

Early adolescents learning needs differ from older adolescents. When training early adolescents, apply these principles in design and delivery:

1. Early adolescent learning is characterized as engaging in strong, intense interests, that are often short lived.
2. Early adolescents prefer interactions with their peers
3. Early adolescents prefer active to passive learning. Their brain growth is enhanced and strengthened through practice and exercise.

From [Brain Development for Adolescents, NEA](#)

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IREX defines youth as people between the ages of 10 and 29 (in line with USAID's Youth in Development policy), unless otherwise noted for a specific training or context.

9 Youth Learning Principles

Principle	In Practice
1 Youth gain mastery through in depth and immersive learning.	Provide opportunities for practice with new tasks and problems, for continued use of new knowledge and skills.
2 Youth learn best when less experienced learners can work alongside more experienced peers or skilled adults.	Provide collaboration opportunities - brainstorm possibilities, pool knowledge and insights, conduct collective analyses, critique each other, and draw energy from a common goal.
3 Youth thrive when working on challenges because they can address difficult but accessible problems.	Provide lessons and activities that require problem solving and critical thinking.
4 Youth are intrinsically motivated to learn at deeper levels through personally meaningful experiences that connect to peers or adults.	Provide opportunities to learn more about a topic, build competence in it, and connect with others who share on the topic.
5 Youth learn when information is presented as unfinished products that leave room for their contributions.	Provide opportunities for making learning experiences their own through using individual or group projects.
6 Youth desire to use, apply, make sense, and make connections to what they learn.	Allow work on tasks that have meaning and value to the themselves or others
7 Youth find it valuable to recognize a range of feelings.	The learning environment should be sensitive to the role of emotion in activities.
8 Youth learn to use failure as an important part of the learning process when assessments are closely tied to learning.	Share criteria used for assessment and ensure clear markers of progress and growth.
9 Youth learn when there are opportunities for them to experience a range of adult roles.	Include opportunities to engage with adults on diverse tasks and ensure support by a rich/multi-dimensional adult role (i.e. mentors).

Adapted from [How Youth Learn, 2013](#)

Positive Youth Development in Training

To achieve positive outcomes for youth, IREX incorporates Positive Youth Development (PYD) in trainings. PYD complements youth learning principles and is defined by USAID as an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths (Positive Youth Development, 2017).

3.2 Adult Learning

Trainings with adult² participants are common at IREX. The needs of adults in a training environment differs from the needs of youth. Therefore, it is important for training design and delivery to be informed by adult learning principles. For adults to learn and apply the content introduced in trainings, their learning needs must be prioritized.

IREX's adult learning principles are drawn from the work of Malcolm Knowles. It is not only important to know the principles, but to also apply them to training effectively.

4 Adult Learning Principles

Principle	In Practice
1 Adults need to be involved in their own learning.	Encourage participants to self-evaluate and assess their own learning and performance. In addition, provide opportunities for participants to design their individual learning experience (i.e. through projects they choose and design).
2 Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.	Provide opportunities for learners to reflect upon and share their existing knowledge and experience.
3 Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.	Make a connection between the learning content and each participant's long-term professional or personal goals.
4 Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.	Share examples and stories that relate the learning content to participant's current challenges or ask participants to share their own examples.

Adapted from Knowles, M. S. (1984). *Andragogy in action: applying principles of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Note: Adult and youth learning have some overlaps, especially in the way older youth and adults learn. The principles for adults can be applied to youth learning when deemed appropriate for the target audience in training design and/or delivery.

² IREX defines adults as people above the age of 29, unless otherwise noted for a specific training or context.

4. Inclusion Sensitivity Approaches in Trainings

IREX's training audiences are diverse. They range from youth to adults who represent different geographic regions and ethnic groups, speak different languages, belong to different faiths, and are different genders and sexual orientations, among other social and cultural identities. The immense diversity among participants requires that all trainings are inclusion sensitive³ to ensure that every participant is able and empowered to equally participate and contribute. Trust and safety are essential.

Creating an inclusive environment starts in design, from the moment participant selection criteria and outreach strategies are conceptualized to when a training begins. In some cases, where engagement with participants starts before the training event, setting the expectation for an inclusive environment will involve many members of a program team. In all cases, training designers and trainers have an important role in promoting and modeling inclusion while encouraging discussion and reflection during training events.

Gender Sensitivity in Training Approach

A gender sensitive training explicitly addresses gender differences in existing roles, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that affect access to the training, receptivity to the topic, and opportunities to apply new knowledge and skills after the training. Such differences may be related to disposable income or time, availability to travel, literacy levels, educational attainment, public and private leadership roles, occupational trends, etc. It is important that training design, delivery, and evaluation consider and respond to gender-specific needs and priorities that affect productive learning.

Gender inequality is an obstacle to equitable and sustainable development around the world. Trainings globally should strive to go beyond *accommodating* gender differences to *transforming* them in ways that widen opportunities and reduce constraints.

Sexuality Sensitivity in Training Approach

An inclusive training environment recognizes and respects all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation. In many societies, people who do not conform to dominant societal norms around sexual orientation and gender identity or expression are marginalized. Trainings are inclusive spaces where the agency and dignity of all people are recognized and respected.



In Practice: Create a “Brave Space” with methods that increase the active participation of both women and men

Often there is dissent regarding the extent to which biological sex differences align with socially constructed gender differences. Through thoughtful content and trainer-facilitated discussions, participants can learn to listen and respectfully question gender-related facts and opinions in a “brave space” that may be uncomfortable at times, but is never unsafe. To address behavioral differences between men and women, participatory methods such as using small groups or organizing separate women and men’s groups can help both genders contribute effectively.



In Practice: Incorporate positive representations of LGBT people

Provide positive representations of LGBT people to help create a tone of acceptance and increase awareness of LGBT related issues

A broad acronym that is used for non-heterosexual people is LGBT or LGBTQ, which refers to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. The “Q” refers to people who identify as “queer” and/or “questioning.” In this section and in Annex D, LGBT will be used as an umbrella term for this diverse group of individuals.

Ability Sensitivity in Training Approach

Ensuring that trainings are accessible and responsive to the needs of people with disabilities is central to trainings. People with disabilities can feel excluded in trainings if there are few or no opportunities for their active participation. From activity modifications to facility considerations, meeting the needs of participants who require accommodations allows trainings to be more inclusive.

Culture Sensitivity in Training Approach

Training diverse groups requires culture sensitive approaches that help optimize learning for multi-cultural groups. Awareness of sociocultural issues and effective approaches for design and delivery of trainings for culturally diverse participants is important. From considering the role of language to delivering trainings informed by global perspectives (i.e. customs and beliefs), culture sensitive approaches contribute to a training that embraces cultural difference by recognizing the role that culture plays in the lives of participants in and outside of the learning environment.

To be effective, a training must consider and acknowledge difference in culture, which may include race, ethnicity, values, and beliefs.



In Practice: Pay attention to energy levels

Attention to energy levels of participants is necessary with any group, particularly for long sessions. Since some disabilities may affect energy levels due to reasons like medications or the effort needed for use of assistive technology, check-ins with participants with disabilities can help adjust sequencing and timing of activities, as needed.



In Practice: Incorporate perspectives and materials from people of different backgrounds

When designing and delivering a training, include diverse content that reflects different cultures. Using a variety of cultural references tailored to the context where a training is held helps participants connect with and understand the content.