

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK TESL BASICS FOR LANGUAGE VOLUNTEERS (TBLV) | L'ABC DU FLS POUR INSTRUCTEURS BÉNÉVOLES (AFIB)

New Language Solutions
Various Locations, Canada

Area of Practice:

- Language Services

Video:

<https://youtu.be/7zpGdj5VlyM>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

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BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

New Language Solutions (NLS) is a Canadian charity that develops technology-based tools to support language learning and settlement for newcomers. Established in 1983, it provides online and blended learning resources and trains language educators to use open-source technologies. The organization is best known for Avenue and LearnIT2teach, which support the LINC program. Avenue is a learning platform built on Moodle, an open-source learning management system, while LearnIT2teach trains educators to effectively use this courseware in blended and online instruction. With funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, New Language Solutions helps service providers deliver effective language training to newcomers across Canada.

The TESL Basics for Language Volunteers (TBLV) program, and its French equivalent, L'ABC du FLS pour Instructeurs Bénévoles (AFIB), was developed to address a gap in training for language volunteers supporting newcomers in LINC classrooms and informal language settings. In 2017, NLS responded to IRCC's Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) call, recognizing the lack of structured online training for language volunteers. The need for such training was also supported by research, which highlighted that volunteers benefit from training, ongoing support, and opportunities for reflection to be effective in their roles. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the importance of online volunteer preparation, as many teachers had little experience integrating volunteers remotely. The program fills this gap by offering training through Avenue, using its Moodle-based platform to equip volunteers to support language instructors both in-person and online.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

TESL Basics for Language Volunteers (TBLV) | L'ABC du FLS pour Instructeurs Bénévoles (AFIB)

Description:

TBLV/AFIB is a 7-week, self-paced online program delivered locally by partner organizations across Canada. NLS provides the course and training to designated local coaches, who are ESL/FSL professionals trained in teaching English/French as a second language and using Avenue. These local coaches, selected by service provider organizations, facilitate the program for volunteers in their communities.

The program equips volunteers with a theoretical foundation before they begin assisting in ESL/FSL classes and informal language settings. It covers seven topics:

1. Introduction and the Canadian Language Benchmarks
2. Working with lower-level learners & literacy learners
3. Providing action-oriented feedback, giving clear and positive suggestions, and practicing pronunciation
4. Using real world materials (Realia)
5. Daily life and employment
6. Canadian/Francophone culture and citizenship
7. Remote volunteering

Topics one to six were piloted between 2018 and 2019, while topic seven was piloted in the fall of 2020. In 2020, an optional diagnostic computer skills quiz was added to ensure volunteers have the necessary technological skills to complete the course. Each topic includes core readings, a video, interactive activities, self-correcting quizzes, and a discussion forum, along with additional resources and help files. Local coaches engage with volunteers in discussion forums, providing support and encouragement throughout the course.

Goal(s):

The primary goal of the program is to equip volunteers with essential ESL/FSL teaching skills so that they can effectively support ESL/FSL instructors and newcomers in learning English/French. By providing structured training, the program also aims to increase volunteer confidence and motivation, leading to better engagement and lower turnover. Furthermore, by effectively training volunteers, the program aims to help newcomers develop stronger language and settlement skills, and to support ESL/FSL instructors to better meet newcomers' needs.

Target Client Group(s):

The direct clients of the program are language volunteers who take the training. Indirectly, the program also benefits newcomers, who receive better language support, as well as ESL/FSL instructors, who gain trained volunteers to assist in their classrooms. Additionally, program managers benefit from greater volunteer retention and improved support for their language training programs.

Delivery Partners:

The program has partnered with the following organizations:

ACSA Newcomers' Centre, Scarborough, ON
Archway Community Services, Abbotsford, BC
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, Nanaimo, BC
Centre for Newcomers, Calgary, AB
Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, Golden, BC
DIVERSE City, Surrey, BC
English Online, Winnipeg, MB
Halifax Public Library, Halifax, NS
Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC
MOSAIC, Vancouver, BC
New Canadians Centre, Peterborough, ON
Newcomer Women's Services, Toronto, ON
Somali Immigrant Aid Organization, Toronto, ON
South Essex Community Council, Leamington, ON
Vancouver Community College, Vancouver, BC
Yes Employment Services, North Bay, ON
YMCA Greater Saint John Area, Saint John, NB

Human Resources:

A coordinator at NLS mentors and supports new local coaches. The local coaches facilitate the training, manage the local course, and support volunteers (e.g., by engaging in forum discussions or leading weekly training sessions). They commit 3–5 hours per week for about two months.

Funding:

The program is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

A key factor in the program's effectiveness is that it was developed with input from ESL/FSL professionals, volunteers, and newcomers, ensuring it meets the needs of all involved. This shaped a course with seven topics relevant to volunteers teaching ESL/FSL to newcomers in Canada. Another important element is the support provided by the trained local coaches – ESL/FSL professionals who guide volunteers during and after the training. The program's interactive and varied activities further enhance its effectiveness. Each topic, designed to be completed in about two hours, includes core readings, videos, engaging exercises, self-correcting quizzes, and discussion forums, allowing volunteers to reinforce their learning in multiple ways.

Efficient:

The program is free, flexible, and easy to use, designed for maximum accessibility and convenience. As a self-paced online training, volunteers can complete the materials at their own pace, anytime and anywhere, making it easier to fit into their schedules. The program can be delivered fully online or in a blended format, depending on the partnering organization's needs. Because the program is developed under a Creative Commons license, partnering organizations have the freedom to modify and customize it. They can choose to use the full seven-week course or select specific modules that are most relevant to their volunteers. Once a local volunteer coach is identified and trained, NLS prepares the course for the partnering organization, making it readily available for implementation.

Relevant:

The program meets a critical need for structured training and support for language volunteers. While many volunteers are eager to help, they often face burnout and frustration when their work does not go as expected. Without proper preparation, volunteers may struggle to effectively support newcomers, leading to disappointment for both parties. The program fills this gap by providing comprehensive training, practical resources, and ongoing support from experienced ESL/FSL instructors, ensuring volunteers feel equipped and confident in their roles.

The program also addresses the limited opportunities for French learners outside Quebec to practice the language. By training French language volunteers, the program helps create more opportunities for learners to develop their skills, improving access to meaningful language interaction in French.

Sustainable:

The program is sustainable through its integration with Avenue and LearnIT2teach, core activities of NLS. Since the TBLV/AFIB course is already developed, it can continue as long as these projects exist. Additionally, the delivery of the program is strengthened through partnering organizations. Partner organizations can train multiple staff members as volunteer coaches, allowing them to independently run the training. This ensures that even with staff changes, the program remains in place, providing ongoing support for language volunteers.

Transferable:

The program is highly adaptable and can be customized to meet the needs of different organizations and locations. When NLS sets up the course for a partnering organization, it includes an "In Your Area" section – a template where organizations can add local resources and information specific to their region. These customized materials are then shared with the TBLV/AFIB coordinator and in the coaches' forum, allowing organizations to exchange resources and best practices.

Since the program is delivered online, it can be offered anywhere, making it accessible to volunteers regardless of location. Organizations can tailor the program to train volunteers in different roles, such as classroom assistants, tutors, or conversation circle leaders. They can also adjust the number of coaches, course offerings, and module delivery formats to fit their specific needs. Some organizations, for example, have developed separate courses for volunteers working with lower-level learners and those working exclusively online.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

NLS stays up to date with the latest technology. The volunteer training is delivered on Avenue, a Moodle-based Learning Management System (LMS). Moodle enables the creation and delivery of online courses, tracks volunteer progress, and facilitates interaction between coaches and learners. The program integrates an open-source plug-in to enhance course content with interactive features such as embedded questions in presentations, interactive videos, and drag-and-drop activities.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

NLS' analysis of volunteer training programs in Canada found no equivalent programs to TBLV/AFIB. Unlike standard volunteer handbooks or orientation workshops, the program offers comprehensive, needs-based training tailored to specific roles and local contexts. It provides structured, interactive learning with area-specific resources, ensuring volunteers receive practical, in-depth preparation beyond general volunteer guidelines.

High Client Uptake:

Because volunteer enrollment is managed locally, NLS measures uptake by the growing number of partner organizations offering the training rather than individual volunteer numbers. The program has expanded steadily, with more organizations joining beyond the pilot phase. Through this partnership model, NLS enables local delivery, where each organization recruits its own volunteers, and the free training makes participation accessible.

High Client Retention:

Each partnering organization determines how to offer the training, whether in full or in part. However, to encourage completion NLS issues a certificate for 15 hours of training to volunteers who complete all seven units of the course. This serves as a small incentive for participants to finish the program. At the local level, the coaches play a key role in motivating and supporting volunteers throughout the training, helping ensure high retention rates.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

The TBLV program has achieved strong, positive outcomes for both volunteers and newcomers, as shown through multiple evaluation surveys conducted during and after the pilot phases.

Volunteers consistently rated the training highly. In the first pilot, 94% of volunteers said they would recommend the course to a colleague, and more than 80% found the course units somewhat or very useful. By the end of the training, 71% felt prepared to work with newcomers, and 94% reported an increased understanding of teaching ESL to adult learners. In the second pilot, when a new unit on remote volunteering was introduced, 92% of participants found it very useful, and over 90% of volunteers rated all course units as somewhat or very useful. The support provided by coaches was also highly rated, with an average score of 4.6 out of 5, based on a five-star rating system where one star indicated the least support and five stars indicated the most. Volunteers reported increased confidence in their skills, with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the course improved their understanding of teaching ESL. Volunteers also reported increased engagement, with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their interest in online training and volunteer teacher training had grown, and 92% stating that their motivation to work with newcomers had increased.

Since the pilot phases, volunteer feedback has remained positive. In a post-pilot evaluation of 119 volunteers, 85% felt prepared or very prepared to work with newcomers, and 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the training improved their understanding of ESL instruction. Additionally, 93% agreed or strongly agreed that the course increased their motivation to work with newcomers, and 91% found it helpful in sharing information, challenges, and suggestions with other volunteers. The program also led to high satisfaction, with 87% of the volunteers reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience and 97% recommending the course.

Newcomers who worked with trained volunteers also reported positive experiences. In the first pilot, 18 of the 50 newcomers who were surveyed, answered the questions about the course's help in achieving their goals. Among the 18 who responded, 100% said the class helped them as expected, and 83% stated that working with a trained volunteer was more beneficial than when they first started language courses. 41% reported significant improvement in their English skills, while 59% reported some improvement. Confidence gains were also evident, with 65% agreeing or strongly agreeing they felt more confident using English and 71% stating they were closer to their settlement goals.

In the second pilot, 20 newcomers completed the survey. A weighted average of 4.5 out of 5 (1 = not at all to 5 = very much) indicated high satisfaction with volunteer-led classes. Learners found Pronunciation (76%), Working in Canada (53%), and Vocabulary (53%) to be the most valuable topics. More than 90% stated that their classes with the trained volunteers helped them the way they wanted, and an average score of 4 out of 5 (1 = a little to 5 = a lot) indicated that learners felt their English had improved from taking the class. Finally, with an average of 3.9 out of 5 (1 = disagree to 5 = agree), learners also stated that they were closer to achieving their settlement goals.

The French version of the program, AFIB, which was developed after the TBLV course (in the fall of 2023), will be evaluated in the near future.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

During the pilot phase, the evaluation of the program focused on several key areas: volunteer and coach feedback, learner experiences, language and settlement goals, curriculum development,

program satisfaction, and the program's overall effectiveness, impact, transferability, and sustainability. To assess these areas, several parties were surveyed.

In the 2018-2019 pilot, coaches, volunteers, and newcomers participated in surveys to help shape the course content and ensure it met their needs. The surveys with the coaches and volunteers measured the usefulness of the topics and activities, the benefit of the course for personal learning and professional practice, the volunteers' satisfaction and motivation, the quality of support provided by the coaches, and the volunteers' plans to apply their learning. To assess these outcomes, volunteers completed two surveys, one before and after the training. Coaches completed the survey after the training. Toward the end of the pilot, newcomer learners who worked with volunteers completed a survey to assess their satisfaction with the volunteer-led sessions and their perceived language gains. This survey was designed for easy completion on a smartphone during their meetings with volunteers. Additionally, volunteers and coaches were interviewed, with responses recorded and transcribed for deeper insights.

In the 2020 pilot, LINC instructors across Canada were surveyed to determine how volunteers could best support learners in online classrooms. In addition, NLS conducted another course evaluation survey which was completed by volunteers after their training, as well as a newcomer survey to assess satisfaction and knowledge gains. The program used the pilot feedback to make continuous improvements. It also followed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, gathering ongoing input from project coordinators, developers, and advisory groups.

Since the pilot, the program has continued to survey and interview volunteers to measure learning gains, satisfaction, and the anticipated impact of the course on their future volunteer work. In the future, NLS also plans to conduct long-term follow-ups using Guskey's professional development evaluation framework, based on Kirkpatrick's model, to further assess the program's impact.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

New Language Solutions

<https://newlanguage.ca/>

Program Website

<https://avenue.ca/tblv/>