

“Learning Connections 2.0” - ProLiteracy

Formative Research Questions

Purpose of Formative Research

The aim of our formative research is to test assumptions to inform the design and dissemination of “Learning Connections 2.0”. Though formative research can be used to answer a variety of questions, R4D has identified two primary objectives that should be pursued based on the assumptions described in the theory of change. These are:

1. Identify and understand the key barriers and challenges, as well as facilitating factors, which impact primary users ability to seek career and professional development opportunities, both generally in the United States and specifically in pilot cities.
2. Identify and understand existing/previously implemented approaches to resolving these barriers, their impact and lessons learned, within and without pilot cities

Below we outline potential formative research questions based on these two objectives, as well as relevant data collection methods and activities.

Potential Formative Research Questions

Objective 1: Identify and understand the key barriers and challenges, as well as facilitating factors, which impact primary users ability to seek career and professional development opportunities, both generally in the United States and specifically in pilot cities.

Formative Research Questions	Data Collection Activities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the current skill and competency-gaps among primary users (new Americans, out of school youth, low-literate adults) which preclude them from career development opportunities? <p>(Low-priority for primary data collection: existing research can be assessed)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Study • KIs with academic experts (Dan Wagner, others)

<p>2. What are the existing barriers for primary users in seeking employment and self-improvement opportunities in our three pilot cities (Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Houston)?</p> <p>a. Are there intrinsic inhibitors (self-confidence, motivation, etc.) to identifying and pursuing employment and self-improvement opportunities for primary users? What are they?</p> <p>b. Are there external barriers (time, resources, access to technology) to accessing information about employment and self-employment opportunities? What are they?</p> <p>(High priority for primary data collection)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Study • KIIs with academic experts, program implementers • FGDs with local program implementers • FGDs with primary users
<p>3. To what extent are primary users aware of employment opportunities relevant to their competencies and interests?</p> <p>(Low-priority for primary data collection)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGDs with local program implementers
<p>4. What are the existing services available to primary users who are interested in improving their literacy and employability skills? What are they?</p> <p>a. How (if at all) are these services utilized by primary users?</p> <p>b. Are there barriers to access for these services? What are they?</p> <p>(High priority for primary data collection)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIIs with academic experts, program implementers • FGDs with local program implementers • FGDs with primary users

Objective 2: Identify and understand existing/previously implemented approaches to resolving these barriers, their impact and lessons learned

Formative Research Questions	Data Collection Activities
<p>1. What lessons and best practices can be leveraged from existing or previously implemented programs working with low-literate and underemployed adults?</p> <p>a. What are the most effective ways to raise awareness about low literacy levels and employability competency?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Study • KIIs with academic experts (Dan Wagner)

<p>b. How have others assessed employability aspirations? How have they attempted to match those with self-improvement opportunities?</p> <p>(High priority for primary data collection)</p>	
<p>2. To what extent have interventions that connect low-literate and underemployed adults to resources about self-improvement successfully led to improvements in skills and employability?</p> <p>(Low-priority for primary data collection: existing research can be assessed)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Study • KIIs with academic experts, program implementers
<p>3. Are there examples of programs that have increased employability skills through individualized digital learning? What are they?</p> <p>a. What lessons can be drawn from other digital/tech tools?</p> <p>b. Do digital tools that include guided in-person components show a greater/lesser impact?</p> <p>(Low-priority for primary data collection: not as relevant)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Study • KIIs with academic experts, program implementers
<p>4. Are there examples of successful employability programs in each of the three pilot cities? What lessons can be learned from them?</p> <p>a. How does the impact of these interventions vary based by beneficiary groups (out-of-school youth, non-native English speakers, another low-skilled adults)?</p> <p>(High priority for primary data collection)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk Study • FGDs with shortlisted pilot sites • FGDs with primary users

R4D Proposed Formative Research Activities:

1. **Desk study:** R4D, ProLiteracy, and partners will briefly engage with domestic literacy and employability literature to understand the extent to which barriers to employment and self-improvement have been captured by research.
2. **Key informant interviews (KIIs):** R4D will conduct in-depth interviews with stakeholders who can contribute to our formative research objectives. These may include, academic experts, literacy and employability program implementers, and staff of shortlisted pilot sites in each pilot city.¹
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** R4D will hold in-person focus groups with local program implementers, shortlisted pilot sites, and primary users in pilot cities.

¹ Though the primary objective of these interviews will be to address formative research questions, R4D may also take this opportunity to assess pilot sites' strengths and weaknesses to serve as "Learning Connections 2.0" partners.