

IT Training Market

This section is Milestone #2 of the Development Action Plan. The timeframe for completing this section is two weeks.

At the end of this section you will have identified the:

- ▶ Target Participants
- ▶ Competition
- ▶ Organization Positioning
- ▶ Estimated Number of Participants
- ▶ SWOT Analysis

Before you begin . . .

So far, you've explored the IT Training Sector at a high level to determine some basic trends and how other organizations are experiencing success. Now, it's time to zoom in a bit tighter to more detail as it relates to what your CTC can offer and to whom.

Also, you will need to consider what makes your CTC stand out in the crowd. What are your specific strengths and weaknesses and what threatens your success. Are there particular opportunities that exist in the marketplace that you think your CTC can fill?

Keep in mind that as a cost recovery organization, your mission of providing a service is important but as a non-profit organization with a CTC that must sustain itself, your CTC has some characteristics similar in nature to a small business. Your sustainable success will be based on your ability to generate interest in your programs and to continue to bring participants through the doors. It is critical that you continue to offer new programs so that participants have additional services they can buy from you. You must also look for ways to partner with other organizations to get the most out of your relationships, to get the word out about your programs and to keep a steady flow of participants wanting your services.

In completing this section you will need to consider:

- ▶ Who is your target market (ideal participant)?
- ▶ What avenues will you use to connect with them?
- ▶ What organizations/businesses are offering similar services in your area?
- ▶ How can you position your CTC and programs to compete with others already in the marketplace?
- ▶ How many participants can you realistically expect the first year?
- ▶ What are your CTC's specific internal strengths and weaknesses?
- ▶ What are some of the specific external threats and opportunities?

⇒ *Let's Begin*

Target Participants

Before you can position your CTC and your program offerings in the marketplace it is important to identify who you will target as your “customer.” The word customer is generally a for-profit term, but keep in mind that it is possible to have a socially oriented mission and still see opportunity in the marketplace. This is especially important if your CTC is to be a self-sustaining entity.

As you look at the potential participants be specific in identifying your real “customer.” Perhaps the examples that follow are appropriate to your CTC. If not, you can change them to meet your needs.

Analyze the Issues

✓	To determine the specific participant you will target for your CTC programs, answer the following questions:
1.	What is the basic demographic of the “ideal” participant for your CTC programs?
2.	<p>Are there specific “qualifying” criteria you will use to target participants?</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Women who are able to pay full price ▶ Women who can pay fees on a sliding scale ▶ Women who receive scholarships <p>If your answer is yes, you will need detailed descriptions for each of these types of participants.</p>
3.	If the qualifying criteria in #2 don’t apply, are there other criteria you will focus on? If yes, include detailed descriptions for each of those types of participants.

4.	<p>Where will you seek the participants that you identify as being ideal?</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Are they at University? ▶ Are they already working? ▶ Are they unemployed seeking work? ▶ Are they associated with other social programs? If so, which ones?
5.	<p>What target participant is your competition seeking?</p>

Move to Action

Once you have answered these questions and defined the ideal participant you want to market your programs to, turn to your Business Plan Template and write the **Target Participants** portion of your plan. Be extremely detailed in describing who the ideal participant is, how you will identify them as ideal, where you will look for them, why you believe they are ideal.

NOTE:

Be sure to list each type of participant you wish to target and include specific demographic details for each type.

Competition

The word competition again denotes the world of commerce, where companies offering similar products and services compete for trade. For your CTC, the word competition is simply focused on those in your area offering similar programs for women.

It is always important to know your competition. It gives you good information to base decisions on, such as which programs you will offer. The market will only bare so many choices, and if there are too many organizations offering the same services, competition can fracture your chances for sustainable success.

Competition also provides an inside look as to what the market wants.

If your competitors are selling similar services, then your CTC must determine how to be unique in what you are offering.

Knowing your competition provides insights into pricing structures. By knowing what your competitors are charging for similar services, it allows your CTC to be competitive and yet still make enough revenue to recover the expenses you will incur in running the CTC. Remember, though we have not addressed the financial aspect of your business plan yet, we will, and your CTC is counting on the ability to recover the cash that is spent to set it up and keep it running. If you under price your program just to beat the competition, you may under price your ability to recover your costs in an acceptable timeframe.

Analyze the Issues

✓	To assist you in analyzing the competition, answer the following questions:
1.	Who are the major companies or organizations offering similar programs in your area?
2.	What are they offering?
3.	Do they target the same “customers” (participants) as your CTC?
4.	What are the major elements of their programs?
5.	Do they have a good reputation with their “customers?”

6.	Has anyone on your team ever experienced the programs your major competitors offer? If yes, what was the experience like and how could it be improved?
7.	How do your programs differ from your major competitors? How are they the same?
8.	Have you visited or observed others' programs?

Move to Action

Once you have answered these questions and defined your major competitors, turn to your Business Plan Template and write the **Competition** portion of your plan. Be extremely detailed in describing how the programs your CTC offers are similar to or different from your competitors. List the individual organizations that are most like your CTC and describe in detail what market they target, how successful they are, what their reputation is, if the experience is a good one and so forth.

Organization Positioning

So, how does knowing more about your competition assist your CTC? The details you learned in researching those organizations will allow you to better position your own CTC for today and the future. Staying close to your competitors can give you insights into new trends happening in the market or provide you with ideas about how to strengthen your own programs.

It is not enough to have good products or services. That's just part of what it takes to bring someone to the door. You must offer good customer service, a clean and inviting environment, and access to unique ideas that a participant cannot find elsewhere. On top of all of that, you will need to continually review your programs to upgrade them as the market changes.

To set your CTC apart it will be important to strategically identify your own features and benefits that can be communicated outside of your organization. A feature is a

characteristic that is part of your program. For example, maybe one of the features of your program is that you offer scholarships or that for every program someone completes they receive a certificate that they can share with potential employers. These features become items you can use on your marketing materials as you begin to develop promotional brochures and items to raise interest in your CTC.

Benefits are the reasons that participants come to your CTC and enroll in your programs. For example, benefits to participants who use your CTC might include access to high quality training, a network of potential employers who seek participants from your CTC and access to a variety of training or scholarships.

When you begin to compare your CTC with your competitors, you will quickly see that it is important to position your programs in a unique way that sets you apart from the others. So then, features and benefits become critical to helping you proactively encourage participants to choose your programs over others that are available. There are many training programs, but the features and benefits you choose to highlight will assist you in your determination to create a sustainable CTC.

Emphasize your features and benefits when you go out to seek participants. You will also want to understand if the features and benefits you have chosen are important to your potential market. In other words, if you choose features and benefits that the market is not all that interested in, then they may not help you pull participants into your program.

Often times, organizations go out and ask people for an opinion on whether the features and benefits of their products and services would interest them. This is called a focus group.

The focus group must represent the same “demographic” of the market you are targeting and can provide great feedback as to what the market is really looking for and what features you can emphasize successfully.

Best Practice:

If you decide to use a focus group, try to stay detached from the outcome of the process. In other words, don't get caught up in what you think the answers should be, but allow the group to give you their true insights and feelings about your program.

It may seem difficult to do but if you can put together a diverse group that represents the “ideal” participant you seek, chances are they will represent the larger population's opinion. This can serve as a tool to get you closer to your “customer” in less time.



BullsEye

It might be helpful to ask your focus group some questions about your competition. Take some of the information you gathered from your research and ask questions that will provide insights into what your focus group thinks about the other programs.

Analyze the Issues

✓	To assist you in positioning your organization, answer the following questions:
1.	What do you believe are the best features of your programs?
2.	What features are just like others offering the same programs?
3.	What are the major benefits of your programs?
4.	Why do you believe a participant should choose your CTC? What unique features and benefits do they get with you that they cannot get elsewhere?

Move to Action

Once you have answered these questions and defined the features and benefits of your program, turn to your Business Plan Template and write the **Organization Positioning** portion of your plan. Be sure to compare your offerings with those of your major competitors and give a detailed explanation of how you intend to set your program apart from the others. Clearly identify the features and benefits statements you will use to market your CTC.

Estimating Number of Participants

By now you should have a clear idea of the marketplace, your competitors and what you intend to offer. You are now getting to what is known as the “nuts and bolts” of the planning process. It may be the most difficult part as well; because you are going to begin projecting what you think will happen. Without complete historical data, it is difficult to know what may happen.

Of course you can base your decisions on limited background information. For example, how many participants do your competitors serve in a particular length of time? Or what percentage of participants that you seek do you realistically think you can bring into your program? Avoid opinions or “maybes” when possible. Base decisions on facts!

Some of your thoughts may be based on what you know to be true about the opportunities in your region and on other organizations that have done some marketing analysis.

From a cost recovery perspective you will have to determine your costs (which will be addressed in the next section) and then analyze whether the number of participants you NEED in the program in order to break even each month will equate to the number of participants you feel you can attract to the program.

For now, focus on the number you feel you can attract to the program. As you move through the process you can make adjustments.

Analyze the Issues

✓	To assist you in estimating the number of participants you will have your first year, answer the following questions:
1.	Based on the resources (financial and human) you currently have, how many participants do you realistically believe you will have come through your CTC programs on a monthly basis?
2.	What is the total annual number of participants you want during the first year of operation of your CTC?
3.	What information are you basing these projections on? (In other words, what makes this estimate realistic?)

Move to Action

Once you have answered these questions and projected a number of participants for your first year, turn to your Business Plan Template and write the **Number of Participants** portion of your plan. Keep in mind that this number may change as you work through the financial portion of the plan, but identify at least an initial estimate of what you believe is realistic and detail how you came to that number.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis is a tool that companies and organizations have been using for years. The idea of the SWOT is to provide an objective chance to look at your organization both internally and externally. The word SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

In this case, instead of conducting a SWOT analysis on the entire organization, you will think about the CTC when forming your thoughts.



BullsEye

It is **CRITICAL** to be as objective as possible with this exercise. When you think about each category, explore it as a group. Brainstorm about all the angles for each of the four areas and write a realistic picture of what exists today. This information can be used to prepare for the future and make your CTC stronger.

The SWOT is divided into internal and external perspectives. The S & W of SWOT (which stands for Strengths and Weaknesses) is written from an internal perspective. The O & T (which stands for Opportunities and Threats) is written from an external perspective.

As you begin the SWOT Analysis, you will look at the internal workings of the CTC. What are its greatest strengths and its biggest weaknesses? Those items are then recorded in the appropriate quadrant of the matrix provided.

Next you will look at the external influences on the CTC. What are the biggest opportunities that exist for the CTC and what are the greatest threats.

Keep in mind; all of these things are a perception. Even though there is a perception of a threat, it doesn't necessarily mean it will happen, but it is important to be prepared for as much as possible. This gives you greater flexibility as an organization to change and shift if the market changes or something impacts your ability to serve participants.

Analyze the Issues

Strengths	Opportunities
Weaknesses	Threats

✓	<p>Using the matrix provided on the previous page complete the SWOT analysis by working through the following questions:</p>
1.	<p>Think about the internal workings and programs of the CTC. What are its greatest strengths, assets and offerings?</p> <p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ We offer programs that no one else offers ▶ We serve a particular participant that no one else serves <p>Once you have determined some CTC strengths, write them in the space provided on the SWOT Analysis Matrix.</p>
2.	<p>Continuing to think about the internal workings and programs of the CTC. What are its biggest weaknesses and challenges?</p> <p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ We don't have a large budget for marketing our program ▶ We can't fund as many employee salaries as are required <p>Once you have determined some CTC weaknesses, write them in the space provided on the SWOT Analysis Matrix.</p>
3.	<p>Now, change your thinking to an external perspective. Think about influences outside the CTC and determine the biggest opportunities you see available to the CTC and the services it provides.</p> <p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The market is really large and ready for these services ▶ Participants already know and use our services so the CTC will open up new opportunities to market to existing participants in the program <p>Once you have determined some external opportunities, write them in the space provided on the SWOT Analysis Matrix.</p>
4.	<p>Now think about what threatens your CTC from an external perspective.</p> <p>Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ We may not be able to get as much grant funding in a slow economic environment ▶ We may have more and more competition as programs similar to ours gain interest <p>Once you have determined some CTC threats, write them in the space provided on the SWOT Analysis Matrix.</p>

Review your completed SWOT Analysis matrix and make sure the points you list for each area are relevant and valid. These points can be used as a reference for a variety of the tools moving forward.

For instance:

- ▶ You may be able to turn the strengths into positive marketing statements for your brochures or advertising
- ▶ You can look at the weaknesses to determine where your internal focus needs to be to overcome the challenges you are facing. If hiring more staff is on the list, then maybe that can be addressed in greater detail as you continue to develop your plan
- ▶ You may have identified a wonderful opportunity in the marketplace going through this exercise. If so, think about folding that opportunity into your plan where appropriate to take advantage of the situation
- ▶ Sometimes, threats are beyond our control; however, if you know they exist or can exist, plan ahead for “just in case” and take a preventative stand

Move to Action

Once you have completed the SWOT Analysis Matrix turn to your Business Plan Template and write the **SWOT Analysis** portion of your plan. Be sure to include all of the four areas of information. Include your specific points for each area, but also include perspectives on how to address those points. This will include thoughts about how to use the information to your greatest advantage. You can even incorporate some action items to make sure items get addressed.

For instance, if one of the goals is to take the strengths and create positive marketing statements, then be sure whoever handles marketing for the CTC receives a list of the strengths and understands the best way to convert them from internal statements to external marketing.

The SWOT Analysis exercise is an effective tool to stay ahead of external positioning for your CTC. It also ensures the inner workings of the CTC are being well managed.