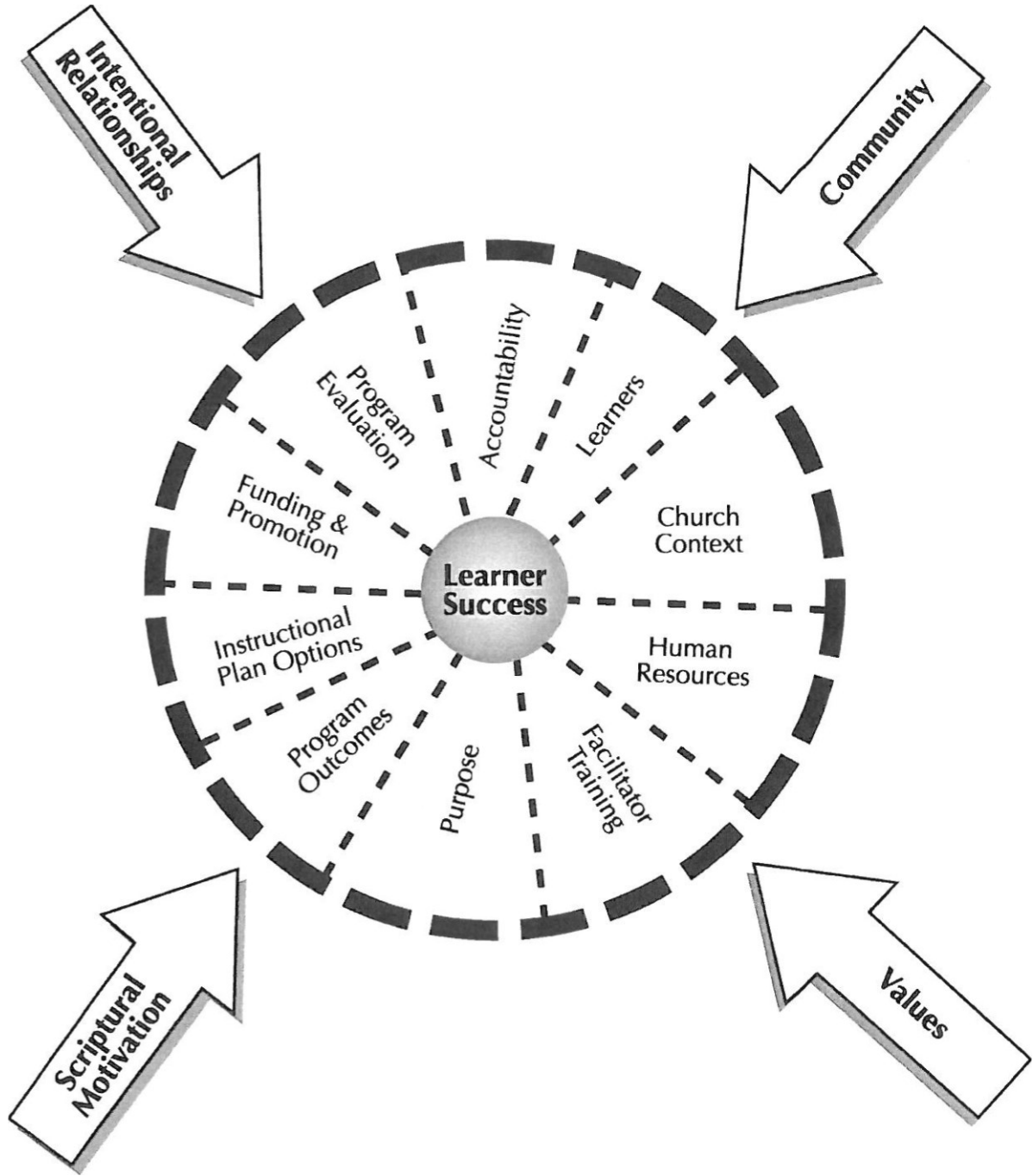


# Faith - Based English Language Learning Program Planning Elements



Source : Janice GT Penner (c) 2026  
Metro Vancouver ELL Ministry Network  
[www.AACE-English.com](http://www.AACE-English.com)  
[AACE.English.jgtp@gmail.com](mailto:AACE.English.jgtp@gmail.com)  
[janicegtpenner@gmail.com](mailto:janicegtpenner@gmail.com)

## To start, what could / should we consider?

- These questions and notes are meant to focus your leadership team.
- There is no "best program." The list includes successful program ideas
- Some questions may not apply, or they may generate even more questions for you!

## Some questions to guide your planning

**Purpose:** What can you offer? These are just a few options:

- Bible Study only with bilingual or monolingual materials
- Citizenship preparation
- Completing visa applications [foreign farm workers visiting family in the US]
- Conversation skills and Canadian socio-cultural topics
  - Optional spiritual focus session (20 minutes after classes, etc.)
- Equipping of non-English speaking Christians [ex: Coquitlam Christian Center, Janice & members of the English congregation led *ALPHA for ESOL* with Korean & Persian congregation members who shared the building.]
- Family ministry (Parenting 3rd culture kids, Reading to your children -ask Janice)
- Income Tax workshops (or other free services)
- Job finding workshops / clubs
- Mentoring opportunities
- Music (weekly choir practices for special events)
- One-to-one Senior & newcomer partners (can meet on Sunday morning, etc.)
- Reviewing the sermon materials after the service
- Workplace focus (specific fields, safety training for construction, etc.)

## Learners

- What are their needs?
- How can you find out the needs of your learners?
- Who lives in your neighborhood?
- Are there enough people that need and have time for English support?
- Who do you want to serve?
  - A particular language group?
  - Believers or seekers who are familiar with your church?
  - A particular level: Beginner? Intermediate?
- Believers in an ethnic language church to help them express their beliefs in English?
  - This may influence if you seek LI language/translations for PR or during sessions.
- Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW -nannies, caregivers, etc)? or Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)? There are at least 3 migrant worker ministries you could possibly work with.

- How old are the majority of your target group? Retired? Working adults? Homework club? [This will affect scheduling (time of day) and number of hours per week.]
- How much L1 support might some learners need? How will this be managed?
- Is it okay with everyone if the learners attend more for "social interaction" and not really working hard to learn English? [social club for seniors; a lot of L1 may be used]

## Church Context

### A) Church's Mission & Engagement

- How does this program fit into the DNA of your church? Is it part of missions? Outreach? Can a new division be created?
- Where will funding come from to cover expenses?
- How can the wider congregation be involved? [prayer team, food team, "adopt a family," Nourouz / Lunar New Year's party guests, cultural variety show guests, etc.]

### B) Other ELL support programs?

- What other faith-based programs exist in your area?
- How long have they operated? How is it going?
- Can your church cooperate with a nearby/ existing program somehow?
- Are there enough learners in the area to maintain another viable program?
- How can you coordinate with the local public library? [most have English circles]
- Are there government funded English programs (LINC) or private schools nearby? Will your program be seen as a competitor to any of the above?

### C) Facilities

- How much space do you have for individual breakout/classrooms?
- Is there a large space for larger groups if this is desired? (whole group sessions)
- When is space available during the week?
- Is there enough adult furniture for these rooms?
- If necessary, who will move the furniture before/ after classes?
- If there are added custodial duties, will this cost extra per month?
- Is there comfortable space for beverage and food consumption?

## Human Resources [Facilitator & Facilitator training]

- Who will lead some basic training for the facilitators?
- Who is available to capably coordinate or lead the program? [preferably someone with an education or TESOL background]
  - o Are you able to pay a coordinator/director? How much?
- How will volunteer facilitators be recruited? Do you want pairs of facilitators/class?
- How will you screen the willing facilitators?
- What are the qualifications for the facilitators (leaders) of the smaller groups?
  - [It's best to consider ourselves as facilitators instead of teachers. The term is less daunting for prospective volunteers and might help leaders talk less. The common concept that a teacher's role is to "impart knowledge" is hard to break.]
- Are they good communicators with people who don't speak English perfectly?

[Facilitators will need to be able to speak in basic English skills instead of using baby talk/ incomplete sentences, speaking louder, or slowing down. It is not impossible. They can learn to express ideas in simple English with frequently used words.]

- Who will provide the orientation and basic facilitation skills training?
- Are all the facilitators required to be believers if the program does not have a Christian/Biblical content focus?
- Are there enough facilitators to sustain the program longer than 1 or 2 "terms"?
- What are the benefits for the volunteer facilitators? (appreciation lunch? Gift card?)
- What support will your program offer to prevent "burn out"?
- Will you be using curriculum that requires special skills? [internet search skills, rewriting published materials, word-processing skills, IT leading online group skills]
- Do you want the facilitators to take something similar to the "Plan to Protect" training or undergo a criminal record check?
- Who can you invite as guest speakers? What special skills/knowledge can people in your church share with learners?

## Instructional Plan Options & Promotion

### A) Learner placement

- How will registration process start? (google form, dedicated email, drop in class)
- How will you decide the level of the learners? Self report? Mini one-to-one interviews? Observation of 4 people discussing a picture? Online evaluation test?
- How will you determine that learners can "progress" to another level?

### B) Instructional Materials

- Will you be using mainstream ESL textbooks?
- Will you adapt existing Bible Study materials?
- Where can you find out about Christian English Language Learning materials?
- Will you choose material from the internet? Can you use video clips?
- How will topics be chosen for the sessions?
- For each lesson, will all levels be discussing the same topic but in different ways?
- Will all levels use similar texts? (See *Westcoast Reader*)
- If used, which version of the Bible will be used? Can you get free ones? [contact Canadian Bible Society for the *Word of Welcome*, Newcomer Bible]

### C) Time Considerations / Scheduling

- How long will your terms be? (Most have 10 week terms)
- How long will the sessions/ classes be? 45 min? 60 min? 90 min?
- Will there be a beverage and snack break?
- Will all classes have a break at the same time? Where?
- Who will purchase, distribute, and oversee the food?
- How will you know about dietary restrictions for individuals or specific ethnic/religious groups?

## D) Promotion

**Note:** If there is Biblical or Christian life content, it is imperative that this is noted on the promotion materials. It's about integrity, and this is a criticism from some of my English teaching peers. I have often heard, "Those free lessons in church basements are a "bait and switch scam." If you want Biblical content, identify it.

- How will non-native English speakers in your area be alerted of this opportunity?
- What types of media will you use? English only? L2 as well?
- How much time will there be between the announcement(s), registration and start of classes?
- How many learners do you want in your first term? [If things go well, word of mouth is all that is needed to continue further.]
- Do you want to maintain a Facebook or Whatsapp group to develop community and continue to communicate during breaks in term?

## E) Group format: Large group and break out groups

- Will everyone meet as a large group and then break out into smaller groups (levels)?
- What will happen in large group? Singing? Object lessons? Devotional? Bible verse discussion? Bible verse memorization challenges?
- Will the large group session be before or after small groups?
- If the large group session includes Christian content, will it be optional?

## Program Outcomes

- How can you measure the success of your program?
- Does your church leadership and membership expect the learners to attend services? Will accommodations be made if they do come to services? [translation, etc.]
- Will pastoral staff insist that the learners and their families attend church events? [A sad example is a pastor who required the learners (predominately enthusiastic female Muslims) to attend an Easter event with their families. The Muslim husbands were so upset because of whatever was said that they forbade their wives to attend any future conversation classes.]

## Funding

**Note:** As a non-profit institution, churches cannot legally charge learners for the ELL program. They may charge for textbooks or supplies (photocopies) or coffee break items. [The BC government has disciplined one church that I know of because the church charged individuals for classes while claiming it was a "church program."]

- What are the fixed and variable costs?
- Where will funding come from to cover expenses?
- Will your program be competing with other ministries in the church for funds?
- If necessary, who pays for paper and photocopying?
- Will the program be charged for utilities? (heating/electricity)
- If used, will the learners pay for the textbook? A folder of handouts? Etc.

- Will resource books be purchased for the facilitators for reference? [Helpful items include a few grammar texts and language learner dictionaries with limited vocab]
- Can a class set of picture dictionaries be made available for students?
- Can an informal lending library be set up with graded readers or book donations?
- Will a "class reservation deposit" be charged with most of the money returned if learners have excellent or consistent attendance?

## Accountability/ Evaluation

- Who is the program team accountable to? Pastor? Board? A committee?
- Will the program team meet regularly for planning and prayer sessions?
- What happens if a volunteer facilitator misses several sessions in a row?
- Will a program review be completed? What format? How often? By whom? Will the learners be included in a program review?

**These questions may appear overwhelming.**

**Remember, you needn't have answers for all of them!**

**They are meant to help people consider the many features of program planning.**

## Other Available Program Planning Support

**Again, with a google search you will find many other guides**

<p><b>ESL Ministry Manual: Practical Guide for Churches (2020)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• by Dr. Marion Chang</li> <li>• 127 pages</li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://eslministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ESL-Ministry-Manual-Formatted-Edited.pdf">https://eslministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ESL-Ministry-Manual-Formatted-Edited.pdf</a></p>
<p><b>A Quick-Start Guide to ESL Ministry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• by Cort &amp; Karen Miller, Olathe, Kansas. Adapted by SOCEM</li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://eslministries.org/start-an-esl-program/">https://eslministries.org/start-an-esl-program/</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 pages</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reaching the World at our Door Step</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission to North America</li> <li>• 7 pages</li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://resources.pcamna.org/resource/esl-ministries_startinganeslschool/">https://resources.pcamna.org/resource/esl-ministries_startinganeslschool/</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have other resources/articles</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teaching English in Church: A practical guide to teaching English ...Christian mission.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William Bradridge &amp; Louisa Walsh</li> <li>• 2019</li> <li>• \$12.00 USD &amp; Shipping</li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://www.amazon.ca/Teaching-English-Church-practical-immigrants/dp/1798739631">https://www.amazon.ca/Teaching-English-Church-practical-immigrants/dp/1798739631</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ISBN-13</b> 978-179873963</li> <li>• 144 pages</li> </ul>

**Feel free to contact the metro Vancouver ELL Ministry Network for connections to existing programs, available resources, etc.**

AACE-English.com [AACE.English.jgtp@gmail.com](mailto:AACE.English.jgtp@gmail.com) or  
[janicegtpenner@gmail.com](mailto:janicegtpenner@gmail.com)