

WORKER EDUCATION

This document is one of five concept briefs published by the Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) Network. The briefs are for practitioners who seek to understand and implement the WSR model. Since the concepts and elements described in these briefs must be implemented as an interlocking and self-reinforcing system, the briefs are not intended for use outside of the WSR context. Taken individually, these concepts do not constitute the WSR model, which requires full implementation of all of these elements together.

OVERVIEW

Worker education empowers workers to play their unique role in the WSR model, achieving two principal goals. First, it provides workers the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities under the Code or Standard—and the understanding of the mechanisms available to them for reporting violations of those rights—necessary to serve as the frontline of defense against labor abuse in the workplace. Second, worker education makes independent audits significantly more valuable, allowing workers to act as informed partners in the auditing process with outside monitors, and building trust in what is otherwise often a foreign and suspect process for workers.

The content and delivery of a worker education program must be carefully constructed to ensure that the material is appropriate for the needs of the workers in each particular workplace, and that the system for delivery of that material is adequate to achieve wall-to-wall coverage of the worker population. Underlying each of these elements is a worker-to-worker, peer education approach, whereby

materials are drafted and developed by (or at a minimum with input from) workers themselves. Moreover, the education program must include redundant layers of training. This reinforces the new norms in the workplace while also ensuring that all workers are reached, regardless of movement and turnover.

CONTENT

Within a WSR Program, the primary goal of worker education is to empower the workforce to become actively engaged in the defense of its own labor rights. Drawing on popular education and peer education methodologies, training content should use accessible language and real-life examples that will resonate with the audience of workers. In designing the curriculum, the worker organization should identify the key rights and protections established by the Code and develop material tailored for each of these rights. Attention should be paid to the emphasis given to each right and its order of placement in the curriculum. Workers should be

encouraged to report potential Code violations, even if they are not certain that a violation occurred. Lastly, workers need to be reassured about the strict protections against retaliation that exist within the WSR Program. The complaint procedure and audits will not function if workers do not believe that this protection is credible.

DELIVERY

There are at least three platforms for delivery of the worker education curriculum. Redundancy will help maximize effectiveness and reach, therefore the best practice is to incorporate each of the following elements into the education program.

— Worker-to-Worker Education Sessions

Led by the worker organization, peer education should occur in person, on company property, and on the clock as frequently as necessary to reach the vast majority of workers. This interval of time will vary depending on industry characteristics such as employee turnover and seasonal vs. year-round employment. Worker-to-worker education sessions utilize credible messengers to build trust with the audience and to create an environment that is conducive to a genuine examination of situations and choices. To the extent possible, educational techniques that encourage dialogue and participation should be utilized, including the use of role-playing, skits and pictures. Worker-to-worker education sessions can yield valuable information in the form of worker complaints (that are then referred directly to the monitoring organization) as well as background for audits. These sessions can also be tailored to the specific issues of a given workplace, based on information that was previously uncovered through the complaint procedure and audits. Lastly, that these sessions take place on company property and are reimbursed at the workers' hourly rate in and of itself sends an important message about the reach of the WSR program and its ability to protect workers from retaliation in the workplace.

— Written Materials

The worker organization should produce written educational materials to be distributed to workers by the Participating Supplier at the point of hire. This succinct booklet should incorporate the same baseline content developed for the worker-to-worker education sessions. The booklet should use clear and accessible language and explanatory images and include the complaint procedure telephone hotline number. This booklet provides a portable resource that workers can store and utilize in the privacy of their own dwelling. During audits, the monitoring organization should verify that the written materials are in fact being distributed to workers by the company at the point of hire. Failure to do so would represent non-compliance with the monitoring protocols of the WSR Program and be subject to corrective action. The worker education team can also distribute booklets during sessions to any workers who failed to receive a copy at the time of hire or had lost their copies and needed a replacement.

— Video Materials

In industries where videos are already being used during the worker onboarding and training process, a WSR worker education video may be developed. Video has the advantage of accommodating visual learners as well as workers with low levels of literacy. The video may be scripted and acted out by worker-actors and should explain Code provisions through demonstration scenarios and concisely distilled instructions. The video should be incorporated into the Participating Supplier's training process, along with the distribution of the WSR booklet. As described above, the monitoring should verify that the video is screened for workers during the company onboarding process.

Another possibility for content delivery is a smartphone application that would include the written and video education curriculum and have a feature to connect workers to the complaint hotline.