

THE SMART APPLICANT'S WORKBOOK

for the 2013
ASTD BEST Award

Application Workbook with Question-By-Question Guidance from
the Writer of #1-, #2- and #7-Ranked ASTD BEST Submissions

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About this Document

The Smart Applicant's Workbook for the ASTD BEST Award is designed to save you time and headaches, and help you present your learning initiatives in the best possible light. The workbook features:

- All 2013 application questions (Parts 1 and 2).
- Section-by-section insights and recommendations on bringing out your learning organization's strengths.
- Response examples—from top 10 winning submissions.

Please note:

- This document intentionally does not look identical to the official 2013 application. Its slightly different formatting will help ensure no one accidentally submits the wrong document. The questions are identical.
- Because this is not the official 2013 ASTD BEST application, *DO NOT submit it.*
- Feel free to compose and compile your responses here. Once complete, simply enter the Part 1 data into the [online application](#), and copy Part 2 responses into the official application, which you'll then upload. If you haven't already, [download the official application here](#).
- Do NOT wait until the deadline to begin the online application.

What you should be looking for:

- *My comments are in orange and in italics.*
- **Does your enterprise operate in more than one country?** is an example of a new question for 2013; all such questions are highlighted in yellow.
- ~~Describe how learning strategy is determined.~~ is an example of a question or wording within a question deleted in 2013 (note: not all deleted questions appear in this document).
- I will occasionally draw your attention to ASTD instructions by underlining them in orange.

*Deb Arnold, Ink. is not affiliated in any way
with the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD)
or the ASTD BEST Award.*

Learning Metrics

Organizational Data

All data must be for the entire company/enterprise. Estimates are acceptable. You must report on enterprise-wide data. Do not report specific data for your division of the enterprise. If you cannot get data for the entire enterprise, then calculate an estimate based on the percentage of the enterprise that your subunit represents. For example, if you are reporting for a subunit that contains 20% of the enterprise's employees, then multiply your numbers by 5 to get an estimate for the entire enterprise.

Apparently, the ASTD folks got feedback that this approach was needed. Good news for those who need it.

Reporting Year

- Calendar year
- Fiscal year --- Begins Month: ____ Year: ____ , Ends Month: ____ Year: ____

As explained in the Guide, it doesn't matter which you choose, as long as you are consistent throughout the submission. (To those re-applying: it's also irrelevant what you chose previously.) So, pick whichever is more advantageous: easier to compile data, better metrics available, awesome new program could be included, etc.

Remember, too, that really notable data from slightly outside your chosen reporting period is OK to include, provided you disclose the timing. Also, it's okay to note impact over time where relevant and significant.

Please enter all financial information in USD \$.

This section is fairly self-explanatory. If your company does not allow you to disclose revenue/profit data, even after you show them where it states, very clearly, that the data will only be used in aggregate, leave it blank but briefly explain why in one of the responses in Part 2.

1. Average number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees (<i>1st of the 5 data points used to evaluate Part 2 – see last page.</i>)	
2. Total payroll (gross wages <u>including</u> benefits or employer-paid taxes)	\$
3. Enterprise's total annual revenue	\$
4. Enterprise's net profit/income (before taxes)	\$

Total revenue: Total revenue generated by the business (on company income/profit and loss statement).

Net profit: Net profit or net income is what is left after all expenses are subtracted from revenue.

Section C: Evidence of a Link between Learning and the Performance of the Enterprise

BEST Organizations align learning to the strategic objectives of the organization and also seek the optimal development of individual employees. This section seeks to determine how thorough the enterprise plans for, executes, and measures this alignment.

Restating the above in different words, what are the institutional links between individual performance, company performance and learning, and how do those links show up in the way things run at your company?

Alignment

10. Describe the **process and reporting tools** the enterprise uses to link training to individual performance and to organizational performance. (500 words or less.) *Underlining added; text identical to last year.*

ASTD confirmed that the underlining was added because applicants were not accurately answering the question. (See #2 in “7 Tips.”) Let’s break this question down:

- **How is training linked to individual and organizational performance?** *You should be able to answer this, yes? Is it intrinsic and systematic or ad hoc? Deeply ingrained in your culture or a new approach? Give an overview of your company’s philosophy.*
- **What are the PROCESS tools used to link these?** *For example, the systems that track individual performance objectives, career development plans and performance reviews (which are based in part on contributions to key business priorities) are all connected and complementary.*
- **What are the REPORTING tools used to link these?** *Who is informed about the outcomes of these links and how?*

11. Describe **how** decisions about training and performance improvement initiatives are made in the enterprise: **determination of need, selection of approach, design, development, and implementation.** (500 words or less.) *Underlining added; text identical to last year.*

SAMPLE TOP-10 WINNING RESPONSE BELOW

*Again, ASTD added emphasis because many applicants answered this question without explaining **how**.*

The breakdown on this process question:

- **How** do you determine the needs that drive training and performance improvement initiatives?
- **How** do you select your approach to training and performance improvement initiatives (modality/ies, overall timing, instructors, etc.)
- **How** do you design training and performance improvement initiatives?
- **How** do you develop “ ”?
- **How** do you implement “ ”?

Recall, we’re still in the section on how learning is linked to organizational performance. This question is a deep dive into these links from the perspective of solution development. You want to draw a direct line from business need to solution implementation: A leads to B, which leads to C, etc. The more systematic and established your process is, the easier this question will be to answer.

SAMPLE TOP-10 WINNING RESPONSE

All learning and performance initiatives begin with business goals, which inform all aspects of program selection and execution. The Strategic Learning Group is intimately involved with our annual strategic planning process on the enterprise, business unit and program levels: