OpenSesame

Protect Your L&D Program When Budgets are Tight

A practical workbook to help you prepare

Is your Learning & Development program recession-proof?

Concerns over economic uncertainty aren't going away any time soon, and many companies have responded cautiously. Expenditures are getting more scrutiny than ever, teams are being asked to up productivity without additional hires, and conversations seemingly always come back to return on investment.

In moments like these, is your L&D department ready for the changes ahead? We put together this workbook to help you prepare, whether that's making the case for preserving your budget, finding areas where you could save money without compromising quality, or prioritizing the activities that will make the biggest difference for your learners.

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Meet OpenSesame

Hi there! We're the world's leading provider of online business training. But we do more than just provide content—we're a strategic addition to your team, providing hands-on curation that ensures the right courses are going to the right learners, and helping you reach your desired business outcomes.

Learn more about us on our website.

Defend your L&D budget by debunking these five myths

Here are some misconceptions L&D professionals commonly face, and how to effectively correct them.

MYTH #1

Cutting L&D budgets is a low-risk way to reduce costs

Too often, learning and development can be seen as a nice-to-have, and an easy place to reduce company costs when budgets are tight. The misconception is that eliminating development opportunities beyond what's required will have minimal consequences in the long term.

REALITY #1

In economic uncertainty, L&D is more important than ever

Slashing L&D budgets can have drastic consequences, not just on a team's ability to perform tasks, but on overall morale and company tenure. Investing in employee growth helps individuals see their career path potential at a company—not seeing this has caused 2 in 3 workers to leave a job, according to a recent study. And at a time where raises may be especially hard to come by, L&D is the avenue through which an organization can show employees that they are valued.

MYTH #2

It's too difficult to prove the value of an L&D program

L&D professionals can feel hamstrung when asked to back up their program's value with cold, hard numbers. Executive leadership sometimes thinks learning is too abstract a concept to quantify, and therefore choose to prioritize initiatives where they believe they can concretely measure progress.

REALITY #2

A few key metrics are all you need to show your true value

The key to proving L&D impact is to tie learning initiatives to overall business goals and employee behaviors. Picking just 2-3 metrics to start is all you need, so long as you track them regularly. Employee engagement and retention are two great metrics to start. (Need inspiration? Here's how truck-manufacturer Nikola compared training data with exit interview feedback to evaluate their program.)

MYTH #3

You can build all your own training in house

You've likely heard this one before: Why pay for third-party content when you could just craft our own training programs in-house? L&D professionals are often expected to create, administer, update, and evaluate all the training content on their own. It might seem like a cost-saving approach to learning, since those staff salaries are already budgeted for, but that's not always the case…

MYTH #4

Soft-skills training is less important than technical skills

When difficult decisions around budget need to be made, building skills in areas like leadership and communication are easily deprioritized. They aren't critical from a legal compliance perspective, and investing in technical skills is what will help employees be their most productive, right?

MYTH #5

A uniform approach for learners is most cost effective

There's a lot of appeal in the one-size-fits-all solution. It's straightforward, easy to manage, and therefore seems like an efficient solution when time and money are of the essence. But does it actually work? Or are those resources going to waste on trainings that don't stick with your learners?

REALITY #3

When you factor in time and effort, often this is more expensive

It's all too easy to underestimate the amount of time it takes to research, create, and maintain quality training materials. When L&D professionals are expected to own these tasks, it can quickly eat up the majority of their time, leaving too few hours to evaluate the impact of that training—or worse, lead to employee burnout. Those are high opportunity costs for an organization to take on.

REALITY #4

In turbulent times, we need our soft skills the most

Don't sleep on soft skills. They're an important contributor to company culture, and when the going gets tough, culture has a big impact on retention. Ensuring managers are equipped in key areas like change management or crucial conversations will be vital to successfully navigating the difficult scenarios to come.

REALITY #5

Personalized learning plans are more effective, and just as easy to implement

It can't be denied: Not everyone learns the same way. And even within similar roles, learning and upskilling needs may be different from one individual to the next. Giving learners more choice in when, how, and what they learn has become an essential piece of the modern learning system.

Ways to proactively minimize costs

Let's be realistic, if your organization needs to tighten its purse strings, the L&D department will have to trim its spending somewhat. But working with a smaller budget doesn't mean the quality of your program has to suffer. Two effective ways to do more with less: 1. Automate routine tasks, and 2. Choose virtual trainings and events over in-person ones.

Streamline workflows and automate routine tasks

Your time is a valuable resource. Especially when headcount may be limited, you want to spend as much of your workday as possible on the high-impact things that move your program forward. Here are a few ways you can free up precious hours while still keeping everything running smoothly; check off all that you're already doing today, and take note where you have opportunities to get better:

- [ ] **Make course maintenance automatic**

Set yourself up with learning technologies that handle tedious tasks for you, like syncing updates to course metadata daily, or removing retired courses and suggesting appropriate replacements. These are all critical for keeping a program functional, but your talents are better applied elsewhere.

- [ ] **Emphasize self-directed learning**

Does your elearning catalog include learning paths? Pre-curated by subject matter experts, or created once by you, you can assign relevant bundles of courses to groups of employees and empower them to learn at their own pace. You'll spend less time having to craft an entire curriculum from scratch, everyone is spared the hassle of coordinating schedules, and learners can level up their skills even faster.

- [ ] **Use actionable metrics to drive decisions**

If your elearning solution has a dashboard summarizing key metrics, use it. (And if it doesn't, you should really consider what you're missing here.) Having data—like course completion rates or most active learners—presented in a succinct, skimmable way makes it much easier for you to tell what's working and what could be improved. Spend less time crunching numbers, and more time thinking through the solutions those numbers support. You'll spend less time having to craft an entire curriculum from scratch, everyone is spared the hassle of coordinating schedules, and learners can level up their skills even faster.

A simpler way to deliver training

Did you know OpenSesame integrates directly with many of the leading learning platforms, like Ceridian Dayforce, Saba, Workday, and more? This direct integration removes much of the manual work required to administer an L&D program, enabling a more convenient way to acquire and deliver new courses.

Move learning events online without sacrificing quality

In-person events can be one of the most costly efforts a department takes on. And while there are times when you simply need to be face to face, these days you can achieve similar results at a fraction of the cost if you move those directed sessions online. But there's more to it than simply setting up a video call. If your next webinar or virtual training needs to be live, use the following guidelines to ensure it's still just as engaging for your learners.

In the planning stages	During the event
❑ Make sure the topic of the session is directly relevant to the employees you invite—nothing sours someone on a program faster than feeling like it has no practical application to their work.	❑ Be interesting from the start. Have a welcome screen or friendly background up as people join the event; you could even have welcome music playing at a low volume while you wait.
❑ Encourage attendees to submit questions ahead of time, then go through those questions and ensure the most pressing ones are answered in the program. You might even plan to give a shout out to someone who asked an especially relevant or insightful question—they'll perk right up.	❑ Encourage regular audience participation, whether through polls, trivia, or simply asking folks to share reactions in the chat. These are great techniques for recapturing any wandering minds, and help learners retain information too.
❑ If your event has a Q&A portion, pre-draft a list of questions in case your audience needs some inspiration. You might even write the answers out too; this can serve as a handy resource for anyone helping manage questions in the chat.	❑ Have a dedicated individual or team assigned to monitoring the chat, and coordinating which questions will be answered live. Attendees need to know they're being heard, but logistically this can be a challenge to do while also presenting.
❑ Practice! Not only to work out technical kinks, but to figure out the setup that enables you to be most engaging on camera. It can be tempting to simply read off a screen when presenting virtually, but it's also the most boring way to do it.	❑ If the event is longer than an hour, be kind, schedule breaks!
	❑ End with a clear next step for all attendees. Where can they go to learn more? How can they start applying this knowledge to their work? If they see the impact of this event, they'll likely be more excited for the next one.

Organizational challenges assessment

What challenges will employees at your organization face in an economic slowdown? As an L&D leader, how can you support folks as they navigate these challenges? Use the table below to identify what will become harder for your colleagues during a recession, what it will take for them to succeed in these new circumstances, and the kind of help you can offer to enable that success.

Affect group(s)	Challenge	Requirements for success	How to provide support
Example: *Sales department, Marketing*	*Closing deals becomes trickier as company budgets shrink*	*Strong persuasive skills to prove your offering is still well worth the cost*	*Help the departments sharpen their storytelling and communication skills*
Example: *People who are part of marginalized or underrepresented or affinity groups*	*Layoffs and downsizing often affects these individuals disproportionately*	*Strategies for maintaining a diverse and inclusive workforce*	*Ensure people managers, HR staff, and leadership develop techniques to counteract unconscious bias*

Affected group(s)	Challenge	Requirements for success	How to provide support

Training readiness plan

Now that you've identified the challenges ahead for your organization, and generally how you can be supportive, it's time to get specific. Use the table below to pair each challenge with a learning opportunity, then prioritize it. This will help you get a clearer picture of what your department needs to tackle first.

Challenge	Affected group(s)	Learning opportunity	Priority
Example *Closing deals becomes trickier as company budgets shrink*	*Sales department, Marketing*	*Increase Your Sales Through Storytelling*	*Medium*
Example *Tough decisions will become more common and feel higher pressure*	*Company leadership, team managers*	*Confidence in the Face of Uncertainty*	*High*

Challenge	Affected group(s)	Learning opportunity	Priority

The world's leading elearning catalog

With more than 30,000 courses from world class publishers, OpenSesame offers the most comprehensive business training library. Courses are available in a multitude of formats, 45 languages, and cover a wide variety of industries and categories. Browse our catalog.

Proving return on investment

Of course, you'll want to be able to report out on the success of your program, especially with the specter of financial hardship looming. The most effective way to do this is to tie each effort back to a concrete business goal in a measurable way. The table below can help you start making these connections—if you get stuck, check out some tips from OpenSesame experts on the pages that follow.

Learning opportunity	Trained group(s)	Impacted business goal	KPI(s) KPI = key performance indicator
Example: *Increase Your Sales Through Storytelling*	*Sales department, Marketing*	*Revenue generation*	*Win rate before and after training*
Example *Unconscious Bias and Workplace Inclusion*	*All staff*	*Minimize overhead costs*	*Employee retention rate before and after training*

Learning opportunity	Trained group(s)	Impacted business goal	KPI(s)

Tips for success from OpenSesame experts

At OpenSesame, the thing that gets us most excited is helping customers tackle whatever challenges come their way. A common riddle we help solve: measuring success. Here's what a few of our resident experts—many of whom worked in L&D before joining us—have to say about proving ROI.

"How you frame and share your results matters. Yes, data is important, but use it effectively. Don't just focus on activity, like number of training hours completed. Instead, emphasize impact—like the amount of time saved by employees being able to complete a task more efficiently as a result of that training. Use the data to tell a complete story about your success, it's more convincing and memorable."

– LIZA WISNER
Enterprise Curator

"Remember to look at internal impact as much as external successes. Especially if business is slower due to recession, look for ways to take advantage of that time to upskill your team, or get better at your collaborative processes and procedures. Investing the available time in improving efficiency will pay off immensely when things pick back up—that's another win you can point to."

– ABBY MILES
Senior Director of People

“It’s good to focus on engagement metrics like course ratings and completion. But we’ve also seen, over the last few years, that L&D can have a dramatic impact on employee retention, happiness, and overall productivity.

Find ways to measure these things periodically, even if you’re just having staff self-evaluate. Then compare these indicators over time to see how their trajectories are influenced by the timing and kinds of trainings being completed.”

– MATT BRADLEY
Learning & Enablement Consultant

“If you can use data to tell the story of how you’ve increased the quality and/or quantity of learning opportunities, while also maximizing your training budget, you’ll be a hero!

– ASHLEY BROWN
Senior Customer Success Manager

Add us to your org chart

OpenSesame customers get more than just a course vendor. We view it as a true partnership, and our team of experts is right there in the weeds with you, elbow to elbow, scaling and refining your L&D program together.

Whether it’s a curation specialist finding the perfect course for your learners, our support staff being on call 24/7, or a customer success manager helping you home in on the best metrics for tracking progress—we’re with you at every turn, for the long haul. Meet some of the team eager to make you a star at your org.

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About OpenSesame

With a library of more than 30,000 courses, OpenSesame offers the world's most comprehensive elearning catalog. Content from expert publishers is available in a variety of formats and languages, and is routinely updated to provide the best information possible across a broad range of categories and industries.

But more than just a content provider, OpenSesame is your elearning partner and advisor. We're a strategic addition to your team, providing hands-on curation that ensures the right courses are going to the right learners, and helping you reach your desired business outcomes. From aligning courses with core competencies, to syncing content with your LMS, to increasing training completion, we're here to help at every turn.

Discover the difference it makes when you add OpenSesame to your org chart.

For more information, visit www.opensesame.com