

Partners in Progress

What clinched the case at NSDC

Proposing and implementing agency: GRAS Academy

No of trainees: 1.3 million in 10 years

No of centres: 250 Skill Development Centres (SDCs) & 75 Skill Development Institutes (SDIs)

Locations: Pan-India covering 21 states and 176 districts

Sectors targeted: Organised retail, healthcare services, building and construction, automobile/auto component, tourism, hospitality and travel trade, electronics, IT, banking and insurance, spoken English

Target population: School dropouts and 10th & 12th pass

Project cost: Rs 80 crore

Business model: Student fee-driven model

Operating model: Modular courses with SDCs for higher courses and SDIs for basic level courses

Key strengths of NSDC proposal:

- Established player in vocational skill training with around 30 centres and 100 staff
- VT Provider (under MES) with certified centers
- Experience in training more than 10,000 students
- Strong management team

has understood the chapter. Since we have our own Train the Trainer programme, it was possible to bring in uniformity. Our subject experts prepared the whole content according to the guidelines of NCVT.”

GRAS also gained other ‘work experience’. The RMoL project was of course one of them, but besides that it partnered International Labour Institute in its much publicized maid training programme in NOIDA, training 100 maids. It also partnered a few NGOs in training programmes. Though of course, as Zahid admits, the infrastructure was basic – water, electricity and fans, sans the frills like air conditioning. And the centres were in suburbs, not prime areas, because of high rentals.

THE BIG LEAGUE

With these strengths and weaknesses, GRAS approached NSDC for partnership, to expand its operations.

NSDC approval means that GRAS will now be setting up 325 centres in India, geographically focusing on North India and extending till Maharashtra. The existing 30 centres will be merged into this tally.

GRAS plans to set up 250 small institutes, to be called Skill Development Centres (SDCs), and 75 Skill Development Institutes (SDIs), to be on a much larger scale, and to be run like mini-ITIs. Zahid informs that GRAS has considered a district population of 20 lakh for SDI and 8 lakh for SDC. The SDCs will offer training in soft trades like spoken English, basic computer, tally and networking; while the SDIs will impart training in hard trades. Its first centre is about to be inaugurated in Lucknow, and will impart training in AC, two-wheeler, path-lab technician, etc. In fact Lucknow will have three SDCs too. Students will be admitted on the basis of entrance test.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Like in case of its other partners, NSDC will monitor the

progress of the project on regular basis. There will be monthly reporting, and visiting the infrastructure to assess the progress for themselves. At the same time, NSDC will also facilitate its growth by helping GRAS build contacts and facilitating meetings.

On its part, GRAS has created a sound organisational structure, where every individual's role is well-defined. Each centre is a business unit, and 10-12 centres come to form a unit. Then there's the zonal office, and at the apex is the corporate office. For effective functioning an ERP solution has been developed, and all centres are in the process of being connected online. GRAS has opted for PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry as the assessing body for its courses, across the spectrum.

THE COST OF IT

Of course, effectiveness comes at a price, and the burden to be trained will be that of students. Zahid says, “We need profit to sustain the setup... The quality of content and trainers, and the resultant cost has gone high.” To give an idea – the spoken English course is at ₹4,800. But Zahid explains that while the DGET course was of 100 hours, the new course is now of 210 hours. In fact, its two-wheeler course is of 1,200 hours. And other courses, like refrigeration (one-and-a-half year) and auto (one year) are also detailed courses.

BENEFIT

The courses are just rolling out and GRAS is working out tieups with industry and corporate world to ensure placements. It has entered tie-ups with Bharti Walmart, Future Generalis, and a few accounting firms and banks, but is keen that the tie-up culminates in proper placement process.

The field is well laid for grass to flourish. ■