

ABF is Sweden's largest adult liberal education association. The abbreviation stands for Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (the Workers' Educational Association).

Our focus on social class is no less important today than it was when the association was started in 1912. That's why we want to give the most to those who have received the least. The ABF is a politically independent organisation, but we share the values of the labour movement.

Democracy, diversity, justice and equality are the foundations of the ABF's operations. Our goal is for people to study together and form an opinion on key social issues. Everyone should have the opportunity to gain the knowledge to influence their own situations, and to be able to influence local and global developments.

Starting a study circle is an easy way to get together for learning purposes. It's cheap and requires no previous knowledge. Organisations that aim to effect change are in constant need of new knowledge, inspiration and methods to know what path to take.

Understanding the conditions at your workplace is essential to be able to make changes. This is why the ABF offers trade union studies.

Culture inspires us and lets us think along new, creative lines, which helps us to interpret the surrounding world and ourselves in new ways. This is why the ABF embraces culture.

Solidarity knows no borders. This is why the ABF focuses on international studies and information campaigns on conditions in other countries.

Someone who does not feel well does not have the strength to make his voice heard. Good health should not be dependent on one's social class. This is why the ABF embraces health issues.

Working for an accessible society, in which everybody can participate, is a matter of justice and democracy. This is why the ABF embraces organisations for immigrants, the disabled and the elderly.

All citizens should be able to gain a liberal adult education where they live and work. This is why the ABF must be active throughout Sweden. We aim to give the most to those who have been least fortunate! This has always been the ABFs goal.

The Study Circle – a practical workshop in democracy

A study circle is a group of people who meet regularly and study together. Anyone can start one, and they can meet anywhere, at times that best suit the group. Study circles have been crucial to the fight for democracy in Sweden, and have contributed to making Swedish popular movements among the strongest in the world. But democracy is not hereditary. A democracy needs people who dare to re-analyse things and have the courage to question things that are wrong. This sort of courage and security can be developed in small groups using the educational methods that the ABF stands for.

Modern society is flooded with information, but to convert this information into knowledge requires understanding, a view of the big picture and processing. Dialogue and action are important parts of the study circle method. Dialogue is still unsurpassed as a means of creating a connection, understanding the entirety, and developing a critical disposition. The learning and adult liberal education environment of the study circle is unique, and the method is a true exercise in practical democracy. The size of the group, 8 to 12 participants,

is optimal for collective learning. The study circle is open to everybody, with no requirements for prior knowledge or admissions tests.

Those who choose study circles do so out of their own interest and free will. The participants decide for themselves the content and working methods in the study circle, and then jointly seek new knowledge, skills and insights. The study circle leader has expertise in the topic and guides the discussions, making sure that everyone has a say and that all participants' experiences and personalities are respected.

How our operations are financed

The majority of the ABF of Sweden's financing comes from grants from the government, county and municipal councils, and fees from the participants and the affiliated organisations. The central ABF receives government grants, which it distributes to the local branches based on the scope of their activities.

The State provides funding to liberal adult education for several reasons:

- To promote activities that allow people to influence their own lives, and that create an interest in participating in social development.
- To strengthen and advance democracy.
- To enhance society's interest in culture, increase participation in cultural activities and promote cultural experiences and individuals' creativity.

Some priorities are to even out gaps in education and raise the overall level of education in society. People of foreign descent, participants with disabilities and the unemployed are particularly important target groups for State financial support.

Study circle leader/facilitator training on different levels

The study circle leader/facilitator is a key person in any study circle. That's why the ABF offers several different levels of leader/facilitator training courses. The ABF system for study circle leader/facilitator training covers the whole range from an introductory dialogue to university-level studies in liberal adult education methodology.

The parts of the development programme are:

- Introductory dialogue
- Basic training (about 25 hours in study circle format)
- Continued training (about 80 hours)
- Literature studies and report writing
- University-level liberal adult education methodology, 10 points

In addition to the general development programme for all study circle leaders/facilitators, we have courses in specific topics, some courses for specific target groups, introductory courses for new study material and a special course in Colour and Design for leaders/facilitators in aesthetics.

The ABF of Sweden on the international plane

The ABF of Sweden has 100 years of experience in liberal adult education with different target groups and a wide range of topics, and we are happy to share our experiences with organisations in other countries. We can initiate a collaborative project, act as a sister organisation or just serve as inspiration.

We can also provide educational assistance by arranging study circle leader/facilitator training, project training courses and lectures. In addition, we can also help with planning,

organising and translating necessary materials. The way we contribute varies; what is important is that each project group develops its own working methods.

International collaborations

The ABF of Sweden has collaborative projects with local and regional organisations to share information on providing liberal adult education. The goal is to contribute to a democratic development in our partner countries. Most of our projects have had a ripple effect, for example new liberal adult education organisations in countries such as Estonia, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Uruguay and Peru.

International studies

In Sweden, the ABF provides information on countries and topics such as union rights, human rights and fair trade. The local ABF branches and districts are pursuing international studies on the initiative of the WEA, other organisations or private individuals.

International contact network

The ABF has many years of experience in international collaboration, and a world-wide contact network, allowing us to introduce each other to new friends of liberal adult education. We are a member of the International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations (IFWEA), its European branch, Euro-WEA, and the Nordic WEA.

ABF's organisation

The ABF provides liberal adult education in all municipalities in Sweden. Much of our activities are study-related collaborations with our affiliated organisations. We have a vital task here, to offer educational methods, knowledge enhancement and new meeting places.

The local ABF branches organise study circles both for the general public and in collaboration with their affiliated organisations and organisations with co-operation agreements. The ABF is also one of the larger arrangers of cultural events in Sweden, offering lectures, public debates, and cultural programmes. Each ABF branch is its own legal entity, responsible for its own operations.

At the regional level are the ABF Districts. This is where study circle leaders/facilitators, study organisers and so on are trained.

At the national level, the National Secretariat keeps in touch with the affiliated organisations and the organisations with co-operation agreements. The Secretariat also analyses the need for studies and works politically to promote liberal adult education.

The Secretariat also supports the growth of operations within the ABF organisation, working comprehensively in the fields of culture, integration, health, trade unions, politics, international studies and disabled issues.