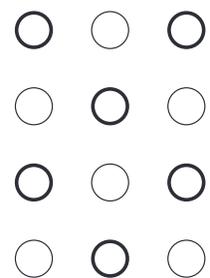
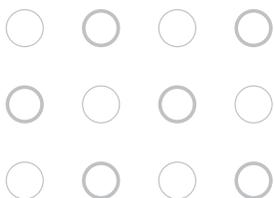




LITHUANIAN FREE MARKET INSTITUTE:

# Reforming Lithuanian Economic Education for the Future





The Lithuanian Free Market Institute (LFMI) stepped up to launch an innovative and interactive textbook and teacher’s manual titled *Economics in 31 Hours*



## Meeting students where they are

In 2002, Lithuania added economic education to its national school curriculum, mandating that 9th or 10th grade students take 31 hours of classroom study. Teachers, many of them working out of their field, struggled to make outdated textbooks relevant to their students, especially as the available material emphasized government-level solutions to economic problems through theoretical mathematical modeling of economic activity. Surveys of teachers found that 70% complained about the abstract marginalization of this new mandated curriculum, made worse through limited time for planning, a lack of engaging and interactive teaching material, and a unanimous feeling among students that the course “did not relate to the surrounding reality and people’s lives.”

The Lithuanian Free Market Institute (LFMI) stepped up to launch an innovative and interactive textbook and teacher’s manual titled *Economics in 31 Hours*. In 2015, the first year of its release, it outsold the total number of economics textbooks that had been purchased during the prior two years combined. As of January 2017, the textbook is used by 68% of 9th and 10th graders in Lithuania’s schools—more than 22,000 students across the country annually. Only 18 months after the original production, LFMI is now publishing the 4th edition of this textbook.

The rapid success of the project is measured not only in quantity but also in quality. Together, the textbook, teacher’s manual, training courses, and online support platform provide a foundation for excellence. LFMI President Žilvinas Šilėnas noted, “This year the teacher’s platform won the People’s Choice Award in LOG-IN—the largest tech and innovations festival in the Baltic states. This is a strong argument for the need for contemporary learning and teaching aids for economics.”

## History

The year 1990 was a momentous year for Lithuania. The country proclaimed its independence from the Soviet Union on March 11, 1990, becoming the first Baltic state to obtain its freedom. After 50 years of occupation, first by the Soviets, then Germany, then the Soviet Union again in 1944, people across the country were excited for independence and the opportunity to chart a new course. Six economists were among those who worked for a freer Lithuania.

Kęstutis Glaveckas, Nijolė Žambaitė, Petras Auštrevičius, Dainius Pupkevičius, Elena Leontjeva, and Darius Mockus co-authored an economics textbook in Lithuania titled *Free Market and Government Regulation*. They saw the opportunity to build a free-market economy in the newly independent Lithuania, and so together established the Lithuanian Free Market Institute. They began advocating for public policy and drafting laws to help shape the legal structure for the Lithuanian economy, beginning with the banking system. Their new organization adopted the motto, “If you

don't create a free market, a black market will emerge." Looking back at the organization's beginnings, Marija Vyšniauskaitė noted, "One could say that the history of LFMI began with the textbook."

## Project team

LFMI's president, Žilvinas Šilėnas, has a master's degree in financial economics from the ISM University of Management and Economics in Lithuania and a bachelor's degree in economics from Wesleyan University in the United States. He is a former elected official, economics teacher, and adviser to an energy company, joining LFMI in 2006 as a policy analyst before becoming president in 2012.

Marija Vyšniauskaitė is co-author of *Economics in 31 Hours*, along with Šilėnas. She heads the LFMI Education Centre, responsible for all the educational activities of the institute. She has a master's degree in philosophy from Vilnius University and a teacher's qualification from the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences. She joined LFMI in 2012.

Aneta Vainė is director of development and programs at LFMI. She has master's degrees in both English philology and economics from Vilnius University, as well as a certificate in Euro-

pean studies from Surrey University in the United Kingdom.

leva Navickaitė is coordinator of education centre projects at LFMI. She has a bachelor's degree in publishing from Vilnius University, and after joining LFMI in 2014 as an intern, she soon became an integral part of the Education Centre.

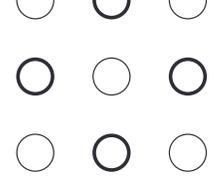
## Reforming economics education

LFMI had worked successfully on policy advocacy and economic reform issues in Lithuania for 25 years before it released the *Economics in 31 Hours* textbook. It had witnessed the rise of a new generation that did not remember the economic and political situation of the country before 1990. In 2002, Lithuania's school system made economic education mandatory for high school students, but the course was generally assigned to teachers without experience in the field, which meant that the teachers struggled with the economic concepts as much as the students did. To make matters worse, the available textbooks were out of date and difficult to understand, in LFMI's assessment, inadequately preparing students to understand and act upon practical laws of economics that affect their daily lives and decisions.



Award-winning *Economics in 31 Hours* was quickly adopted by more than half of the classrooms in Lithuania.





“We decided to be a part of official curriculum in order to influence a significant change in social education.”



Marija Vyšniauskaitė,  
Co-author

“Textbooks were aging faster than they were published,” Vainė explained. “Teaching centered largely on mainstream economics that yielded a one-sided approach to economics and exalted big, omnipotent government.” In addition to these problems, students were not learning the significance of economics and markets in how they would approach political, social, and career decisions. “Available economics textbooks focused on mathematization of economic decisions and lacked social, civic, and ethical perspectives,” Vainė said.

The LFMI team understood how important it was to the entire country to have students learn and apply a quality economics curriculum. “It is by no means true that knowledge of economics is necessary for only a minority—the understanding of the discipline is crucial for everyone and essential for the well-being of the society,” Šilėnas said.

They devised a solution that would entail returning to the organization’s roots and publishing an economics textbook. They understood that the book needed to be part of an overall reform in the way that students learn economics, so they also developed a teacher’s guide, which includes a full curriculum plan and associated learning aids. In addition, they provided training and support that would allow teachers to be-

come more effective with material they understood. The result was a rapid success.

*Economics in 31 Hours*, named after the length of the course requirement as specified in the law, was quickly adopted by more than half of the classrooms in Lithuania. The textbook began to win awards, and other organizations began to inquire about translations of the textbook for their own countries.

## KEY CHALLENGE: Understanding audiences

In order to achieve success, however, LFMI had to develop a successful outreach approach. The organization’s mission did not include plans to become an educational supply company, but was centered on promoting the ideas of individual freedom and responsibility, free market, and limited government. Its primary objective is to help advance the general interests of the people of Lithuania, which can best be accomplished through market action. In order for the textbook project to serve this objective, they had to do more than just create the book— they needed to change the way students understood eco-

conomic principles, in order to create a significant shift in Lithuania’s economic awareness.

Since the launch of LFMI in 1990, together with the creation of its original *Free Market and Government Regulation* textbook, the organization had consistently included education as part of its work. Through their informal online “Economics in Action” classes, LFMI had developed experience working with more than 2,000 secondary school students.

“We identified that the quality of teaching and learning economics at schools is poor,” Vyšniauskaitė said, noting that extensive feedback from the students had played an invaluable role in the organization’s appraisal. “That’s how we decided to be a part of official curriculum, in order to influence a significant change in social education.”

This meant developing an outreach initiative focused on the target audiences of students, teachers, and the Ministry of Education and Science. To achieve success, LFMI needed to understand the needs of each group and address all of their concerns.

## Students

The goal was not to sell textbooks, but to change lives. To do that, LFMI needed to reach the students where they were and encourage them to engage with the material, understand it, and adopt it as relevant to their lives. Vyšniauskaitė summarized the challenge as finding a way “to make it catchy for the pupils.”

“The textbook is written in a very attractive and user-friendly form,” Vyšniauskaitė said, explaining that LFMI’s first priority was to engage the students. “All materials, learning aids, and tasks directly relate economic laws and market forces to the reality and personal decisions of 16- and 17-year-olds.”

This means, for example, that instead of asking about price theory, they would ask questions like, “How much should a ticket to a Lady Gaga concert cost?” or “Is Uber the worst nightmare for taxi drivers?” The topics they cover are written as stories, with the teenage audience in mind, and designed to be interesting. Even the examples they use are selected for relevance in the life of a teenager—longboards, for instance,

instead of lemonade. Follow-up surveys with students are one way they ensure that the examples remain relevant.

Throughout the textbook, the exercises are designed to connect economics to the lives of the students. Each lesson encourages individual reflection and judgment, critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. LFMI made sure to include different learning styles and account for different levels of student ability. It also created a variety of learning aids for each lesson, including videos (accessible online via QR codes), games, and illustrations that make the lessons relevant to the lives of students.



## Teachers

If the first step was to make the textbook catchy for students, the next had to be to make it useful for teachers. After listening to teachers and discovering what they most needed, LFMI developed an online teacher’s manual—the first of its kind in Lithuania. From the beginning, the textbook, teacher’s manual, and online support platform were designed with the teacher in mind, and their development was aided by the fact that Vyšniauskaitė is a certified teacher herself.



The manual made it simple for teachers to be successful in helping their students learn the material. It included course planning materials, methods for organizing coursework and presenting the material, and plans for conducting educational activities in the classroom. The LFMI team understood that most of the teachers presenting the course would not have a background in economics, so Vyšniauskaitė explained that they included in the online manual “glossaries and digests of key concepts, demonstrations and illustrations of topics, and supplementary activities such as class discussions and games.” To keep the course relevant and sustainable, the online teacher’s manual is updated monthly.

## Education officials

After developing a course that met the needs of both students and teachers, LFMI’s next step was to obtain approval to make it part of the official curriculum. The textbook had to go through the formal approval processes of the Ministry of Education and Science, which meant review from within the ministry as well as by an independent reviewer. LFMI was prepared.

“Another thing that contributed to the success of the textbook was our policy advocacy work in the field of education—the system is free enough so anyone who wants can create ma-

Through accredited professional development workshops, LFMI has helped more than 300 teachers better understand the material and upgrade their qualifications.



terial for use in schools, and schools are free to choose appropriate material,” Vyšniauskaitė explained. LFMI understood the needs and formal requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science. The course needed to cover all the essential points covered in the economics education regulation, and do so in a manner that would withstand critical scrutiny. LFMI’s efforts to ensure rigorous quality standards in the textbook were rewarded when the ministry approved *Economics in 31 Hours* and registered it as a recommended textbook for secondary schools.

LFMI went a step further, Vainė noted, creating a continuous professional development course for economics teachers that received accreditation from the ministry’s affiliate regional education centers. The professional development course was also recognized by Lithuania’s leading teacher training institution, the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences. Through these professional development workshops, LFMI has helped more than 300 teachers better understand the material and upgrade their qualifications.



# Key insights

LFMI's seemingly overnight success with *Economics in 31 Hours* resulted from several important decisions made by the organization in its planning and execution. This project provides several important lessons in how to achieve impact.

## Play to your strengths

LFMI's origin included the publication of an economics textbook. When the opportunity for new action presented itself, the organization looked to its existing capacities and accomplishments. "We had experience working with pupils and teachers," Vyšniauskaitė said, "so we incorporated not only know-how, but also texts, tasks, and video material from the online classes we had run since 2009." LFMI had been working on economic policy and related issues for many years, so it was able to assign specialized topics to individual policy analysts. This gave the textbook both a grounding in economic theory and a connection to real-world, current economic situations. Leveraging the organization's inherent expertise and experience helped create a better product.

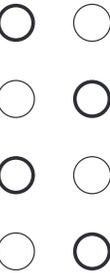
## Find the right partners

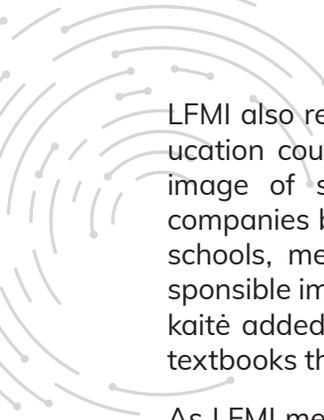
As important as it was to use the organization's existing talent, LFMI also took the critical step of identifying the areas where it did not have the in-house experience for this project. "We made some mistakes here that made [the] process a bit more complicated," Vyšniauskaitė confessed. Writing the textbook was only part of the task, and LFMI soon discovered that they needed assistance from people with different skillsets to make this project work. This meant reaching out to editors, web designers, illustrators, publishers, distributors, and all of the other pieces necessary to make the project work.

LFMI's advice to other think tanks considering a similar project: "Find reliable partners!" You will need assistance to manage the project, and it's important to remember that you don't know what you don't know. As you leverage your strengths, be sure to incorporate the strengths of others in managing tasks outside of your expertise.

Those partners include your existing allies, members, friends, and funding relationships. "Exploit your donors!" Vyšniauskaitė added. One reason that LFMI was able to move so quickly and get the textbook in front of so many students was because it worked with Lithuania's business community, with whom LFMI had already built relationships. Business organizations and individual businesspeople both became partners in helping secondary schools learn about and adopt the textbook.

To leverage these partnerships for success, LFMI began by identifying what would motivate them to help advance this initiative. "We have contacts with donors and prospects in all regions of Lithuania," Vyšniauskaitė explained. "Entrepreneurs are concerned about economic literacy and they want to invest in projects that can be implemented in the region they work."





LFMI also recognized that partnering with education could help a company strengthen its image of social responsibility. “That’s why companies buy textbooks, make contacts with schools, meet pupils, and establish their responsible image in the local society,” Vyšniauskaitė added. “We have sold about half of the textbooks this way.”

As LFMI meets with its donors, it offers choices in where they can invest their philanthropic gifts, and education is a popular area for giving. By providing a tangible product with demonstrable results to potential donors, LFMI has seen great success, both when meeting personally with donors and in a mass-market mail campaign. The textbook has been “the most popular offer,” Vyšniauskaitė said.

LFMI also looked for unexpected allies and partnerships. The textbook was a great way to tell the story of market economics, so the team worked to ensure that the textbook was available in bookstores, supermarkets, and online retailers. This helped broaden awareness of the project, expand its market, and increase its impact.

## Communicate continuously

Listening to students and teachers to discover what they needed in a textbook was only the first step for LFMI. It needed to keep a constant two-way flow of information with all of the key stakeholders, including students and teachers. To achieve its long-term mission, the organization needed to create more than only 31 hours of impact. LFMI recognized that it was in the business of building reputation and trust, and that would only work if it continued to deliver what its stakeholders expected. “The most important thing is to respond to their needs and solve their problems,” Vyšniauskaitė said.

LFMI continues to expand its efforts to maintain open lines of communication. In addition to implementing changes based on feedback received through its workshops and continuous education programs, the organization has added pre- and post-course surveys to understand more about what students are learning from the program and how their mindsets change. Even with the success it has had, LFMI is still

focused on understanding its target audiences and getting the message right.

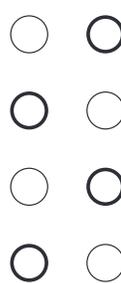
## Measure your impact

LFMI maintains a broad range of metrics to measure its project success. This includes more than just measuring the total number of students using the textbook, it also includes tracking educational results for both teachers and students who have participated in the course.

Measuring these results requires the use of questionnaires for both teachers and students, Vyšniauskaitė explained. These measurement tools have shown significant results, letting LFMI know that the program is on track. “All teachers who used the textbook in 2015 claim that quality of teaching and learning economics improved and they recommend the textbook to other teachers,” Vyšniauskaitė said. LFMI used pre- and post-course questionnaires for the students to measure changes in how they think about economics and free markets. It also conducted informal interviews with students and teachers to learn more about the impact the course has had.

To get a more complete picture of the impact of the program, LFMI measures how often those who use the course become advocates for its adoption. This includes tracking teacher recommendations and impressions about the course on Facebook, as well as more immediate advocacy roles. “When I go to teach teachers in the regions and the ones who are already using it keep pitching to other teachers participating in the seminar,” that’s a sure sign that the program is making a difference, Vyšniauskaitė said.

Finally, LFMI measures the impact of the course on the organization as a whole, as the program’s success helps strengthen its reputation and success in other areas. This includes fundraising, as it measures new and refreshed contacts with donors, and messaging, with a focus on metrics such as media hits.



## Build on your successes

Success leads to more success, if you work for it. LFMI has seen an increase in opportunities to

advance its mission, and these can be traced to the impact of the *Economics in 31 Hours* course. “We have had several inquiries about the possibilities to take this textbook to countries like Ukraine and Greece, and we are now set to take the textbook to Estonia and Latvia, too,” Vyšniauskaitė reported. In addition to expanding the geographic reach of the textbook, LFMI is adding more resources for teaching and learning.

This creates prospects to expand the work in other ways as well. “Inspired by the success and recognition of *Economics in 31 Hours*, we are now launching a new project to produce a set of teaching and learning materials for integrated economics, ethics, and citizenship education,” Vyšniauskaitė added. This new project will be implemented throughout the Baltic states. LFMI is also creating a version of the textbook and associated materials in English, in order to expand its worldwide reach through cooperation with like-minded organizations. The organization has plans for additional projects, and other strategies for expanding the reach of the textbook. These opportunities are possible because LFMI was ready to rise to the challenge when new doors opened, and willing to continue exploring new ways to enhance its mission.

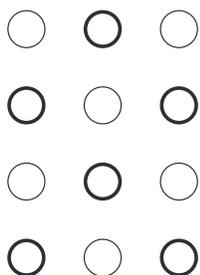
## Conclusion

At its core, this project is about much more than a textbook. “The importance of economic thinking cannot be underestimated,” Šilėnas explained. “Our individual and societal well-being depends on it. Unfortunately, economic education in schools is shallow at best, and incorrect at worst. Our aspiration is to win the battle for freedom of young minds.”

By launching this project, LFMI has made a long-term commitment to the economic literacy of a nation. The future impacts on economic policy and growth of the free market may transform the country. As the educational adage says, “You can count the seeds in an apple, but you can’t count the apples in a seed.”

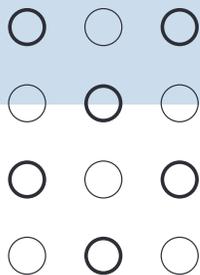
“*Economics in 31 Hours* has truly transformed the way of teaching and learning economics in Lithuanian upper secondary schools, and we are heading in the right direction,” Šilėnas concluded. “So I can assure you that investment in education pays off.”

LMFI’s *Economics in 31 Hours* is a part of the overall reform in the way that Lithuanian students learn economics.



# Points to Ponder

1. How did LFMI identify and act on an opportunity to increase its impact? How much time should think tanks devote to exploring new opportunities?
2. How does a think tank balance new projects with existing work? How can a think tank ensure that the newest initiatives don't take time, resources, and attention away from its core efforts?
3. In launching its new initiative, LFMI had to reach out to new partners and assistants in the new field it was entering. Where are the opportunities to find allies, partners, and assistance in the projects that think tanks are currently engaged in?
4. Communication was a significant factor in LFMI's successes. What different methods did they use to reach an understanding of their target audiences? What opportunities are there to increase audience feedback?
5. LFMI found new ways to engage their donors outside of their financial contributions, and this participation helped create project success. How could think tanks keep donors engaged in the work in ways that are mutually beneficial?



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