

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS SYMPOSIUM

Feedback Summary received on October 6, 2017

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) hosted a symposium on October 5th and 6th, 2017 in Toronto to continue discussions with the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) network on strengthening the program and improving and increasing support and services to learners.

This summary report reflects feedback received on October 6th. It was written by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development and has been finalized following participant input.

The intent of this summary report is to capture the range of perspectives that were shared on October 6th. It does not assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives nor does it indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives.

1 WHAT ARE YOU SEEING AS THE GREATEST NEEDS IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?

Demographics

- Currently the Age suitability indicator for LBS learners targets those who are older than 45 and younger than 64. Indigenous populations accessing LBS services are younger than Ontario's non-Indigenous population¹. LBS suitability indicators² should better reflect the needs of a young Indigenous population. Many Indigenous people are highly mobile, moving every 3-6 months. Program parameters should better accommodate the mobile nature of many communities.

Indigenous Culture

- Indigenous cultures and activities need to be better reflected in the LBS program.
- Many Indigenous adults accessing LBS services are very interested in participating in cultural programming, and some organizations are interested in seeing these activities (better) supported. Greater flexibility for Indigenous organizations to choose whether adopting cultural programming is appropriate for their context/community.
- The ministry should provide Indigenous cultural competency training to ETCs so they have a better understanding of the communities they are supporting.

Program Administration and Reporting

- Service delivery providers are able to enter learner data into EOIS CaMS only for individuals once they have committed to participating in learning/training. The ministry should recognize that issues of poverty, mental health, addictions, trauma, learning disabilities, homelessness, abuse, intergenerational trauma, suicide and changing life circumstances affect a learner's ability to enter and remain in the program. Service delivery organizations first work on creating trust, building self-confidence, healing and healthy lifestyles with learners before helping them move onto the LBS program. This unfortunately creates a system where many of the learners who come through the door are not recorded nor counted toward targets; however, organizational/program resources are being used to support these clients.
- The ministry could develop more realistic expectations around data, including the numbers of learners served.
- Reporting requirement timelines should acknowledge the processes/work of the board overseeing the program (e.g. accommodating the need to have the Band Council approve the reports).
- The ministry should explore ways to lessen some of the administrative burden from paperwork/reporting.

¹ [Aboriginal Peoples: Fact Sheet for Ontario](#), March 14, 2016.

² [LBS Service Provider Guidelines](#), section 4.3, 1. Effectiveness, Table 3: Indicators of Suitability, pp 52-54

- There is a desire to have access to better training for EOIS CaMS to support more consistent data entry from site to site.
- EOIS CaMS has a display issue (Java plug in issue, Oracle is no longer supporting it)

Geography

- Northern Ontario communities are faced with many distinct challenges; including lack of public transportation, cost of travel, and a lack of robust internet speeds or a dependable connection.

Funding

- Disparity of funding levels across streams, as well as between sectors needs to be addressed so there is funding equity across the program.
- The program should recognize the work that organizations undertake with individuals prior to them becoming LBS learners. The work of getting them ready to learn and assessing their needs is resource intensive. A client may come and go a few times before they can commit to the program and sign the registration form, which enables the service provider to add the client into EOIS CaMS.
- Additional funding is required to better serve northern and remote First Nations communities.
- There is an interest in broader discretion for learner supports, such as food security, transportation and childcare.
- Funding should support delivery of programming that is flexible for learners wherever they go and whenever they join/rejoin.

Community Supports

- Poverty, mental health, addictions, trauma, learning disabilities, homelessness, abuse, intergenerational trauma, suicide and t changing life circumstances are some of the issues affecting a learner's ability to learn and stay in the program. Better partnerships with key community services (e.g. Ontario Works, addiction and mental health centres, housing etc.) are essential to supporting learners who are experiencing hardship. Organizations noted that additional funding would help them to initiate and maintain partnerships within their communities. Due to capacity, smaller organizations in particular need to choose between teaching and partnership engagement.
- Currently other programs such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Community Living, Ontario Works (OW), and Employment Service (ES) are developing their own literacy/essential skills workshops instead of partnering or referring clients to LBS. Participants noted that they would like the ministry to work more closely with other ministries (for example the ministries of Community and Social Services, Education etc.) to improve awareness and coordination among LBS and other provincially funded programs and services.

- LBS community organizations, school boards and colleges should work more closely together to help more adult learners access the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) processes to attain their credit toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or for entry to a college program.

Employment Ontario (EO) Service Coordination

- LBS and other EO programs should better coordinate services and offer LBS to individuals who need upgrading sooner and while working.

2 WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE EXISTING NETWORK THAT WE SHOULD BUILD ON IN SERVING INDIGENOUS ADULTS?

Performance Management Framework (PMF)

- The ministry should keep the PMF and the Service Quality Standard (SQS), but modify the suitability indicators and measurements to better reflect the stream and the realities of northern program delivery.
- There are inconsistencies in the ministry's communication around the application of decisions and requirements.

Further Engagement

- There is an interest in more opportunities like the symposium to come together, discuss priorities, and learn.
- The ministry and the government more broadly need to continue to work to understand the intergenerational effects of colonization for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and communities.
- Ministry visits are welcomed and that it would be beneficial for ETCs to visit more frequently and experience how program delivery is being done (i.e. attend a class and observe teaching and learning).

Funding

- There is an interest in project funding so that the field can continue to develop culturally inclusive resources to better support Indigenous learners.
- Many Indigenous adults are very interested in participating in cultural programming, and that this may be a natural way to engage adults in learning activities and a subtle way to support the changing of attitudes towards learning. Interested Indigenous organizations should have the flexibility to incorporate such activities if they are appropriate to their context/community.

- More flexibility to allow boutique programs would help organizations better respond to context and the needs of the community.
- Additional funding is needed for northern regional networks to better support learner outreach and supports.

Services in Remote Communities

- Currently e-Channel is working with Contact North and regional networks to encourage outreach to communities not presently served by LBS sites. This creates important access options for those who may otherwise have limited access to opportunities to upgrade their skills. And so this work should continue to be supported.

3 ARE THERE OTHER IDEAS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE MAESD AND THE LBS NETWORK CONSIDER AS THIS WORK MOVES FORWARD?

Performance Management Framework (PMF)

- There is a desire to serve everyone who needs LBS; not just those who meet the ministry's criteria.
- The Organizational Review Process could be improved to lessen the administrative burden on organizations.
- The program and ministry reporting requirements need to be flexible enough to account for the work of serving potential learners who may only stay for a few days given life circumstances. Gaining the trust of prospective learners and helping them change their perspectives on learning and their own potential is resource intensive, regardless of whether or not those learners remain in programming.
- Some learners may not progress and have no other place to go in the community.
- There may be a limit to the number of learners an organization can serve when resources and funds are limited (e.g. some organizations have one staff to perform intake, assessment, community outreach, program administration/ reporting and teaching).
- There is a desire to have access to better training for EOIS CaMS (e.g. webinars, videos, online modules etc.).
- One of the primary measures of success should be learners meeting their own goals.

Funding

- There is a desire to increase the number of staff at many LBS delivery sites, and improve salaries, training and resources for practitioners.

Professional Development

- It would be helpful to have better support for/access to training/professional development, particularly for those organizations delivering services to high needs clients.
- LBS practitioners should be better recognized professionally.
- It is important that organizations have the capacity to promote cultural teachings as well as alternative learning practices.

OALCF/Curriculum

- The OALCF should better reflect and include Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, living and doing, which includes land-based teachings.
- There are ways to use the framework to support cultural teachings; however, more should be done to support the use of these approaches, which ultimately create more personal experiences for learners, where appropriate.
- It is important to involve Elders in curriculum development and program delivery.

Program Administration and Reporting

- It would be helpful to have program forms that use clear language so learners are able to understand them. In addition, the Exit and Follow Up form should recognize and capture outcome information for all five goal paths and not just employment.
- The ministry should make strides to minimize the administration burden for true blended learning. Currently learners participating in both in-person and online LBS programming have double the paperwork to complete (e.g. two registrations, learner plans, and follow up reports upon exit).
- There is an interest in seeing mobile registrations and learner plans that follow learners as they move between communities and service providers so they may continue to seamlessly work on their goals. This is especially important for Indigenous peoples who are highly mobile/migratory (many whom habitually move every 3-6 months).

English as a Second Language

- There is a desire to see ESL for the Indigenous (Native) stream acknowledged and funded. For many Indigenous learners, English is a second language. Therefore additional language supports and learning resources are needed in order to support some Indigenous learners.

Across Government

- The ministry can do a better job of working with other ministries to support the availability of seamless programming for learners e.g. a continuity of services where clients may be referred if they are not well-suited for LBS.

4 WHAT WAYS SHOULD WE CONSIDER WORKING TOGETHER IN THE FUTURE?

Clear and Defined Roles

- The ministry should work with the network to better define and strengthen the roles of the support organizations and regional networks to maximize support for service delivery organizations.

Engagement

- Events like the symposium promote partnership and provide important opportunities to better understand Indigenous learner/organizations' struggles and stories. These opportunities are helpful for organizations, support the ministry in learning more about the stream, and provide opportunities to work together to create solutions.
- There is a need for better lines of communication between the ministry and the network. One recommendation is for ministry communications to be sent to service delivery managers in addition to the Executive Directors/Senior Leadership.
- There is a strong desire to continue to work together to balance accountability with program flexibility. Some flexibility would be particularly helpful to better incorporate cultural aspects into programming and to support the needs of learners entering with lower levels of skills, and with multiple barriers and those seeking the independence goal path.

OALCF/Curriculum

- Many noted a desire to be involved in indigenizing the LBS program, so that program development occurs from a place of working with and from an Indigenous perspective.

Professional Development

- The ministry and/or Support Organizations should create training webinars on topics such as OALCF, professional development topics etc.
- There is a desire to have access to better training for EOIS CaMS (e.g. webinars, videos, online modules etc.).
- It is not only learners who experience or are dealing with the effects of trauma, addictions etc. Staff and other community members are also affected. Many organizations would benefit from opportunities to learn more about how to better support staff, learners, community members, etc.

Program Administration and Reporting

- A reduction in paper work/reporting and data entry would allow service delivery organizations to spend more time reaching and teaching learners.

Ministry Understanding

- Sometimes there is inconsistency of messaging/direction received from the ministry.
- It would be helpful for ETCs to visit LBS sites more often to better understand the realities and context of delivering LBS in the communities they support (space, resources, learners, transportation etc.).