LiTERACY
more than words

Community-Based Literacy Planning Workbook

cmec
Council of
Ministers
of Education,
Canada

Is there a fool-proof way to improve literacy levels in Canada? This module looks at one possibility: community-based literacy planning—what it is and what it looks like.

Using the B.C. organizational model as a guide and resources from the April 2008 Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum, the module looks at the community-based literacy planning approach and discusses benefits and challenges.

The module is designed for groups, organizations, and institutions interested in learning more about this approach and what it means to work together to bring a continuum of community literacy services for all ages.

Upon completing the module, participants should understand how a community-based literacy plan will benefit a community and its literacy level. Participants will also know the steps to take to establish a plan in their community.

This symbol corresponds to the module page number: ⌐1

1 LITERACY HAS **THE POWER** TO CHANGE LIVES.

Is literacy more than reading and writing? Turn and discuss with your neighbour.

What does literacy mean to you?

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2 Here are some ideas:

- Literacy allows people to express thoughts and ideas.
- Literacy increases confidence.
- Literacy allows people to participate in community life.
- Literacy is the ability to compute, interpret, and create.
- Literacy enables adaptation to a changing world.
- Literacy is the key to opportunity and full participation in society.
- Literacy is in the interest of all people, of every age, from all walks of life.

LITERACY IS… MORE THAN WORDS.

⊖L3 A CALL TO **ACTION**

If action is needed to improve literacy levels, who is in the best position to act?

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SOME JURISDICTIONS ARE LOOKING TO COMMUNITIES TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS IN LITERACY.

⊖L4

In this module, we will look at comprehensive community-based planning to improve literacy.

- What is it?
- What does it look like?
- What are the benefits and challenges?
- How to move from planning to implementing and delivering?

The module is based on information collected from the 2008 CMEC Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum.

⊖L5 **ACTIVITY**

Take a few minutes to consider, as a group, the following question:

What do you think community-based literacy planning means? Discuss as a group.

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COMMUNITY-BASED L6 **LITERACY**

- Engages communities in literacy planning — where people live, work, and play
- Involves community groups, organizations, and individuals in an effort to reach the same goal
- Contributes to a system to sustain lifelong learning for all community members

A COMMUNITY IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO MAY

- Live in the same geographical area
- Share culture and traditions
- Have activities in common
- Share ownership or responsibility
- Share common goals or values
- See themselves as a community[1]

L7 **ACTIVITY**

Community-based literacy planning means engaging a community in literacy planning.

1. Take a few minutes to brainstorm
   - *What communities are you a part of?*
   - *Who might be part of a literacy community? (individuals, formal and informal organizations, etc.)*
2. Record your ideas below.

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3. **Remember:** Each community is unique, with unique characteristics.

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[1] Adapted from *Literacy Now: A Planning Guide, 2010 Legacies NOW*

4. Now look at the list below… Did you consider each of these community members?

SERVICE AND SUPPORT

- Literacy organizations
- Volunteers
- Social-planning agencies
- Transition agencies
- Media
- Faith organizations
- Community, village, band, and municipal governments

EDUCATION

- Preschools and daycare centres
- Public and independent school districts
- Community colleges and universities
- Continuing-education and postsecondary institutions

CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

- Recreation centres
- Youth centres
- Social-development agencies
- Government ministries and agencies

HEALTH

- Health-care providers
- Mental-health organizations
- Crisis-support organizations
- Wellness centres
- Government ministries and agencies

BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL

- Community economic-development agencies
- Trade unions
- Professional and business associations
- Chambers of commerce
- Credit unions and banks
- Community service organizations
- Community futures organizations

JUSTICE AND LEGAL

- Restorative justice
- Legal aid
- Family-assistance organizations

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

- Aboriginal organizations
- Heritage organizations
- Cultural groups
- Libraries and museums
- Sports and recreation groups

EMPLOYMENT

- Employment and assistance centres
- Training centres

Source: Adapted from *Literacy Now: A Planning Guide, 2010 Legacies NOW*

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Did you consider these other community members?
- Could these diverse groups work toward this goal: **A system to sustain lifelong learning for all community members**? Describe how they can do this.

WHAT IS A
COMMUNITY-BASED
PLANNING APPROACH TO LITERACY?

- Leona Gadsby, Director of Community and Adult Literacy for B.C.'s 2010 Legacies NOW society, supports community literacy planning throughout B.C., and presented on a panel at the Vancouver site during the literacy forum.

- To listen to Leona describe the community planning approach to literacy, go to the Community-based literacy planning module at www.Forum2008.cmec.ca.
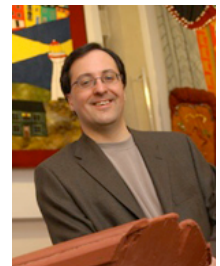
ACTIVITY

What do you think the main point is that Leona makes?

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9 COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Dr. Rob Greenwood is an advocate of the wider community coming together to improve literacy levels. He is a professor at Memorial University's Faculty of Business Administration, and also facilitates outreach activities in the areas of regional policy and development.

A panel session at the Atlantic site of the CMEC literacy forum in Saint John discussed the question: **_How do we provide accessible literacy programming in rural communities?_**

To listen to Rob describe the community planning approach to literacy, go to the Community-based literacy planning module at www.Forum2008.cmec.ca.

ACTIVITY

After watching Rob's video clip, consider the following questions:

1. What are some of the challenges faced by rural communities?

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2. How do we provide accessible literacy programming in rural communities?

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L10 COORDINATED ACCESS TO LIFELONG LEARNING

Rob's point:

To meet current and future social and economic needs, a system of coordinated access to lifelong learning is necessary.

The following three panellists from the Vancouver site of the literacy forum agree with this point:

- **John Boraas** – Dean of the School of Access and First Nations Education and Services at Comosun College, Victoria, B.C.
- **Leona Gadsby** – Director of Community and Adult Literacy for B.C.'s 2010 Legacies NOW
- **Anne Cooper** – Superintendent of Revelstoke School District

To listen to the panel describe the community planning approach to literacy, go to the Community-based literacy planning module at www.Forum2008.cmec.ca.

THE COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY
PLANNING PROCESS

STEPS TO SUCCESS

STAGE 1: GETTING STARTED

STAGE 2: PREPARING THE COMMUNITY PLAN

STAGE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

STAGE 1
GETTING STARTED

✓ *Initiating the conversation*

✓ *Planning the first meeting*

✓ *Roles and responsibilities*

✓ *First meeting*

✓ *Second meeting*

✓ *Forming a task group*

INITIATING THE CONVERSATION

Before any steps can be taken toward creating a community literacy plan, the conversation about literacy must be initiated.

Reach out to others who may be interested — e.g., community leaders and literacy organizations.

Ask others to help coordinate a first community meeting.

PLANNING THE FIRST MEETING

When inviting participants to the first meeting, it is important to be inclusive to ensure that doors are always kept open.

Those who do not wish to participate in the first meeting should still be kept informed of the discussions, and organizers should continue to invite them to meetings.

Clearly communicate to the invitees the purpose of the first meeting: **To come together as a community to explore working in concert to improve literacy levels across the spectrum.**

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Before the meeting, decide who will take responsibility for certain roles and tasks. Planning this in advance is vital to the success of any meeting.

You will need to know who will chair the first meeting, as well as who will find a meeting place, plan for childcare, and record the meeting.

FIRST MEETING

At the start of the first meeting, the chair should introduce himself or herself, review the purpose of the meeting, and ask everyone to state who they are and why they came.

The chair then reviews and leads a discussion on the Guiding Principles:

- Participants will be treated with respect and will be encouraged to share their ideas.
- Communities support networks, partnerships, and mentoring relationships.
- All community members have the opportunity to be part of the planning process.
- Communities respect, build on, and enhance past and current practices.
- Communities value new ways to see current programs as well as ideas for new programs.
- Initiatives promote lifelong learning and improving literacy in children and adults.

Usually, participants are able to devote differing amounts of time to the establishment of a community literacy plan. The chair will lead a discussion on the levels of participation, being careful to ensure that respect is shown for each level:

- **Task Group members** – will take an active role and attend meetings
- **Community Partners** – will attend regular meetings with community members
- **Supporters** – will want to be kept informed

The chair reviews the next meeting and asks people to sign up for one of the participation levels. It is important, before participants leave, to coordinate a second meeting, at which the assets and needs of the community will be discussed.

17 • The first meeting with community members is key to a successful community literacy plan.
• Sandi Hildebrand, a presenter at the Regina site of the literacy forum, initiated a community literacy plan for the town of Duck Lake.

To listen to Sandi describe the community planning approach to literacy, go to the Community-based literacy planning module at www.Forum2008.cmec.ca.

18 SECOND MEETING

The second meeting is a critical step toward the community literacy plan — participants will discuss the assets of the community and its needs.

The chair opens the meeting by reviewing its **purpose**:

To broaden the discussion about literacy as it applies to a specific community

The Chair then leads an exercise that involves sharing ideas and focusing on goals and visions. The idea is to lead the group toward building trust, making connections, and finding common ground to set a direction for the community plan.

We will do that same activity now.

⌖19 ACTIVITY

- Form groups of four or five people.
- Post these questions around the room on chart paper:
  - *How would we like our community to be different five years from now?*
  - *How can we expand choices for literacy and lifelong learning for all ages?*
  - *Is there a need to give people learning opportunities in community service, citizenship, early childhood learning, or pre-vocational training?*

Have groups visit each chart in turn, spending up to five minutes on each question and recording their ideas on the charts.

At a signal, the groups move on to the next chart, and repeat, until all the charts have been visited by each group. Then, invite everyone to look at the charts again with everyone's ideas now recorded.

Address the following questions as a whole group:

- Are there any patterns emerging?
- What are the most important ideas that we see?

Record responses on chart paper, or record responses here:

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NOTE: When this activity is held at the second community meeting, the results set a direction for the community plan and lay the foundation for the Task Group's work.

⌖20 FORMING A TASK GROUP

At the second meeting, a Task Group should be formed, consisting of committed community members who wish to take an active role in the development of the community plan.

Note that **developing the plan will take several months.**

The group should set a date for the first Task Group meeting and a schedule for meetings with community partners over the next six months, to guide the formation of the community plan.

Consider arranging childcare to make it possible for anyone interested to participate. As well, consider ways to provide transportation if necessary.

STAGE 2
PREPARING THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The Task Group now moves into Stage 2 of preparing a community plan. In this stage, the Task Group will follow seven steps to meet goals and write the plan. (Details follow in later slides.)

✓ *First Task Group meeting*

✓ *Develop a Community Profile—What is your community like today?*

✓ *Develop a Community Literacy Inventory—What literacy assets, funding sources, resources, and programs are already in your community?*

✓ *Set Goals—What do you want to do?*

✓ *Create an Action Plan—How will you do it?*

✓ *Create an Evaluation Process—How will you know if you are successful?*

✓ *Write the Community Plan—Summary, process, profile, plan, and budget*

FIRST TASK GROUP MEETING

At the first Task Group meeting, a facilitator should be selected. This person should be:

* Neutral
* A skilled communicator
* A good organizer
* Familiar with conflict resolution strategies
* Experienced in chairing meetings

1. Appoint someone to record your meetings and to distribute notes to Task Group members.
2. At this meeting, the stage should be set by discussing these questions:
   ○ *What is our purpose?*
   ○ *What is our vision/ideal picture of the future?*

Activity for the first Task Group meeting:

The results of this activity will describe the vision of literacy for the community.

* Using five sheets of chart paper around the room, complete the statement:
  "Life for _____ in our community would be better if…"
* Participants fill in the blank for: preschool age, school age, young adults, adults, seniors (put these headings on the chart paper).
* Discuss the results of each group.

ACTIVITY

REVIEWING A SAMPLE PLAN

Take ten minutes to review a sample community-based literacy plan.

After reviewing the plan, take another ten minutes to discuss as a group:

What stands out about this plan?

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Whose needs are met by this plan?

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How will the community sustain this plan?

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24 ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Collaborating with community members to create a step-by-step plan to improve community literacy sounds straightforward… but there will be challenges. Listen as John Boraas (at the Vancouver site) and Bev Kirby (at the Saint John site) describe struggles, benefits, and lessons learned.

To listen to John and Bev describe the community planning approach to literacy, go to the Community-based literacy planning module at www.Forum2008.cmec.ca.

ACTIVITY

After listening to John and Bev, think about the goal of community-based literacy planning:

To build a system to sustain lifelong learning for all community members

In a five-minute group discussion, ask whether you think the advantages of working toward this model outweigh

the challenges in making it happen?

Advantages

Challenges

DEVELOP A COMMUNITY PROFILE

It is time to find out about your community today, to help determine where you want to go. A community profile briefly describes the historical, geographic, social, and economic context of your community. Gathering this information into a community profile will serve as one basis of discussion about your community, and will help place focus on necessary initiatives for your community plan.

The Task Group will need to

- Identify the community and its geographic location

- Provide a brief community history

- Develop a demographic scan that includes information on the age distribution, marital status, and ethnic backgrounds of your community; include a comparison with provincial averages

- Compare the level of schooling of your community with the provincial averages

- Describe the economic situation of your community — main industries, businesses, unemployment rates, and trends

- Identify the main social and economic issues in your community that can be addressed by a community literacy initiative

TIPS:

- Community profile data of StatsCanada: www.statcan.ca/english/edu (click on Community Profiles)

- Local public and private agencies may also have developed profiles that could contain much of the necessary data for your community profile. Check what exists with school districts, colleges, town administrations, chambers of commerce, and tourist bureaus.

26 DEVELOP A COMMUNITY LITERACY INVENTORY

The purpose of developing a community literacy inventory is to find out about your community today: What are the current literacy assets, funding sources, resources, and programs that already exist?

Your community literacy inventory will list literacy programs and resources.

- How will you find out about other resources that you may not know about?

Record the names of programs and resources on a matrix divided into lifespan stages (birth to 5 years; kindergarten to grade 3; grades 4 to 7; grades 8 to 9; grades 10 to 12; young adults; adults; seniors).

As this information is collected, look at transition periods as people move from one stage to another, e.g., from pre-school to kindergarten, or from secondary school to the work world.

Gather information about programs from service providers:

- Who and how many does a program serve, and when does it occur?
- What are the goals?
- How is it staffed? (volunteers, paid staff)
- What resources do you have? (funding, training, personnel)
- What are the greatest successes?
- What more would you like to do to make the service better for participants?
- Are there possible links with other existing programs?

Evaluate the literacy inventory, looking for gaps, links, and overlaps in the literacy assets.

- Explore the strengths, opportunities, needs, and challenges:
  - *What do we do well already?*
  - *What's happening now that we could work with, make use of, or benefit from?*
  - *Who do we need?*
  - *What could stop us or get in our way, inside or outside the community?*

27 SET GOALS

You now have a vision of the literacy services you would like to have in your community, and an inventory of your current community programs. It is time to choose areas of focus.

Set Goals – What do we want to achieve?

- Choose areas of focus: Which needs will be addressed in the short term, and which will be addressed over time? **Use a consensus-building strategy rather than voting to determine these.**
- Create "goal statements" for each need to be addressed. These statements broadly describe what you want to do, e.g., "More pre-school children will have the opportunity to develop early literacy skills."

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

The action plan describes what you are going to do.

Take one area of focus and explore all the ways you could take action in this area to achieve your goals.

An action plan describes what will be done, in detail:

- What tasks need to be done to reach the objective?
- Who needs to be involved in this activity, and who will make sure it happens?
- What materials, partners, places, skills, and knowledge are needed?
- When do these activities need to be done?

28 CREATE AN EVALUATION PROCESS

It is important to monitor your plan so you know if you are successful.

- Write a success statement for each area of focus that describes how things will look if you are successful, e.g., "We will know we have been successful when…"
- Communicate with stakeholders (funders, providers, participants, community members) who can provide feedback.

29 WRITE THE COMMUNITY PLAN

You have all the pieces prepared — now it is time to put them together in a plan. Your community literacy plan should include:

1. **Summary** – briefly describes the process and plan
2. **The Process** – Who are the Task Group members, and how were the areas of need chosen?
3. **The Profile** – summarizes the community profile, the literacy inventory, gaps, and links
4. **The Plan** – includes the action plan and success statements for each area of focus

STAGE 3
IMPLEMENTATION

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Implementing the community literacy plan is the culmination of all the planning. It is now time for real action to begin on all the chosen areas of focus.

Remember to consider using volunteers as a resource in your community — they may welcome the opportunity to participate in your projects.

It is the Task Group's responsibility to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the plan.

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ONGOING TASKS — KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Everyone who was involved in creating the community literacy plan, providing information or advice for the plan, or offering assistance, will want to ensure the plan's successful implementation. Ongoing tasks to follow that are "keys to success" include:

- Task Group should continue to meet monthly.
- Revisit the action plan continuously—evaluate progress.
- Hold a community partners' meeting—provide a progress report.
- Celebrate progress—have an open house.
- Communicate regularly with all stakeholders.
- Keep the media informed—assists in achieving broad public support.

33

You have now completed the Community-Based Literacy Planning module.

Some things to remember:

- Many people are doing a lot of terrific things in communities.
- Community plans find gaps and fill them.

This module ends with a final clip from **Leona Gadsby**, panellist at the Vancouver CMEC literacy forum site. Also included in this last clip are clips from a video that was created in B.C. by journalist Lucy Hyslop for 2010 Legacies Now. Lucy visited communities across B.C. to observe community planning in action.

Thank you for participating in this module.