A GUIDE FOR PLANNING A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION FOR MUNICIPAL WORKPLACE LITERACY PROGRAMS

A Joint Initiative By:
Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA)
and
Workplace Education Centre, ABC Canada

Workplace Education Centre
Centre d'éducation en milieu de travail
ABC
1 800 303 1004

April 1998

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L.E. Strang
President, CAMA

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Section I – Preface

If you are reading this guide, you are probably taking part in some aspect of a program to help workers in your organization improve their basic skills. Basic skills generally include reading, writing, math as well as technological skills necessary for the work environment[1]. Your committnent to the program will enable you to make a valuable contribution to your team and to evaluating the success of the program.

A.   Why do program evaluation?

A program evaluation will help your team analyze and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the program. It will help to identify the things that worked well and why, as well as the things that could be improved. On-going evaluation enables all the partners to assess how successful the program is in achieving results and meeting its goals.

An evaluation should be a joint effort between all of the partner groups. It should be designed so that:
- all of the partners learn as much as possible;
- the partners can act on what has been learned to improve the design of future activities;
- the experience of the program can be shared with other organizations that operate workplace literacy programs.

Ideally, the evaluation process should be planned when the workplace basic skills program is being established.

B.   Who should do the evaluation?

Workplace basic skills planning committees are made up of people who have a real interest in guiding a program toward success. The committee members. represent the key stakeholders, such as managers, unions, and workers, and may have different goals and expectations of the program.

The committee members jointly define the program goals and create an implementation plan to achieve these goals. They must also ensure that they have a plan for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the program at key points during its implementation. Regular monitoring will tell the committee if the program is achieving its goals, and meeting the needs of participants.

The planning committee may choose to work with an outside resource person (a facilitator), but the committee should have the overall responsibility for the evaluation.

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[1] Nutter, P. *The Writing is on the Wall.* Investing in Municipal Workforce Literacy.

C.   What are the first steps?

Before your committe starts planning the evaluation strategy, consider the following:

❑ Does the committee have representatives from all the interest groups in the workplace, and if not, who else should be on the committee?

❑ Does the committee have the support of the senior levels of the organization to enable it to carry out its work, including the evaluation strategy?

❑ Does the committee have the resources it needs to carry out this work, for example: are meeting rooms available, is there clerical support for paperwork that needs to be done, do committee members have adequate time to handle the responsibilities of this task, are resources available to work with an outside facilitator if necessary?

D.   How can this workbook help?

This workbook describes a step-by-step process for developing an evaluation strategy. This approach is based on collaboration and on-going assessment. The workbook describes how to prepare for the evaluation, how to plan the evaluation, and how to carry it out. It also offers a list of resources that may be of value and interest to the committee.

Section 2 of the workbook describes the principles that have been demonstrated by successful workplace literacy programs in municipalities across Canada. Section 3 introduces key points to guide your evaluation. Section 4 provides working documents to help you plan and carry out the evaluation process. Section 5 provides tips for reporting your findings to all interested parties. Section 6 will help you to assess the evaluation process, and Section 7 provides a list of additional resources.

We hope this workbook will help you develop a strategy for effective collaboration among the partners in your municipal workplace literacy program. Good luck in your efforts!

Section II – Background

A.   Basic skills for today's workplace

Today's workplace is changing rapidly in many different ways. Downsizing and restructuring mean that people must have a broad and adaptable set of skills to ensure job security. Increased attention to health and safety regulations requires people to learn about new laws and safer ways of doing their work. Changing technology and equipment demand that people learn new skills to get the job done. Changes like these mean that many workers have to use reading, writing, math and communication skills more than ever before, or in different ways.

As our workplaces become more complex and our jobs more challenging, employees at all levels of an organization need to have a sound foundation of basic skills in reading, writing, math, and computer knowledge upon which to develop new skills and knowledge.

Think of three ways in which your job has changed in the past 5 years and list them below. Compare your list with the person next to you to see what is similar and what is different.

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

3. _____

   _____

B.   The CAMA investment in basic skill development

In 1995 the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) carned out a research project to see how basic skills development in the areas of reading, writing, math and oral communication might be offered to municipal employees. It also looked at how the employer and employees would benefits from such programs. The result of this research laid the groundwork for the publication *The Writing's on the Wall: Investing in Municipal Workforce Literacy* (Nutter, August 1996).

The Writing's on the Wall provides an overview of the basic skills demanded of municipal government employees. It explodes myths about basic skills, describes partnerships and processes that underlie successful workforce programs, and offers a description of municipal

workforce programs across Canada that offer basic skills.

The report shows that, although all municipalities started with a similar goal, each one created a program to suit their specific situation. The case studies demonstrate that there is no "one way" to tackle basic skill training! For example, compare the program offered by the City of Kitchener and the program offered by the City of Saint John.

How do they differ and how are they the same?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

C.   Principles for Success

CAMA's research demonstrated that the following principles guided each of these successful municipal programs:

- ✓ The approach is collaborative in nature, and all partners have input into the design and delivery of the program.
- ✓ The approach accommodates the diversity of participants' cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.
- ✓ The approach empowers people, recognizing and building on their extensive experience and abilities, and allowing for voluntary participation in programs.
- ✓ Programs are organized, planned and delivered effectively.

Section III - Introduction to Program Evaluation

A.   The Committee

The workplace basic skills planning committee is best suited to undertake the evaluation process. Its members created the goals, have a keen interest in ensuring the program's success, and have access to the decision-makers within the organization. Members of this committee may include:

- workers who are involved in learning in the program
- management representatives
- union representatives
- a representative of a funding organization
- program instructors

These people generally are committed to the program and have the time to help with the evaluation.

If the committee decides that it wants the help of a facilitator, they may choose a member of the planning committee or an outside resource person who is trained as a facilitator.

B.   The role of a facilitator

A facilitator can assist the committee by guiding it through the evaluation planning process. A facilitator can help the committee keep a clear focus, make sure that the evaluation sticks to its time frame and budget (if it has one) and provide an objective view of the program. The facilitator should be familiar with the basic skills program and its goals. However, the facilitator should not have direct involvement in the basic skills program either as an instructor or a participant.

C.   Two kinds of evaluation

Most people have been involved in some type of evaluation either at work, in community activities or even at home. It may not be a formal evaluation process, but every time we look at how something went and what could be done better next time, it's a form of evaluation. This workbook describes two kinds of evaluation: on-going and summative (or final).

Often when people think of evaluation they think of summative evaluation, in which a project or program is assessed at the end of its term. Summative evaluation is like a "report card" because it details the progress made, and makes recommendations for future program initiatives. On-going evaluation is different. It is a process whereby the program or project is monitored regularly while it is taking place so that adjustments and improvements can be made immediately. Both types of evaluations are important for different reasons.

Both types of evaluation should be based on a common understanding of the goals of the program and the results you expect to achieve. Both types of evaluation will find out:
– what has happened and why;
– whether the results are what you expected;
– whether some things happened that you did not expect;
– what factors made the program work well;
– what factors should be changed to improve the program.

Remember, that an evaluation should not only collect positive information. Things that did not go well can provide valuable lessons to improve the program.

D.   Your experience with evaluation

Take a minute and consider situations where you have been involved in evaluation - either formally or informally. Try to answer the following questions briefly. Then compare your experience with other members of your group.

1. Why did you do the evaluation?
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Who did the evaluating?
_____
_____
_____

3. What changed as a result of the evaluation?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

E.   Pausing for thought: A case study

Read the case study below (from The Writing's on the Wall) and consider the two questions which follow it. Then discuss your ideas with the other members of your group and try to reach agreement.

This exercise will prepare you for planning the evaluation of your own municipal workplace basic skills program.

Case Study A

The City of Hamilton' s Literacy in the Workplace Program runs each year for sixteen weeks from December to March during work time. The Worker Education Centre (WEC), a project of the Hamilton and District Labour Council, is the educational provider. WEC instructors, who may be municipal personnel, are trained by a WEC coordinator. Workplace materials, generic teaching aids and community information are used for instruction.

Workers are encouraged to participate in the literacy program by way of memoranda to all staff, notices on bulletin boards and individual meetings with supervisors, managers and union representatives. Recruitment is the joint responsibility of the unions and branch managers.

1. If you were facilitating an evaluation for this program, who might you suggest be on the evaluation committee?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Given this description of the project, what information do you think each stakeholder would want to find out?

a) Workers in the basic skills program

   _____
   _____

b) Management

   _____
   _____

c) union representatives

   _____
   _____

d) funding organizations

   _____
   _____

e) program instructions

   _____
   _____

Ready to move on to planning your own program evaluation? Great!

Section IV - Working Together, Planning Together

STEP 1

Establish Expectations and Goals for the Evaluation

One way of creating goals for the program evaluation is to first ask yourself and others what their expectations are for the work they're about to undertake. Committee members could write a statement about what they expect the program evaluation to achieve, and then share the ideas with the group. The exercise at the end of Section 3 may help you get started.

I hope that the program evaluation will:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Sharing ideas about expectations will ensure that everyone understands and agrees with what the program evaluation might achieve.

People's expectations can be restated as goals for the program evaluation. For example, if a person's statement was "1 hope that the evaluation will help ensure that every worker has the chance to participate in learning at any time," then one of the goals for the program evaluation might be:

- To ensure that every worker is made aware of the opportunities for learning and that conditions make it easy for people to participate.

Try using this approach to translate each committee members' expectations into goal statements for the program evaluation. List the goals on the next page.

Goals for the Program Evaluation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Does everyone agree that these are good goals for the program evaluation? Sometimes it can be important to list them in order of importance.

Consider as well how you will evaluate the process you are beginning. How will you ensure that all stakeholders participate? How will you monitor the process to be sure that it stays focused and on track? Section VI provides details to help you monitor the evaluation process.

STEP 2

Establish Program Goals and Components

Program goals

Now that goals for the evaluation have been decided, committee members should review the original program goals and decide if they are still appropriate, or if they need revision.

If no goals were set for the program, then the committee will need to do that now, since no program can be evaluated without a clear statement of what the program hopes to achieve. You may want to start by brainstorming ideas, then reorganize them into a list of goals, just as you did for the evaluation goals.

For example, program goals might be:
- to offer reading, math, oral communication and writing courses to workers to meet the challenges we face at work and in the community;
- to encourage the organization to develop a policy for using plain language in all communications;
- to manage the programs in a cost-effective way so they can be maintained;
- to ensure that the program meets the education and training needs of workers;
- to create a climate in the municipal workplace that encourages learning at a11levels of the organization.

Write your program goals here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Program components

Now review the program components. Program components are specific learning opportunities that employees have said they would like as part of a basic skills program. Decide if the components listed below are needed in your program, or others that suit the needs of your workplace.

- Basic keyboarding skills
- Basic computer skills
- Reading comprehension for workplace documents
- Communicating effectively
- English as a Second Language
- French as a Second Language

Write your program components here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

STEP 3

Plan the Details of the Evaluation

Once the program goals and components have been decided, the committee can think about, talk about, and decide:

- what kind of information is required by each stakeholder group;
- why that information is required;
- how to collect the information;
- what results they hope the evaluation will reveal.

The information collected in the evaluation should reflect the goals set for the program.

i. Who wants the information?

There are a number of possible stakeholders who might want to know how the program is going. The most common stakeholders are:

- the participants/ learners
- management
- union

- instructors/ coordinator
- funder
- workers who have not yet participated in program
- families of workers
- co-workers

Some of these stakeholders might be considered "primary" audiences (e.g. participants, instructors), and others as "secondary" (e.g. families, co-workers). You will probably want to focus your evaluation on the information required by the people identified as the primary audience for the evaluation to ensure the best use of your resources.

ii. What information do they want?

You will probably notice that some of the information people want is related to process, such as, " is the program operating well". Other information will be related to the results produced (such as how many people have participated, how many hours it takes to complete the program). Information of both types is valuable and will help the committee and others make decisions for the future of the program.

Current or potential might want to know:

- Is the program user-friendly: does everyone have access at convenient times and places?
- What other courses might be offered in addition to those currently available?

Management might want to know:

- How many people have participated?
- How has participation benefitted the people who took part and the organization?

Unions might want to know:

- In what ways has the program benefitted members?
- How do the goals of the program support the values of the union?
- Has participation in the union increased?
- Are members more aware of their rights?

iii. Why do people want this information?

Generally speaking, stakeholders want to know this information for one, or all, of three reasons:

- to decide if the program should continue to be funded/supported;
- to decide how to integrate the program and its goals with other organizational and/or union initiatives (policies, HR programs, etc);

- to decide what improvements need to be made in the program. Your evaluation should answer the following questions to assess the effectiveness of the program:
  – Did the learners like the program? (reaction)
  – Did the learners learn new knowledge/skills? (learning)
  – Did the learners use the new knowledge/skills? (transfer)
  – Did the program produce the expected results? (impact)

iv. How can the information be obtained?

Now that the committee has decided what it needs to know, it will need to plan how to get the information it needs and from whom. The most common ways to collect the information are:

- one-to-one interviews with various stakeholders
- focus group discussions
- review of surveys, such as course evaluation forms

Other supporting documentation might also be used, such as:

- budget reports (to evaluate funding requirements)
- instructor's reports
- comments or stories from participants, instructors or supervisory staff
- employee participation on committees or other training programs.

v. Defining results

It is useful for the committee to identify not only the information that people want and why, but also the results that they hope to see, so that they can compare the actual results with what was expected. Remember, however, that the actual results may not always be what you expect. Be open to possibilities - both good and bad - and see what you can learn from them.

vi. Defining indicators of success

Indicators should be appropriate for your project, its size and complexity. Try to limit the number of indicators to no more than three for each result. Indicators should be:

- clear and simple to use;
- relevant and appropriate for the expected results;
- useful over the whole life of the project;
- based on accurate and reliable information;
- cost-effective to carry out;
- measured quantitatively when possible (eg. number of people involved, progress in a specific period of time etc);
- qualitative when appropriate (eg. descriptions of changes, personal testimonials etc);
- easy to understand.

The indicators you define should help you assess the on-going progress of your project as well as the end results. Regular feedback, analysis and assessment of progress will help you identify where you need to make adjustments to improve your project.

Case Study B

In planning its program evaluation, the management of the City of Hamilton decides it would like to lmow how many workers will participate in the program in the next 12 month period.

It wants this information so that it can decide the level of financial support for the program after the 12 month evaluation period.

How the Information will be collected: The evaluation committee decides to document participation levels throughout the program, and also to interview workers who have not participated to determine how the program might be made more attractive and accessible.

Indicator of success: The committee decides that a key success indicator is that 5% of the population had participated in learning.

Interviews with workers will give the committee ideas to improve participation and help them reach the 5% level they have set as a successful result.

A chart, such as the one on the following page, can be an effective way to organize all of the information required for your evaluation.

Who	What information	Why	How to get it	Key success indicator

STEP 4

Create a Timeline

Some of the information you need should be collected on an on-going and regular basis throughout the time that the program is operating, while other information will be collected only at the end of the program. It is important to decide at the beginning when you need to collect this information from the stakeholders.

Other kinds of activities should also be planned - for example committee meetings to monitor the evaluation process. Once again, a chart can be a useful tool to organize and track all the required activities.

The chart on the following page shows a timeline that might be used for the City of Hamilton project. Not all of these activities may apply to your committee, or your committee may have others it wishes to add, but this chart suggests a framework for ensuring that evaluation activities are carried out when they are needed.

Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec Jan	Feb
Hold regular planning committee meetings	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊
Get ongoing reports from instructors	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊
Look at enrollment numbers	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊
Collect stories	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊	◊
Do performance review of instructors			◊			◊			
Review workload of instructors		◊							
Write interim revort				◊					
Plan end-of-cycle evaluation • Revisit evaluation plan • fine-tune questions • Decide when to do it • Decide who ...							◊		
Do end-of-cvcle evaluation								◊	
Complete end-of-cycle pilot evaluation report								◊	
Make reconunendations to Plant committee								◊	
Share results with others outside company									◊
Who will do it									

From: Collaborative Evaluation: A Handbook for Workplace Development Planners,
ABC CANADA

STEP 5

Decide Who Will Collect the Information

Now that you have a schedule for the evaluation activities, it is necessary to decide who might be the most appropriate person! people to collect that information. If you use a collaborative approach, all of the stakeholders, including the participants in the program, may be involved in some way. The evaluation planning committee should work with the facilitator to decide the best way to collect the required information. Once you have decided who should do each of the activities, fill in the last line of the chart created for the timeline.

STEP 6

Develop a Communication Plan

The planning committee should decide and document when and how to communicate the findings of the evaluation. A good communications strategy ensures that all stakeholders know about the program and its progress toward its stated goals.

There are several common ways to communicate evaluation activities and findings:

- by publishing regular Evaluation Committee meeting minutes
- by writing about them in company and union newsletters
- by regular presentations of information at key team meetings
- by posting information on bulletin boards
- by writing interim and final reports that are available to any interested person

The committee will need to decide when to communicate the information, how to best convey it, and who will be responsible for this. Using the chart on the following page will help organize and document the committee's decisions.

What information	When	How	Who responsible

STEP 7

Use the Information to Refine the Program

If your on-going monitoring shows that program activities are not producing the expected results, the planning committee should analyze why, then re-evaluate or redesign the activities. Remember to look at how the program is being carried out as well - perhaps what is needed is a new approach to the activities.

Section V - The Final Report

The final report is a document that includes a compilation and analysis of all the data collected during the program evaluation. It is a key part of the communication plan.

A.   Analyze the Information

The committee will have to analyze the information collected throughout the evaluation period. This is usually done with the help of a facilitator. Analyzing the information means seeing the patterns that emerge from the data and understanding the significance of those patterns, as they may cany implications for revising or improving the program. Analyzing the information also involves pulling out the information wanted by various stakeholders during the evaluation planning process.

B.   Write the report

Complex information can often be conveyed in a brief and effective manner by using a chart. Consider using charts and testimonials of participants to report much of the evaluation findings.

Sometimes a final evaluation report is quite lengthy, and not all of the information is interesting for all of the readers. A short, concise Executive Summary that focuses on the key points of the evaluation may be a useful format for circulating the evaluation findings to more people.

C.   Check for plain language

Make sure that the evaluation report and the Executive Summary are written clearly, using language that is easy for most readers to understand. Avoid using a lot of jargon or technical terms.

Make sure that the organization of information and the page layout are clear and easy to follow. Whenever possible, use headings or sub-titles to help organize the material-for your readers. Ensure that the type size is large enough to read easily, and that there is a good balance between text and white space on each page. A page that is dense with text can discourage even the most motivated reader.

D.   Distribute the report

The Executive Summary should be made available to everyone in the organization. You may decide to distribute the full report to funders and other key stakeholders, or just to those who request it. Sometimes, sister cities and townships may wish to receive a copy of the full report so that they can understand the programming possibilities for their organizations.

Section VI - Evaluating the Process

An on-going, collaborative evaluation process can be lengthy and labour intensive. The process does, however, provide constant feedback which can be used in a timely manner to revise and refine the program.

You may find that the evaluation process itself may require revision as it progresses. The people involved will have suggestions about how to improve the process, and will benefit from the opportunity to share ideas with other stakeholders. Evaluating the process can be fruitful for all.

How you will evaluate the process should, ideally, be considered in the initial planning stages (see Section IV). It will be easier to evaluate the process if you have defmed your expectations at the beginning.

Consider the following options and choose at least one way in which you will evaluate the process:

❑ Develop a set of success indicators for the evaluation process as a committee during the initial planning phase. Review these indicators at the end of the project to see how well you have met your own expectations.
❑ At a strategic point in the process, use a questionnaire to survey participants in the process for their impressions and suggestions. Discuss the results as a committee and decide on what changes should be made to complete the process.
❑ Host a brownbag lunch, or hold an organization-wide forum, to learn people's responses to the process and get recommendations for changes.
❑ Interview key stakeholders and include their comments about the process in the final evaluation report.

Key questions that the committee will want to ask include:

• What did you think the purpose of the evaluation was?
• In what ways was that purpose achieved?
• What did you like about the process?
• What changes would you like to suggest for future evaluation activities?
• Were the original expectations met?
• What follow-up activities should be undertaken to ensure any changes had a positive impact on the program?

Section VII – Additional Resources

Other resources that may be helpful to the committee as it plans the evaluation:

- ✓ Jurmo, Paul and Folinsbee, S., 1994, *Collaborative Evaluation: A Han.dbook for Workplace Development Planners*, ABC Canada

- ✓ Conference Board of Canada, 1997, *The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace*

- ✓ ABC Canada, 1997, *The Impact of Basic Skills Programs on Canadian Workplaces*

- ✓ Mikulecky, L. and Lloyd, P., 1993, *The Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs: A New Model for Evaluating the Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs*

- ✓ ABC Canada, 1996, *Principles of Good Practice in Workplace/Workforce Education*

- ✓ Sarmiento, Anthony and Kay, Ann, 1990, *Worker-centred Learning: A Union Guide to Workplace Literacy*, AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR COPIES:

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