BEFORE YOU START

Developing A Community Needs Assessment

for Adult Literacy Programming

Manitoba
Education
and Training

Introduction

This package of information was developed to help communities prepare for an adult literacy program. Before a community can receive funding from the Province, the Community Needs Assessment must be completed.

Other communities may find the package helpful to develop community awareness about adult literacy needs or the different kinds of adult basic education programs that might be considered.

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Why Do A Community Needs Assessment?

Many communities are aware of the literacy needs of people in their community. They are aware that large numbers of individuals did not complete high school education, dropped out, are unemployed, or need to up-grade their skills to get advancement. Clearly, then communities **know** about the literacy needs of their members. However, just because we know that a need exists does not mean that a literacy program can succeed. In order to succeed a literacy program must have the following in place:

a) A solid base of community support.

People in the community must support the program. Even though a community receives funding for a literacy program, funding levels are never sufficient to provide all the necessary conditions. Usually communities provide space and facilities for the program (through community centres, community schools, band offices, etc.). Quite often, communities provide free telephone, postage, photocopying, etc. Therefore, the program funding pays for the instructor's salary, learning materials and learner supports such as transportation and child care. If broad community support does not exist, then the program is not likely to succeed.

Individuals in the community must believe the program will be useful to all of its members not just those unemployed or the youth in the community. The community must believe that by offering an adult basic education program in the community, the whole community will profit. They must feel that the program is a positive benefit to all.

b) An informed based of community groups for referrals.

In order for a program to succeed, all the local community groups must know about the program, understand how it is run, and provide it with regular referrals. People in the community must understand that the adult basic education program is not like school. They must realize that learning will be individualized and proceed at the learner's own rate. Community groups must be educated about the reasons people have literacy problems and the kinds of specific literacy needs that students have.

Because students in programs are adults, they often must interrupt their educational program for personal reasons. Students may attend erratically or may have to drop out for months at a time. Students may have to deal with changes in employment, problems with housing, sick children or other family demands, or personal difficulties. All these challenges can interrupt a learning program. Thus, many adults do not have a smooth path for their learning.

For these reasons, most literacy programs have continuous intake which means that potential referrals must be regular to the program from community groups.

Community groups include: business groups (local Chamber of Commerce or business association), service clubs (such as Lions or Rotary), interest groups, social clubs (Girl Guides, Scouts), government agencies (Canada Employment Centres, social services, public health), ethnic groups (Heritage Language, cultural groups), local newspapers or media, etc. Other appropriate agencies might include health and social service providers such as public health nurses. These groups know their members. The more groups that know about the program, the more appropriate referrals the program will receive.

c) A committed group of volunteers.

Volunteers must be available not only for tutoring but more importantly for a range of program development and support roles. Volunteers must be available to promote and publicize the program, develop print and media materials to promote and market the program, do community fund raising, develop learning materials for specific learners, provide help in transportation and child care for the students in the program, and serve as program managers on the Literacy Working Group.

Steps to Conducting the Community Needs Assessment

The Community Needs Assessment consists of a number of surveys that are targeted at businesses, service agencies and potential students in the community. The surveys indicate how aware the community is about literacy needs. More importantly, the surveys often point out misconceptions about literacy that many people have. For example, people may assume that only immigrants or minority groups have literacy needs. The Statistics Canada Survey of 1990 showed that literacy needs are experienced across all social, economic and ethnic groups.

The Needs Assessment will help the community determine what level of community awareness about literacy exists. (See Appendix I for a short description of the levels of Community awareness about Literacy.)

Step One: Formation of a Study Group to conduct the Needs Assessment.

The Literacy and Continuing Education Branch does not fund a community needs assessment. Communities must find the resources from volunteers or their own funds. Therefore, a group of individuals responsible for conducting the research must be formed. The responsibilities of this group will be to make sure that a cross section of employers, service agencies and potential students is surveyed.

Forms and surveys are available with this package of information. (See Appendix C.) If the community has funding from other projects to do the Community Needs Assessment, they may hire a community individual to conduct the surveys and do some literacy outreach.

Step Two: Formulate lists of people to be surveyed.

The group will next need to gather information about people to be surveyed. Local newspapers can be helpful in promoting the survey and promoting information about literacy development. It is recommended that a cross-section of businesses, service clubs and agencies, educational providers be surveyed. You must include surveys of potential students in your Needs Assessment. These students do not have to agree to attend the program, but they will provide essential information about the kind of program that will need to be developed to be successful in your-community.

<u>Step Three</u>: Advise the groups to be surveyed that you will be calling to gather the information.

Letters need to be mailed to all the people on the lists you developed. In some cases, you may decide to enclose the survey and ask them to fill it out. In other cases, you may wish to personally call on individuals and/or fill in the survey by telephone.

<u>Step Four:</u> Collate the results.

The results of the surveys must be gathered and tabulated.

<u>Step Five</u>: Write a report.

A short report which accompanies the survey results should be provided. (See Appendix D for a format and sample report.) A plan for how the literacy program will proceed should be a part of this plan. The plan should include information on where the program will be located, members of the program managers group (Literacy Working Group), how recruitment of students will take place, and what publicity and promotion will be included in the program development.

Appendix A: Community Readiness for an Adult Basic Education Program

Level 1:

Only a few people in the community believe there is a need for adult literacy programming. Usually, these are not the learners themselves but educators or politicians who have heard something about adult literacy. Before a program should begin this community will need to do a fair bit of awareness raising about adult education in general. It may take several years to prepare this community for a literacy program.

Level 2:

A number of people in the community believe that there is a need for adult literacy programming. Surveys or general interest have convinced these people that the need exists. A few people are willing to volunteer their time and funding may or not be available.

The problem with beginning a program at this level of development is that learner recruitment is usually very small and after an initial intake the program is forgotten. Some communities may go after funding in order to bring work into the community rather than to build a base of adult education programming that will survive.

Programs in these communities usually close as soon as funding is withdrawn. There is not commitment to continue the program beyond the money it brings in to the community. There is little recognition of the relationship of education to job creation, self-esteem, and community and family relationship building.

Level 3:

A community needs assessment has established that students can and will come to the program once it is set up.

A core of volunteers is available with a commitment to doing publicity, on-going recruitment, and awareness raising about adult basic education.

Programs in this level may survive if funding levels change. However, they often do not understand the need to carry on publicity and recruitment campaigns even while the program is running. Learners may or may not be part of the planning procedure so that confusion exists around who the program is targeted at and what the results of the programming will be.

Often communities at this level of development have a limited range and number of volunteers, so that once the initial intake of volunteers burns out, there are no others to take their place.

Level 4:

A core of major players in the community (i.e. politicians, community groups, elders, media people, educators, government representatives) believe in and understand what adult literacy programming is about. Regular publicity initiatives are undertaken so that the community is well informed about the range of programming available.

Student recruitment is not a problem since the program is sensitive to potential barriers to learning. The community welcomes the program and sees that it is "not just for young people, or not just for getting jobs." Learners are represented on program development and evaluation committees.

A solid instructor with a good reputation in the community is responsible for coordination and program development. Students who attend the program feel they are treated like adults and program managers understand that an adult literacy program will function differently from schools-based programming.

The community understands the nature of adult education provision. They realize that the program model may change as the needs of the community change. Adult basic education provision is flexible and available to a range of needs and requests. A literacy support group provides direction and imagination to the rest of the community around potential program developments.

Appendix B: Case Study: A typical adult basic education program

Setting:

The program is located in a community centre, church basement, or library. Few programs are located in schools because of the negative associations learners have with school buildings. A classroom is allocated to the program with locked storage space available. Furniture consists of tables and chairs (not desks) arranged in an informal manner. Many programs have had "old" computers donated so that students can learn computer literacy skills.

Instructor:

The best instructors in literacy are imaginative, flexible teachers who are excited about learning. Although they don't always have "professional" qualifications, these instructors are avid readers and writers and are eager to participate in their own training and professional development. Since curricula is individualized for each student, instructors must develop a wide range of materials and provide continuous resources for learners.

Students:

Adult learners come to basic education to upgrade their skills for a range of reasons. These may be personal, or social, or in order to get a new job, or improve employment prospects. A typical group of students might include: 1) a parent who wants to learn to read to his or her children, 2) an employed person who must upgrade because of changes in the workplace, 3) a person on social assistance who needs work preparation skills, 4) a student who dropped out of school in sixth grade who wants to get a General Education Diploma (G.E.D.), 5) a person who wants to enter a training program at one of the province's community colleges, and 6) a person who wants more control in his or her own life and must learn such things as banking skills or how to read specific material.

Curricula:

Adult literacy programs develop individualized curricula for each student. Since the individual needs of students vary from program to program, programs must make use of public libraries as well as using program money to buy books and materials. Many instructors create materials from newspapers, magazines and other print material. Programs collect materials from the community, government agencies, and other literacy resources.

<u>How does instruction take place</u>?

The program is usually funded as a part-time educational program for about 10 to 15 hours per week. Students attend voluntarily and do not get paid to attend. Groups meet on a sessional basis (from about 10 to 15 students meet for at least two times per week.) The scheduling of meeting times is determined by the students. Students work in small groups, with volunteers or with the instructor. Some programs operate a one-to-one tutoring model, but more commonly programs are organized on a sessional model. For example, one class might be offered on Monday and Wednesday evening and another on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon.

<u>What supports are available</u>?

Transportation and child care costs may prevent students from attending adult basic education programs. Therefore, many programs set aside part of their grant allocation to cover these costs. Other programs use volunteers as drivers and still others do extra funding raising activities to cover these costs.

Appendix C: Sample Surveys

The following surveys have been developed to help communities find out the information about both literacy needs and literacy awareness in their community. These survey forms may be amended or changed depending on the particular flavour of your community. It is recommended, however, that members from the following groups be surveyed:

- local businesses
- social service and health agencies
- social clubs and interest groups
- educational providers
- prospective students or learners

Most of the surveys can be mailed to these people in the community. Individuals identified as prospective students should be interviewed person to person. The interviewer should fill out the form in collaboration with the student. Interviewer} should be sensitive about the literacy abilities of potential students.

Business and Industry Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey is to identify literacy needs in the community.

Name of Firm or Company: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Address:⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Telephone #: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Person completing the survey: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Position or title: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

1) How large is your current workforce?

2) How many new people do you hire each year?

3) What percent of your workforce are:

   a) shop workers _____%   b) managers _____%   c) other _____%

4) How important are reading and/or writing skills for your shop workers? (circle one)

   a) not needed   b) needed very little   c) often needed   d) essential

5) How important are reading and/or writing skills for your managers and other workers? (circle one)

   a) not needed   b) needed very little   c) often needed   d) essential

6) Are you aware of how competent your workers are in reading and writing? How have you determined this?

7)

What do you currently do if you realize workers need help with basic skills?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8)

If a basic education program was available in the community, would your employees be interested?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Questionnaire for Community Groups or Agencies

The purpose of this survey is to identify literacy needs in the community.

Name of Group or Agency: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

Person completing the survey: _____

Position or title: _____

What kind of a group are you?

_____ social club   _____personal interest group   _____job finding agency/ club

_____band council   _____health agency/service   _____social service agency

_____service club   _____community/heritage language group

_____community counselling service   _____other: _____

1) Do you offer any kind of reading and/or writing service for your members or clients?

2) Are you aware of any specific literacy needs in your community? What are they?

3) If there was a local adult basic education program in our community, do you know anyone who you might refer to it?

4) What supports do you think people would need in order to be able to come to adult education classes?

Questionnaire For Educational Providers

The purpose of this survey is to identify literacy needs in the community.

Name of Educational institution: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____

Person completing the survey: _____

Your role/job in the educational institution: _____

1) Are you aware of any members of the community with difficulty in reading and writing?

2) How many parents of children in your school/class do you think might have -, reading and writing needs?

3) How many parents of children in your school/class have indicated an interest in upgrading or adult basic education?

4) Do you think setting up a literacy program in your community is a good idea? Who do you think would be prospective students for this program?

5) What supports could/might your school/institution provide to a local literacy program? (e.g. class space, secretarial support, telephone, photocopying, etc.)

Questionnaire for Potential Students

The purpose of this survey is to identify literacy needs in the community.

I. Background information

    Name: (optional)

    _____

    Age: _____   Male _____   Female _____

    Last grade attended: _____

II. Purposes and perceived value of literacy

        1.   Would you like to read and write better? (probe further if no)

        2.   What would you be able to do with better reading and writing skills that you can't do now?

        3.   What problems do you have now because you don't read and write as well as you'd like to?

        4.   What can people in your community who read and write well do that you cannot?

        5.   If you were to learn to read and write better, what would be your reasons for doing so?

(Interviewer should pause for a general answer and then say, "I am going to read eight possible goals for reading and writing. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being unimportant and 5 being very important), tell me how you would rate these goals for yourself. "

____   1)   (knowledge) To become better informed; to be better at reading and writing; to know more about the world.

___ 2) (personal) To feel better about yourself; to be happier and more self-reliant.

___ 3) (family) To get along better with family members; to be a better parent/grandparent.

___ 4) (community) To understand community problems better and to contribute to their solutions; to be more active in your community.

___ 5) (instrumental) To be able to deal more effectively with daily tasks such as filling out forms, reading sings, writing cheques, etc.

___ 6) (economic) To get a job or get a better job, to do your job better; to make more money.

___ 7) (entertainment) To read stories and magazines; to get pleasure and entertainment form reading and writing.

___ 8) (culture) To study our culture; to write down stories and pass on cultural information.

___ 9) Other reasons:

[Person doing the survey should then do the following. Reread the items the respondent ranked 5, and then ask, "Of these reasons, which one would be the most important to You?"

___ Most highly ranked reason.

III. <u>Past barriers to learning to read and write</u>

1. Why do you think you didn't learn to read and write better when you were younger?

1. 2.Did you go to school? How did you like school? What didn't you like about school? (Possible answers include: being ignored by teacher, too large classes, racism, problems in the family, didn't get along with other kids, etc.)

3. Why did you leave school?

_____

_____

4. Do you think your negative school experiences (if any) affected your learning to read and write? How?

_____

_____

IV. <u>Positive learning environment</u>

1. If you decided to improve your literacy skills, what learning situation would you prefer? (e.g. one-to-one, small group, only women/Aboriginal, informal learning/traditional classroom)

_____

2. Where would you prefer to learn? (own home, community centre, library, someone else's home)

_____

3. What are the things you know how to do well now? (Not reading and writing.) How did you learn them?

_____

_____

4. How do you learn best?

_____

_____

5. What supports would you need (e.g. child care, transportation) in order to attend a reading and writing program?

_____

_____

Appendix D: Sample Community Needs Assessment Report

Name of community group/proposed literacy Program: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone # (day): _____

Names of members of the study group: _____

_____

Background to the Needs Assessment

In this section of the report, you should identify how your community got interested in setting up a literacy program. Why you believed there is a literacy need in your community. How you first established contacts.

Community Contacts (surveys)

This section should list all the people/groups you contacted about the prospect of a literacy program in the community. You should attached statistics about the number of businesses, service clubs and agencies and potential students you surveyed. You do not have to attached all of the completed surveys.

Public Awareness Initiatives

List here all the public awareness tasks you completed. You should include samples of publicity (e.g. posters or brochures) you developed. You should also include a list of groups your study group talked to about a literacy initiative in the community.

Plan of Action

Your plan of action should include the steps you will need to take once funding is secure for your project. Where will the program be located? Who will be the program managers? Who will provide program supports? How will recruitment of students and volunteers take place? What kind of learning program do you think the community wants?

Sample Report of a Community Needs Assessment

Red River Adult Learning Program
Lake Winnipeg, Mb.

Background

For a number of years a small group of people, the principal of the school and the home economist specifically, have been aware of the literacy needs of members of the population. Parents often have difficulty corresponding with the school because of literacy difficulties and more and more individuals indicate confusion about technology and the workplace.

A study group was formed which consisted of the principal, the human relations officer at the local pulp and paper mill, two teachers, members of the community, two churches, and members of two local businesses.

Community Contacts

The following businesses were contacted to complete the survey:

Micro-motors (small electronics firm)
Squeaky Cleaners (dry cleaning business)
Fast Food Heaven (two outlets)
Royal Bank

The following agencies completed surveys:

Community Health Service (public health nurse)
Social Service Agency (social worker)
Canada Employment Centre (counsellor)
Drug Rehab Centre

The following educational institutions completed the surveys:

Four principals from elementary schools
Six teachers from elementary and secondary schools
Two community college instructors
Agriculture extension worker
Two school counsellors

Ten potential students (names are anonymous) were surveyed by phone or in person.

Public Awareness

The study group contacted ten interest groups in town. We spoke briefly at four worship services with the two churches in town. We developed some preliminary publicity and called a town meeting about the needs for a literacy program. Twenty people attended this meeting. Four people signed up as potential volunteers. A further 12 volunteers have been recruited through word of mouth and the surveys.

Results of the Needs Assessment

People feel a basic education program would be a critical addition to this community. Based on the response to the surveys and the public awareness meetings, we feel there is an interest in the following:

- A GED program for upgrading a number of people in the community who did not complete high school.
- A family literacy program targeted at young mothers whose children are in elementary school.
- A one-to-one tutoring program for adults with a range of reading and writing needs.

Plan of Action

The Red River United Church has offered a small room which we can use for the family literacy group. The coordinator can also use this space.

The Elementary school will provide space for the GED evening program. The elementary school will also provide some instructional resources and photocopying support.

The local community centre will provide tutoring space on two evenings per week.

<u>Funding Needs</u>

We will need to fund a part-time coordinator of volunteers and a part-time instructor.

Instructor: family literacy program
(4 hrs per week: 20 weeks @ $20/hr) $ 1, 600

GED upgrading instructor:
(6 hrs per week: 20 weeks @ $25/hr)   3,000

Part-time coordinator:
(10 hours per week: 30 weeks @ $15/hr)   4,800

Community counter-part:
(ongoing publicity and community contacts)
(4 hours per week: 20 weeks @ $10/hr)   800

Learner supports and transportation costs*   0

Instructional resources   2,000

Total funding request $12,200

* This will be provided by volunteers and local fund raising.