



Take Action for Literacy

A Learners Toolkit

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Produced by the
Nunavut Literacy Council

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Literacy in Nunavut

What is literacy?

Literacy is how people understand and use information. Literacy means more than learning how to read, write, and calculate. It involves understanding & being able to use the information required to function effectively in one's own context and society. In Nunavut this means being connected to language and culture.

Literacy is how people understand and use information at home, at work and in their community. A literate person has the basic skills that they need to read, write, think, listen, speak, and evaluate in order to construct meaning, communicate, and interact in real-life situations within their own community.

What sources of information do we use to measure literacy levels in Nunavut?

In the past we have relied on anecdotal information, statistics from Nunavut Arctic College on student enrolment in and graduation from literacy programs, and self-reported results from the *2001 Nunavut Household Survey*.

These sources of information indicated that literacy rates in Nunavut were very low. The survey did not tell us the extent of the issue and who had low literacy rates and why. These important questions need to be answered before any kind of strategy can be developed to deal effectively with the issue.

In 2003 Nunavut took part in the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey. Taking part in this international research study enabled us to confirm the extent of the literacy issue and to understand ways in which we could deal with it.

What is the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey?

The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) was a joint project of the Government of Canada, the US National Center for Education Statistics, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The first results from this survey were released on May 11, 2005.¹

IALSS built on its predecessor, the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey, which was the world's first internationally comparative survey of adult skills. In Canada data was not collected from the territories in the 1994 survey. In the 2003 survey

¹ Retrieved at: <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050511/d050511b.htm>

more than 23,000 individuals aged 16 and over from across the ten provinces and three territories spent an average of two hours responding to the questions. The survey aimed to measure the literacy, numeracy, and problem solving competencies of the Canadian population.

Statistics Canada worked with Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit, the Government of Nunavut department responsible for statistics, to carry out the survey in eleven communities across Nunavut.

The results of the survey were published in *Building Our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey*. *Building Our Competencies* also analyses the relationships between literacy skills and socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education level, type of work, and income.

How does IALSS measure literacy levels?

The test was administered only to those individuals who stated that they were fluent in English or French. These individuals took part in a series of tests that examined their prose, numeracy, and problem solving abilities.

Each person who took part in the survey was first given a common questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gather demographic information such as age, sex, education, occupation, income, and engagement in adult learning and community activities. They were then given the IALSS test that measured the following²:

- **Prose literacy** – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts, including editorials, news stories, brochures, and instruction manuals.
- **Document literacy** – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and charts.
- **Numeracy** – the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage the mathematical demands of diverse situations.
- **Problem solving** – the knowledge and skills required for goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solutions exist. The problem solver has a more or less well defined goal, but it is not immediately obvious how to reach it.

The literacy tasks covering these categories were scaled by difficulty from 0 to 500. This range was then divided into five broad literacy levels.

Level 1:

Indicates very low literacy skills, where the individual has very basic reading skills. For example they may have difficulty identifying the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information found on the package.

Level 2:

Respondents can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out, and in which the tasks involved are not too complex. This is a significant category because it identifies people who may have adapted their lower literacy skills to everyday life but would have difficulty learning new job skills requiring a higher level of literacy.

Level 3:

Considered as the minimum desirable threshold in many countries but some occupations require higher skills.

² Bulleted list excerpted from Building our Competencies: Nunavut Results of the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey. Statistics Canada. 2003

Level 4 and 5:

Show increasingly higher literacy skills requiring the ability to integrate several sources of information or solve more complex problems. It appears to be a necessary requirement for some jobs.

What are the levels of literacy among adults in Nunavut?

Nunavut faces the most serious literacy challenges of any jurisdiction in the country. More than half of Nunavut's working-age population struggle with serious literacy challenges. These challenges are greater in our small communities where people face a wide variety of systemic barriers that prevent them from achieving their potential.

Low literacy levels in Nunavut have a serious impact on our territory's social potential and economic growth. According to the survey:

- Over 70% of the Nunavut respondents scored at level 1 and level 2. This has serious implications as many experts say that level 3 is the minimum level needed for most occupations. Professional and technical occupations require much higher levels and the jobs being created in Nunavut are requiring increasingly complex literacy skills.
- Over 80% of Nunavut's youth between the age of 16 and 25 scored below level 3. This is particularly alarming as youth have the most time to contribute their knowledge and skills in their jobs, within their families and in their communities.
- Unlike the rest of Canada where younger people performed better, the highest scoring age groups in Nunavut were those aged 46 to 55. There are very strong correlations between educational attainment and literacy skills. Differences in schooling and school completion may be a factor.
- Over 60% of those who are employed in Nunavut have scores below level 3. This has serious implications for the employees and employers. Employees with low literacy levels have higher absentee rates, have more accidents on the job, are less likely to be satisfied with their jobs, and are more likely to make mistakes³.

There is evidence that literacy levels in Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun are also low. According to the results of the 2001 Household Survey conducted by the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics⁴, 64% of Inuit between the ages of 15 and older stated they could read and write in Inuktitut syllabics well or relatively well. Thirty-four percent of Inuit adults stated they could read and write in Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun in Roman Orthography well or relatively well. These self-reported results indicate that while there are many fluent speakers, literacy rates in Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun are quite low.

³ National Survey of Employers, conducted by The Conference Board of Canada, 2001.

⁴ [Language Data from the 2001 Household Survey](#). Nunavut Bureau of Statistics. 2001

What kind of programming do we need to support adult learners?

Adult Basic Education

Adult basic education is any program that helps people get ready for post-secondary training or employment. Adult basic education is learning to read, write and use numbers and information technology. It is life skills, career planning, upgrading in specific subjects or work training and experience.

Community-based Literacy Programming

Community-based literacy programs are programs that are created and designed by a group of individuals or an organization in a community rather than by an institution. For example, the Ilisaqsivik Society in Igloolik developed a family literacy program as a way to encourage young adults to improve their literacy skills and those of their children. This is an example of a community-based literacy program.

There are very few literacy programs that are offered in Nunavut. Most of these are offered through Nunavut Arctic College. Many adult learners have had bad experiences in the school system and are reluctant to attend literacy programs in a formal classroom setting. Some have attended college programs but because the programs were designed for upgrading students, the people with very low literacy skills find it hard to cope and may drop out. Once these students drop out, they are often very reluctant to come back to a program.

Some of the most successful literacy programs are designed by people in communities or through the college, in partnership with a community.

What can you do to make sure that literacy is a priority with the new government?

1. Send a personal letter to each candidate in your area. Use the sample provided or write your own.
2. Attend campaign events in your community. Talk to people at the event about literacy. Use the literacy fact sheet provided as a handout.
3. Attend the candidates meeting in your community. If you are allowed to ask questions, ask a question about issues that are important to you.
4. Take part in community radio call-in programs with the candidates. Talk about why literacy is important to you.
5. If you are in a literacy program, invite the candidates to come to your program to talk about issues that are important to you.
6. Volunteer to work on the campaign of one of your local candidates. Use your contacts with the candidate and his or her workers to talk about literacy.

Here are some sample questions that you can ask your candidate.

1. What will you do to make sure literacy is a priority for the new government?
2. Will you make sure that all adults who want to improve their literacy skills have access to literacy programs? If so, how will you do this?
3. Will you make sure that literacy is given a high priority in the Nunavut adult learning strategy that is being developed?
4. Will you make sure that the Government of Nunavut asks the Federal Government to make literacy a priority?
5. Community-based literacy programs are struggling to find enough money to offer programs to adults that need literacy support. How will you make sure community-based literacy programs get the government funding they need?
6. Family literacy programs are effective community-based programs that support the literacy skills of parents and caregivers and their children. Will you work to make sure there is ongoing, stable funding to community-based family literacy programs?

7. Do you support the expansion of family literacy program funding to include families with school-aged children?
8. Literacy services for our out-of-school and at-risk youth are almost non-existent in Nunavut. Do you support ensuring that the Adult Learning Strategy includes funding to support programs for out-of-school youth?
9. Public libraries play a really important role in literacy development. What will you do to make sure that more Nunavut communities have access to books through our public library system?
10. Returning to school as an adult to improve literacy skills is not easy and many adult learners have no income when they go back to school. Currently, there is no financial assistance for adult learners attending adult literacy and basic education programs other than Income Support. Will you work to make changes to the Student Financial Assistance program to include adult literacy and basic education programs?
11. Learning starts at home when children are infants. Family literacy programming offers parents an opportunity to raise their own literacy skills and build the literacy skills of their children. Will you give more money to support family literacy?
12. What will you do to support the revitalization of Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun in Nunavut?

Please feel free to use these sample letters as is – you can just add your letterhead, contact information and signature – or they may be used as a rough guide for your own personalized letter.

Sample Letter to Candidates

Date

Your name

Your address

Candidate's name

Candidate's address

Dear _____:

In Nunavut, many adults do not have basic literacy skills that enable them to read well enough to carry out daily tasks or to find and keep jobs. These are adults from all walks of life who, for a variety of reasons, have difficulty with reading and writing. They struggle with job applications, letters from their children's schools, grocery labels, written directions from health care providers, income tax forms, driver's license exams, printed campaign literature and election ballots.

Literacy matters to families, the workplace, communities, and individuals. Strong literacy skills are critical to our well-being. Strong literacy skills help our economy, improve our social conditions and our health, and increase active citizen participation. Now, more than ever, we need to make sure all Nunavummiut have opportunities and the necessary resources to develop their potential and contribute to our quickly changing northern society.

The current government is supporting literacy by developing an Adult Learning Strategy. However, this strategy will only be effective if there is the political will and financial resources available to support it. **If elected, what actions will you take to make literacy a priority with the new government?**

We would appreciate a direct response to this important question from you. We can be reached at _____. Your answer will help us decide how to vote in the upcoming election.

Yours truly,

Sample Letter from a Learner to a Candidate

Name
Box number
Community, Nunavut
Postal Code

Today's date

Candidate's name
Candidates box number
Community, Nunavut
Postal Code

Dear Candidate:

Did you know that approximately 70% of the adults in Nunavut have major difficulty with reading and writing? I am one of those adults and I will be voting in the upcoming territorial election.

Right now people like me have few opportunities to improve our skills. I want to know what you will do, if elected, to improve opportunities for people like me to develop our literacy skills. Your answer will help me to decide how to vote in the election.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours Truly,

Lobbying a Candidate

Excuse me please. May I talk to you for a moment?

(If you are lobbying a candidate by phone, you could say "Hello. May I please speak to _____ or their assistant"?)

My name is _____ and I am

representing learners from _____
(college or organization).

If you are elected will you support (name the issue)

_____?

This is important because (give your reasons for supporting the issue)

_____.

By supporting this issue, (tell how supporting this would help your cause)

_____.

Do you have any questions or suggestions? (Write down any questions or suggestions that the candidate has)

_____.

Can we count on your support? ___ YES ___ NO ___ MAYBE

Thank you very much for your time.

Name of Candidate

Constituency

How can you promote literacy during an election campaign?

Here is an outline of how campaigns are often organized and steps you can take to get the literacy message to the candidates:

| Campaign Activities | Ways to Promote Literacy |
|---|--|
| <p>Campaign Headquarters Candidates often set up campaign headquarters, where their volunteers work and the public can stop by for information.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call the candidate’s campaign office for the date, location and time of all public functions like open houses, candidate forums, radio and community TV call-in shows and other events. • Call the campaign headquarters and invite the candidates to come and meet the learners or participants in your literacy program. • Try to attend as many events as you can to speak up for literacy. |
| <p>Campaign Team Candidates may have some people that are working for them. Members of the team may include a campaign manager, a person who researches policy, someone who fundraises for them and other volunteers.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the names of candidates in your community and the names of people who are working on their campaigns. • Send a letter based on one of the sample letters included in the kit to each candidate. • Send a similar letter to the campaign manager. |
| <p>All – Candidates Meetings These meetings are often hosted by local organizations and are often covered by the press. At these meetings the candidates often make prepared statements and are asked questions by a moderator. This is followed by questions from the general public.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend all-candidates meetings in your community. • Take the opportunity to ask either one of the sample questions about literacy in the kit or one that you would like to ask. • Ask all candidates to respond to the question. |
| <p>Door – to – Door Canvas Most candidates try to visit everyone in their riding at least once during the campaign</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to candidates about literacy issues when they come to your door. • Ask them some of the sample questions on literacy. |
| <p>Campaign Volunteers Candidates rely on volunteers and are interested in their issues.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have time, you can volunteer for a candidate. Make sure you let the candidate or campaign manager know that you have an interest in literacy issues and would like to talk to the candidate about literacy. |

Elections Resources

Elections Nunavut has some excellent resources on the elections process and voting. You can contact Elections Nunavut at:

Elections Nunavut

43-4 Sivulliq Ave. Box 39,
Rankin Inlet, NU Canada XoC oGo
Phone: 867.645.4610 Toll Free: 800.267.4394
Fax: 867.645.4657 Toll Free Fax: 800-269-1125
info@elections.nu.ca
www.elections.nu.ca

Elections Canada also has some excellent resources. You can contact them at:

Elections Canada

Public Enquiries Unit
Elections Canada
257 Slater Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M6
Phone: 1-800-463-6868
Fax: 613-954-8584
www.elections.ca

Please contact us if you would like more information on literacy in Nunavut. You can contact us:

In Cambridge Bay:

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Cambridge Bay, Nunavut
XoB oCo
Phone: 867-983-2678
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In Rankin Inlet:

Box 519
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qpilakapsi@qiniq.com

Or call us toll free at: 1-866-608-2678