



# Realizing Workforce Potential through Workforce Planning Boards and Regional Literacy Networks

Revised from March 2012



## **Summary: Staying Competitive through Workforce Planning**

During this uncertain economic climate local economies can endure by planning ahead, staying competitive and adapting to change. Ontario, Canada's most populated province with the second largest geographical area in the country, is rich in its diversity and its advantages. Utilizing these resources is critical to our local economy's prosperity – and together workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks have a great deal to offer Ontarians to this end.

Working together, regional literacy networks and workforce planning boards can take ownership of their local workforce opportunities and challenges by addressing their distinctive needs. By creating strong workforce development pipelines and career pathways at the local level, local economies can gain and maintain a competitive edge that contributes to the overall prosperity of all Ontarians. This work, however, needs to be a shared responsibility. Industry, labour, government, community agencies, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) service providers as well Employment Service (ES) providers have to work together to develop and maintain our workforce. Creating an effective workforce development plan and a systematic response program is essential as it allows for businesses to grow, individuals to strive and local communities to flourish.

Ontario's local economic clusters are changing. Regions that were historically production centres are re-orienting their local economies towards advanced manufacturing, information and communication technology, higher value-added services and other creative industries. Other regions are building for the future and are anticipating growth in specific sectors. In this context, we must capitalize on the shift to build off of our growing sectors and create a workforce development pipeline that supplies the human capital necessary to support our changing local economic landscapes.

From the development of the Ring of Fire region in the James Bay Lowlands to the growing wineries and luxury hospitality in the Niagara region, the 'Silicon Valley' of Kitchener Waterloo to Biotech in the nation's capital, and the wind farms of Sault Ste. Marie to the growth of creative industries in Toronto, Ontario's economy is shifting. Diversity is Ontario's value-added approach; we see this in our people and our local economies. However, while our diversity is one of our strongest assets, it also poses significant challenges in our systems' ability to produce effective 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. Different regions and different local economies possess different challenges and have access to different resources and assets. As such, our local economies require provincially-supported, collaborative, locally-made and locally-focused interventions.

The development of our workforce's literacy and essential skills is a key driver of our local economies. Economic theory suggests that human capital – what individuals know and can put to productive use – is an important driver of economic growth (McCracken and Murray 2010). Literacy and essential skills determine an individual's ability to learn and fully participate in the labour force - higher levels of literacy and essential skills are associated with higher rates of employment, family-supporting wages, health outcomes and increased educational attainment (McCracken and Murray 2010). In short, the literacy and essential skills profile of a population affects the performance of enterprises and communities in a given society as the differences in average literacy levels explain more than 55% of differences in the long-term growth rate of gross domestic products (GDP) per capita at both the national and provincial level (McCracken and Murray 2010).

Similarly, employability skills and local labour market knowledge – as offered through Employment Service providers and workforce planning boards – are also of critical importance to individuals' ability to gain, maintain, fully benefit and participate in the workforce. Lack of appropriate employment skills is often cited as a major barrier by employers in organizations' ability to overcome internal communication challenges, high turn-over rates and access to desired employees. Furthermore, lack of knowledge on part of the potential employees in terms of available employment opportunities accessible to them can hinder their ability to fully assess and engage in the local labour market. To fully address local and provincial labour force needs and support our evolving economy, it is critical that potential labour market participants are made aware of all their community employment and training opportunities and are equipped with the in-demand employment skills necessary to gaining and maintaining employment.

In this context, workforce planning boards (referred to here as 'boards') and regional literacy networks (referred to here as 'networks') can play a critical role as they are ideally positioned within their communities to develop tailor-made approaches that accelerate effective workforce development. Boards and networks can identify trends and strategies, assist their constituencies in accessing the training they need and, in turn, help their local industries grow. Through the work of workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks, and support from other key stakeholders, we can produce locally-driven solutions and give our communities and Ontario a competitive edge. In many communities, boards and networks have robust working relationships. They are addressing their communities' training needs and working to identify opportunities through strategic partnerships and labour market information. In many communities however, such relationships are a work in progress. In some cases, the geographical areas of boards and networks do not conveniently overlap, while in other communities the value of such partnerships is not identified as a priority for either or both types of organizations for various reasons.

However there is emerging promise in fully aligning the work of workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks which can serve as a template for how local organizations can partner together and create tailor-made solutions for their communities. Indeed, a call for more cohesive relationships between employers, labour market information and the employment and training community has come from a variety of sources. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) in its report, *Protecting Our Most Valuable Resource: The Business Case for Lifelong Learning and Job-Based Training*- recommended regional multi-stakeholder training hubs that actively engaged industry. (Ontario Chamber of Commerce 2011). Tom Zizys, in his paper *Working Better*, funded by the Metcalf Foundation, articulated a transformative vision in which regional training groups played a human resources role for industry sectors (Zizys 2011). Collaboration between key stakeholders in our local economies, it seems, is the next step in our communities' ability to gain and maintain their place at the cutting-edge of economic development.

## **Utilizing Labour Market Information and Embracing Cluster Development**

*"The new economy, with its emphasis on knowledge and creativity, is highly dependent on localized, or regionally-based, innovation" (Gertler and Wolfe 1999).*

Given the changing economic climate, governments are increasingly looking to economic clusters as a means of accelerating labour market growth on a regional basis (Gertler and Wolfe. 1999). While centralized government can establish a policy and funding framework for education and training,

there is now an understanding that regional priorities can only be drawn and effectively addressed by combining local analyses of labour market information and other data sources with the collaborative efforts of key stakeholders. Attention has shifted from a top-down, institutionally-driven perspective to the importance of linking firms, people, services and knowledge at a regional level to allow for more innovative, competitive and effective interventions (Organisation for Co-operation and Development 2007).

Advancements in Ontario's training system, new analytical tools and technologies present an opportunity where local communities and regions can now use evidence-based approaches to facilitate local economic and workforce development solutions. Such a system has the potential to provide training that is rapid, responsive and reflective of the needs of the local workforce; it builds from the bottom up, utilizing our regional strengths that in turn raise the level of Ontario's competitive edge as a whole. In this context, boards and networks can work together to assist their communities in finding local solutions, build a more flexible and adaptive workforce and serve the needs of Ontarians – industry and individuals alike.

### **Labour Market Information (LMI)**

Labour Market Information (LMI) can be used to identify and assess local areas' needs, develop a strategic plan and make decisions regarding regional workforce development issues. LMI reports generally includes data on the changes in occupational demands, demographics, technological shifts, labour market trends and occupations skills and educational requirements (Government of Alberta, Employment and Immigration 2009). LMI is not an exact science with predictable outcomes – many factors can affect our local economies, be they external or internal.

“Predicting labour trends is notoriously tricky, partly because the economy sways and shifts much more quickly than the education or immigration systems that supply many workers. Sometimes events can change overnight – one tsunami in Japan, for example, can cause countries around the world to re-think investment in nuclear industries” (Grant 2011).

When used at a regional or local level, LMI can identify broad labour market trends and pinpoint specific areas of opportunities. For instance we can highlight the needs of skilled trade professions, ascertain what healthcare services/ healthcare occupations and immigrant/ migrant populations are growing, as well as what challenges they face in terms of workforce integration. What's more, effective use of strategic partnerships and continuous dialogue with local stakeholders can be used to gather up-to-date information with immediate implications. Partnership engagement can create a coordinated feedback loop that can help programs design initiatives that are better aligned to the needs of a given community. Enterprises, industry associations, college educators, trainers and employment services providers must be included in this process to help track changes in labour demand and needs and to create effective coordinated workforce planning and training initiatives (Grant 2011). This joined-up approach has the potential to help create a higher level of shared responsibility, as key stakeholders will have a vested stake in workforce development and regions will have greater sense of ownership.

Local regions, networks, boards and community-based services have used LMI to highlight:

- workforce planning opportunities
- business demographics
- companies hiring or downsizing
- growing occupations which have sound employment prospects
- literacy and basic skills levels
- workforce shortages
- skills shortages and training opportunities
- build local talent and attract new talent
- integration and utilization opportunities for newcomers into the labour market
- employment opportunities for vulnerable individuals

### **What are Industry Clusters and Why are they Important?**

“Clusters, or critical masses of unusual competitive success in particular business areas, are a striking feature of virtually every national, regional, state, and even metropolitan economy” (Porter 2000). For over a decade, economists have identified that specific places tend to specialize in particular activities, as enterprises involved in the same or related activities tend to cluster together in order to accelerating productivity (Organisation for Co-operation and Development 2007). Most definitions agree that clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions in a particular field that compete but also cooperate (Porter 2000).

A number of basic motivations lie behind the support for a cluster approach. Many academics argue that clusters are a natural and pragmatic organizing method. Clusters tend to focus on effectively allocating resources, aligning strategic partnerships and assisting in providing opportunities for all enterprises, institutions and individuals. Empirical evidence suggests that industries concentrate in specific regions with complementary set of other industries and can out-perform their competitors located in less rich environments (Organisation for Co-operation and Development 2007). This cluster conceptualization is widening our understanding of regions to see them as living ecosystems that are complex areas with numerous overlapping interconnections and intersections.

Though a relatively a new model, traditional cluster approaches have been a top-down, centrally-planned activities, often under the jurisdiction of government and research institutions. What we are seeing now is that such a top-down system is not fully addressing the ever-changing needs of our regions and communities. However when used in a local, bottom-up manner this approach can increase the effectiveness of our employment and training systems and accelerate regional and local workforce development pipelines.

A collaborative partnership cluster model is emerging; this model is based on supporting the differentiated needs of regions and communities that are inherently flexible (Organisation for Co-operation and Development 2007). Through the combination of a top-down and bottom-up cluster approach, we will have more opportunities to take advantage of local diversity, provide scope for adaptability, have the ability to deal with multifaceted complexities and identify local solutions. These solutions are supported by a “joining up” partnership-based approach, a hybrid cluster model utilizing both bottom-up and top-down frameworks.

By adopting a hybrid cluster model, our province, as well as our regions and local networks and stakeholders are partners in shared responsibility. Government will monitor and contribute to enhancing the tools and framework used, while regions are relied upon to pinpoint priority areas, identify opportunities and come up with locally-made interventions (Organisation for Co-operation and Development 2007).

<b>Cluster Model</b>		
<b>Approach:</b> Strengthening the competitiveness of local regions through their core concentration of industries, facilitated by a dense network of supports that are geographically aligned.		
<b>Old Model</b>	<b>Hybrid Model</b>	<b>New Focus</b>
Top-down and centrally-planned	Hybrid top-down and bottom-up planning system	Targets often include lagging regions and vulnerable areas
Redistribution of leading to lagging regions	Building competitive regions by bringing local stakeholders and assets together	Focus on smaller firms as opposed to larger firms
Picking the winners		Broad approach to sector and regional innovation targets
System design based on a national or provincial strategy		Emphasis on engagement of actors

If clusters are the natural organizing manner in which our economies are structured and are the basis for local economic growth, innovation and productivity, then the question of ‘how to develop and utilize a cluster approach and build on what exists to assist in our regional and local communities’ economic development’ still remains.

Understanding the nature of our local economic clusters is of the utmost importance. This approach can give our communities the ability to map out local assets and needs and illustrate the intersections between places, sectors, actors and enterprises. In many cases, workforce planning boards have used the following factors to consider when mapping out their annual Trends, Opportunities and Priorities (TOP) Reports:

- development of regional industries and sectors
- illustrating regional value chain intersections
- identification of key stakeholders
- aggregate statistics on employment, production and trade
- pinpointing types of public services, their availability and effectiveness
- understanding the regional demographics, educational level and workforce participation

- identification of socio-economic factors, migratory trends, immigration and recent economic shocks

Enterprises, services, educational institutions and communities all exist in our interconnected cluster ecosystem. Policy, service delivery and planning should align to assist in developing our local workforce ecosystems. By collaborating with key stakeholders, regions and local areas can utilize a cluster approach which could help identify opportunities and programming options that align with each region's interests. The challenge of how regional literacy networks and other service providers can understand the importance of local economies, and how they can best adapt services to reflect a cluster approach', still remains.

### **Connecting LMI and a Regional Cluster Approach to Enhance Workforce Planning**

Combining Labour Market Information (LMI) and a cluster approach gives local communities the tools and framework to plan ahead, coordinate activities and assist in providing services that are aligned to the needs of their communities. Accessing accurate information and defining targeted areas of opportunities is the key to an evidence-based approach to workforce planning and development. A recurring issue within workforce development is a focus on lining up fragmented local training delivery systems, which in many cases are delivered in silos (Organisation for Co-operation and Development 2007). Breaking these silos and forming regional workforce partnerships can lead to a more responsive employment and training system that has the potential to accelerate growth and improve prosperity for all. Integrating workforce planning with literacy services through the Employment Ontario (EO) system is a good starting point; it addresses the needs of an underutilized labour pool, of individuals who have low skills and are eager to make a meaningful contribution to the labour market. Workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks have the opportunity to cooperatively utilize their positions and LMI through TOP reports and literacy service plans to empower their regions and communities.

### **What are Others Doing to Accelerate Growth through Literacy and Basic Skills and Workforce Development?**

In the United States, communities are breaking down these silos. In many regions, Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), which are similar to Ontario's workforce planning boards, are working with enterprises, adult education service providers and employment service centers to raise the level of educational attainment and employment opportunities for adults who struggle with literacy and basic skills.

## Case Study: A Joint Effort of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the Philadelphia Literacy Coalition

Over 50% of adults in Philadelphia have literacy deficiencies and require higher basic skills to gain employment. To help alleviate this situation, in 2004, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (WIB) established *Excel Philadelphia*, a partnership with the Philadelphia Literacy Coalition to address the region's workforce skills deficiency.

The *Excel Philadelphia* initiative brought together employers, employees and employment services of *CareerLink* to help increase the number of workplace literacy programs in the region. In Philadelphia, employment services, like many other jurisdictions, struggle to align employment and literacy services in a coordinated manner. To increase their level of coordination, the Philadelphia WIB brought together *CareerLink* centers and Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) services to launch a range of new fully-integrated literacy services into employment services. By aligning these services, it provided a relatively new model for ensuring workers advance into stable, well-paying jobs with benefits.

Labour Market Information (LMI) has been collected on all aspects of the projects and the data has been used to identify effective practices and develop a scalable model of pilot projects. These projects are demonstrating positive results: learners on average have increased their reading and math by two grade levels and more than 50% of learners have secured employment with retention rates at almost 100%. This literacy and employment partnership has:

- conducted research comparing the literacy levels in Philadelphia and the needs of the local economy
- developed a formal business plan for literacy service providers
- enhanced relationships between local literacy providers and *CareerLink* centres, which has helped literacy services and employment services realize their potential for mutual benefits and natural lines of intersection

Though the work of their pilot projects, expansion is on the horizon and a more fulsome integrated approach is underway. Philadelphia's WIB and literacy agencies are working together to develop and strengthen local career pathways. Their goal is to focus on specific industries that align the training of individuals who struggle with literacy and educational attainment with occupations and enterprises that need specific human capital and skills.

Across the United States, other WIBs are reaching the same conclusion. If we look to our neighbours in the South, we are seeing a new model emerge. This model links natural lines of intersection and pools resources together, utilizing labour market information, local industry clusters as well as workforce planning and literacy and basic skills - this is the *career pathway model*.

*Source: National Center on Education and the Economy. 2009. Guide to Adult Education for Work Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce.*

## Pathway Educational and Training Model

*Career Pathways* and integrated adult basic education and skills training have become an agreed upon model in the United States because it was created in a collaborative manner. This model was not developed in a vacuum or through a top-down process. The cumulative efforts of workforce investment boards, literacy agencies, English as a Second Language (ESL) service providers, employment and training organizations, municipalities and state and federal government all view this model as an effective method of providing vulnerable individuals with workforce opportunities while supporting the growth of communities. Although a relatively new model, leading indicators are demonstrating that it works, as evident in such programs as I-BEST in Washington State.<sup>1</sup>

The career pathways model aligns workforce development strategies, adult education and regional skill needs of industries. The pathways model reflects an active partnership engagement process. Key partnerships are formed and members work together to create a more robust workforce pipeline where roles are clearly defined. Career pathways focus on targeting key industry sectors and occupations which are in demand and growing. Skill requirements are identified and training requirements are aligned to specific career pathways. One crucial aspect of the career pathways model is progression - levels of education and training required for a position are clearly articulated from one level of instruction to the next, each level leads to specific outcomes and all pathways have clear options for alternative routes and further advancement (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges 2005).

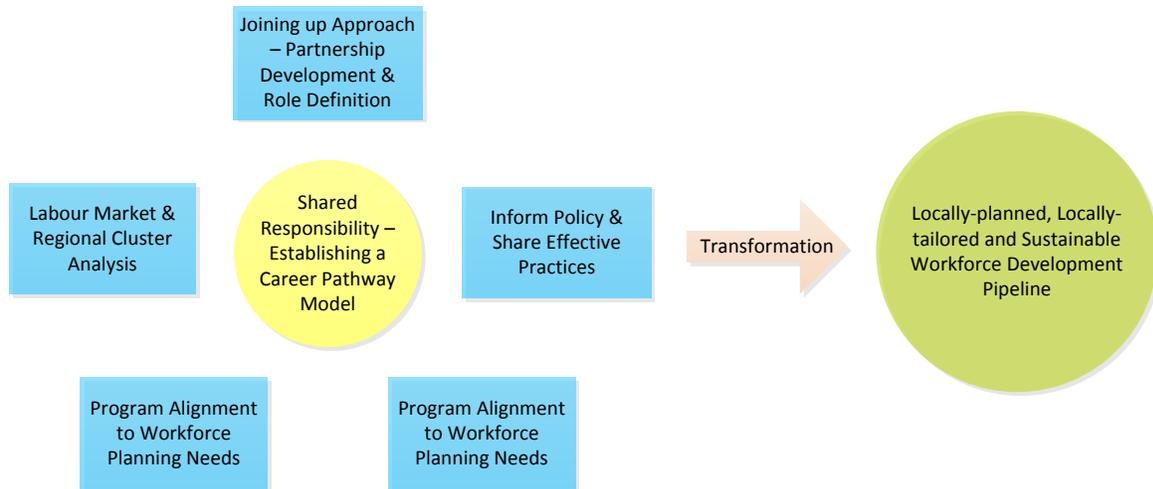
A further key principle of such a career pathways model is that curriculum development and instructional design are viewed through the lens of contextualized learning environments. In many cases the training and education attained are stackable in value in the labour market and can lead to further higher level credentials or degrees associated with higher level occupations within a specific industry. Within this structure local areas are and can develop new and different modes of delivery. These modes have been used to address the local needs towards workforce development, adult education and training. In some cases, these new delivery modes have bypassed traditional postsecondary and educational institutions and are now creating community-based, short-term and accelerated skills training programs recognized by local industries.

Furthermore, career pathways are organized in a manner that speaks to the particular needs of clients as each career pathway can be personalized based on an individuals' need. Education and training service are flexible to individuals' work schedule and can be provided in a modular manner, be it online, at night or continuously. Learners are also given credit for prior learning which helps them enter or advance within a specific sector or occupational field regardless of their education level at the point of entry and further accelerates educational attainment and career advancement. In addition, pathways are supported by career counselling and wrap-around support services which have been proven to strengthen the overall potential of goal achievement for the program participants (Career Pathways 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> The I-BEST program was designed to meet the changing needs of state industry and adults with a high school diploma or less who did not have the resources, grades, or time to access College (I-BEST programs are six to eight months in duration). Under the I-BEST model, basic skills instructors and college career-technical instructors jointly design and teach occupational courses for adult basic skills students at the college-level. Literacy and basic skills instruction is integrated with instruction in college-level career-technical skills. I-BEST's model challenges the traditional educational ladder that basic skills instruction ought to be completed prior to starting college-level courses. When randomized control trials were used to compare to traditional ESL students to I-BEST students who had the same level of proficiency and started studying during the same time period; students in the I-BEST program earned five times more college credits and were 15 times more likely to complete training.

The career pathways model demonstrates how communities can utilize LMI, industry clusters, workforce planning and literacy and basic skills in a relevant way. It is important that when looking to build a stronger employment and training system in Ontario, we have the opportunity to leverage the natural lines of intersections between literacy and basic skills, labour market information, industry clusters and local workforce planning for stronger communities and more sustainable regional economies.



## Aligning Workforce Planning Boards and Regional Literacy Networks to Accelerate our Local Workforce Development

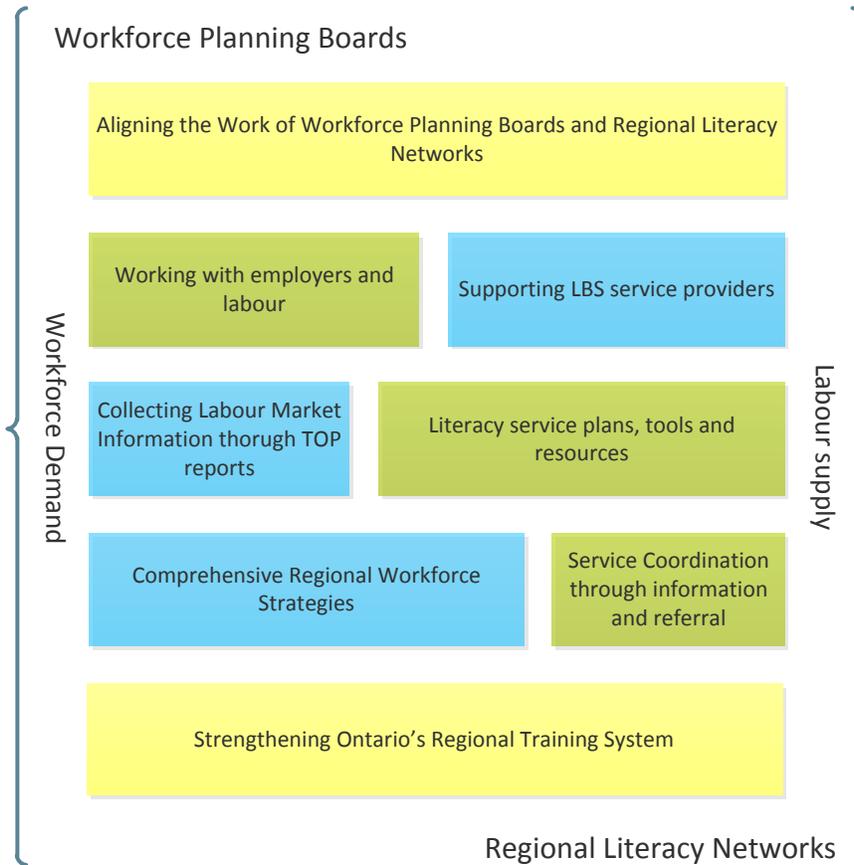
Currently Ontario lacks a comprehensive workforce development and cluster approach. The LMI that exists today is generally available at an aggregate level and is at best a work in progress. To fully utilize labour market information and to adopt a cluster approach, comprehensive data is necessary and strategic workforce development plans and targets must be established. Only when this information is available can LMI be effectively utilized, mapped out, planned and integrated at local levels. Currently, the Employment Ontario (EO) system is in the process of defragmenting services, which will, in turn, make navigation more efficient and effective for clients. However, when addressing individuals who face low literacy levels and educational attainment, they are often in need of a broader range of services. Even with the improvements that are occurring in Employment Ontario, there still remain many other services that are spread across different ministerial lines. Connecting these services and having a clear approach to their coordination and referral protocols will be the next key factor in developing a long-term and comprehensive workforce development strategy.

We are all well aware of the long-term challenges in Ontario. We know that there are looming labour market shortages due to our aging workforce, we realize that there are now *“People without Jobs, and Jobs without People”* (Miner 2010) and are aware that this trend may not only persists but

will potentially grow. Dr. Rick Miner describes this trend as the “workforce deficit:” it articulates the mismatch between jobs that are not filled and the people that are jobless, yet lack the skills needed for the ever-changing job requirements (Miner 2010). If we do not work together to address Ontario’s workforce deficit, it will affect our level of competitiveness - industry growth will be inert and individuals with low levels of educational attainment may face even more tenuous employment opportunities. It is projected that by the next decade, Ontario could possibly have a workforce deficiency of 600,000 and by 2031 this could rise to over a million (Miner 2010). If these projections are correct, potentially one in ten Ontarians of prime working age will lack the education or skills to find work (Miner 2010).

Workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks are located in an ideal position to act as the local workforce development interlocutors. The boards know the workforce planning needs in their regions – every year they create the TOP reports, which contain the appropriate data and evidence to support workforce planning; while the networks understand the training needs and how the training should be delivered. If both groups work together and bring in other stakeholders they can facilitate a level of shared responsibility and improve our local workforce pipelines. It is essential that both groups collaborate and utilize their natural intersections so that they can continue to play an important role in ensuring Ontario’s prosperity.

Networks and boards often work together, however this is sometimes done in an ad hoc manner and the quality of relationships is uneven across the province. When partnerships have been established they have often achieved strong results. The groups have worked together to perform activities which include community-based research, event planning, marketing and communications as well as the development of assessments and learning tools. However, further alignment needs to occur – boards and networks can work together to establish a clear set of terms of reference. This will provide a description of the purpose and structure for their relationship and clarify their roles and responsibilities. This clarity will allow the two groups to establish plans, recognize what other stakeholder are needed at the table and provide a justification and clarify what specific targets require attention.



## Regional Literacy Networks Know Literacy Learners and How Training is Delivered in the Community

Adult literacy programs have been traditionally scattered throughout the province in community-based settings, colleges, libraries and school boards. They were originally created due to the high numbers of Ontarians struggling with literacy and learning difficulties. Fuelled by a higher demand in our society for basic literacy skills, the literacy movement sought out ways to facilitate adult learning. One way to do this was to bring all of the literacy players together under one umbrella to promote local or regional literacy services and to make access to these services easier.

Ontario's first adult literacy network, the Adult Basic Education Association of Hamilton was established in 1983. The Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML) was the second network to be established in the same year. The Ottawa Community Coalition for Literacy (OCCL) was formed in 1984 and Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo Wellington was founded in 1988. The other 12 networks were developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In 1986 the literacy networks became eligible for funding under the Ontario Community Literacy Grant programs. They were funded under the category of "Literacy Networking and Information & Referral."

The guidelines from the province at the time gave this description:

Literacy networks are independent organizations serving particular regions and localities. They are accountable to their members, including literacy providers, workers, learners and other friends of literacy. Through networks, members of the literacy community work to advance adult literacy as a focus of public action and of high quality practice within the evolving lifelong learning and training system in Ontario.

With the greater penetration of technology into the workplace in the mid-1990s came evolving job and skill requirements. To address this change, the focus of literacy programming moved to include skills upgrading related to workforce participation.

Today there are a total of 16 regional literacy networks in Ontario. In their communities, literacy networks work with four literacy streams: English, Francophone, Aboriginal and Deaf. They are also provincial umbrella groups that represent Ontario's literacy sectors: Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA), Community Literacy Ontario (CLO), Essential Skills Ontario, Laubach Literacy of Ontario (LLO), the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC), the College Sector Committee (CSC) and la Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes.

Literacy networks are under mandate by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and are funded by Employment Ontario to:

- work with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies to develop community plans that enable an appropriate level of flexible programming available to adults in the region
- provide support, training and resources to agency staff, volunteers and adult learners
- act as an information broker between government and other literacy initiatives to agencies and the public
- educate Ontarians about literacy awareness and services to community agencies, employers and the general public
- provide information and referral services about literacy and upgrading programs to agencies and learners

The main role of a network is to facilitate the Literacy Community Planning (LCP) process which culminates in an annual Literacy Service Plan (LSP).

Regional literacy networks support and maintain a well-coordinated system which supports the needs of literacy practitioners in their respective service area. They also take on additional projects that are unique to their regions/communities.

## **Workforce Planning Boards: Know their Regional Clusters and Utilize Labour Market Information**

In 1990 the Ontario Premier's Council Report recommended establishing regional committees (Workforce Planning Ontario 2012). This was in response to the diverse needs of local communities and business in the area of workforce development. Workforce planning boards were created by the Ontario government in 1993 as an element of the Ontario Training and Adjustment

Board (OTAB) and continued after the demise of OTAB. The first Local Training and Adjustment Board (Local Board) was established in 1996. Today, the province is divided into 25 local workforce planning zones. There are 23 workforce planning boards funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

The original governance models for workforce planning boards were based on a multi-stakeholder, consensus-driven decision-making model used by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board. Each is composed of business and labour co-chairs and representation from education, trainers and four equity groups.

The role of the board is to engage communities and community partners to enhance local labour market development. They use and analyze local labour market information, conduct research and carry out labour market planning processes. Workforce planning boards also inform trends, priorities and facilitate community partnerships to implement solutions to local issues. Annually, the workforce planning boards deliver TOP Reports that examine labour issues in their respective regions.

Over the years the boards have built and maintained strong relationships with community partners, allowing them to carry out over 1,000 partnership projects/activities such as:

- developing of tools and resources for employers that includes employer guides, research reports and best practices
- identifying the workforce skills and knowledge needs of their local labour markets
- involving employers, individual participants and learners in a collaborative local labour market planning process
- involving employers to align education, training and employment strategies within a changing social, economic and employment landscape
- contributing to meeting skills retention and attraction strategies that, over time, reduce out-migration and increases immigration
- attracting and developing future talent supply based on local labour market information within the context of shared labour market planning that complements economic development strategies
- coordinating career fairs to promote skilled trades as viable and rewarding careers

Like literacy networks, workforce planning boards take on projects unique to their regions and communities. The boards are focusing their efforts more closely on demand-driven strategies that inform the public of current and future skills needs of sectors in their regions.

It is important then, when creating demand-driven strategies for boards to ideally coordinate their activities with the work of the networks and other initiatives that exist in adult training and employment field within Employment Ontario (EO). By connecting co-existing services, agencies, initiatives and other institutions at the local levels, we can make the system as a whole more effective.

## Case Study: Niagara Workforce Planning Board – looking forward and working towards a better future

Increasingly, many workforce planning boards are working in a collaborative manner and embracing change. The Niagara Workforce Planning Board (NWPB) has embraced change – they have expanded their existing workforce development framework and are demonstrating how LMI and TOP reports can be used in new and innovative ways. By looking across the border, NWPB has worked with the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, adopting a human capital development model. This model builds on the experiences and interests of individuals and communities and matches them with the needs and opportunities in the region. This human capital development model, 3D: Dynamics, Diversity and Density framework, focuses on how to “Prepare/Educate/Train, Match; Retain”. NWPB has applied this framework to their local planning approach, working to combine workforce development with service planning and service delivery.

One example of how they have furthered this development is their partnership with Literacy Link Niagara (LNN) and their work on occupational profiles. Both of these agencies have worked together to identify occupations in declining and emerging sectors in their region and have adapted detailed occupational profiles that are matched with their regional LMI. The information is presented in an online, easy-to-use format. With this new resource, local service providers and job seekers have been provided with information that can assist them in making career decisions and create ‘career action plans.’ These plans align with the changes occurring in the Niagara labour market and help support workforce development. NWPB has provided a solid template of how workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks can move forward.

*Source: Niagara Workforce Planning Board. 2010. Niagara3D: Dynamics, diversity and Density...Informing Human Capital Development.*

*To view the Niagara Occupational Profiles please go to: <http://niagaraworkforceboard.ca/essentialskills/>*

## Strengthening the Bond between Goal-Oriented Learning and Workforce Planning Outcomes

The development of the new Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) provides a new opportunity – it is a leap forward in the field of literacy and essential skills. With this new framework we can set forth a clear direction for aligning literacy and basic skills to workforce development. One of the core features of the OALCF is goal-directed learning, which places a greater emphasis on what a learner wants to achieve upon exiting a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program. With this new focus on goal-directed learning, networks and boards can better align their activities in relationship to OALCF goal paths and gear their learning outcomes to meet the workforce needs in their communities. Four of the five OALCF goal paths – employment, apprenticeship, secondary school credit and postsecondary – have a clear relationship to workforce planning. These goals may involve different approaches and may occur in different institutions but their ultimate goal will be a form of labour market participation. How or what goal a learner

chooses cannot occur in isolation from our communities' labour market. If a learner is going to choose a goal in relation to the OALCF, they should be provided with the right kind of information for developing this goal and career plan. They should be informed of:

- what kinds of opportunities exist in their community
- what types of training and credentials employers are looking for
- where these programs are offered
- how long it will take
- what financial resources would be required<sup>2</sup>

Having the ability to interoperate this kind of information provides an opportunity: boards and networks can now collaborate in collating information and provide learners with better resources when mapping out career directions – boards can look at the Ontario Ministry of Education's Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program which can serve as a workable template. SHSM is a specialized, ministry-approved program that allows students to focus their learning on a specific economic sector while meeting the requirements to graduate from secondary school (Department of Education 2010). It focuses on establishing clear occupational transitions from secondary school graduation to pathway of apprenticeship training, college, university or the workplace.

This is very much similar to planned OALCF goal paths. By using the SHSM as a template, the boards and networks can help their clients set and achieve appropriate goals that are trellised to the needs of the local labour market. Under this model, the boards can gather LMI and regional cluster data and work with the networks to translate the data into educational and training pathways. This will in turn inform the learners of available employment opportunities and what access routes are available, as well as refer then to appropriate services. Overall this kind of exchange would present a more efficient method for informing learners' and LBS service providers' decision-making processes. Through this model, the boards and networks can enhance the effectiveness of their TOP reports and Literacy Service Plans (LSP).

## **Working with Employment Ontario (EO) to Create Seamless Delivery of Wrap-Around Services**

In addition to the OALCF, recent developments in the Employment Ontario (EO) system can further provide opportunities for workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks. With integration of Literacy and Basic Skills programming into EO, the roles of networks and boards can also be redefined towards a more fulsome integration of the whole EO system. It is important that networks and boards understand the complexities of the new EO system and work together to create local solutions to address the “no-wrong-door” approach to service coordination. Boards and networks can assist in facilitating service coordination through sharing of community connections, pooling and verification of knowledge between other agencies and research into finding alternative methods and interventions that can innovate service delivery. By forming a new partnership model, boards and networks can be seen as a template. This template will illustrate how other local communities agencies can work together, share information, investigate effectiveness of service models and come up with locally-driven solutions to enhance the quality of services in a region.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information visit EOPG OALCF Goal Path Descriptions and Summary at <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/oalcf/>

## **Case Study: Taking the Lead - Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) – Using a Partnership Approach to Enhance the Delivery of Services**

Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) is one of the first regional literacy networks that develop an integrated service plan which linked literacy to employment service. This development was the result of an extensive process that involved a wide range of partners. This process was particularly effective due to the formulation of a formalized Joint Service Planning Task Force which included: the Employment Sector Council of London/Middlesex (ESCLM), which itself is comprised of 45 employment and training organizations; the local Workforce Planning Board; the United Way; the City of London; and London Council for Adult Education and Partners in Employment. Through this taskforce LLSC was able to establish a commitment to linking common assessment and referral processes through the development of concrete tools and protocols.

The condition that made the work of this taskforce possible was their shared level of responsibility. When creating a joined-up partnership approach to community planning, stand-alone agencies have a stake in achieving better results in the community, as well as larger pools of resources and expertise to solve what maybe considered intractable challenges.

### **Workforce Planning Boards and Regional Literacy Networks Providing Opportunities through Local Workforce Development**

In the past, collaboration between regional literacy networks and workforce planning boards have produced significant results. Today our communities are faced with unique economic changes that are specific to their regional and communal workforce. Given the scale of the province's challenges, workplace planning boards and regional literacy networks can work together to bring about local workforce solutions; they have the ability to assist individuals, businesses and government services all at once.

However, given the current situation, they will need some assistance from our provincial government to provide them with the resources and mandates that will allow them to realize their potential. Both groups need greater financial resources to invest in new technology, tools and the human resource which will give these organizations the capacity to gather better data, create better tools and resources and align their work with other organizations. This will in turn make our services more effective. As well, workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks need a new relevant mandate – one that addresses the changes in Employment Ontario (EO) and the changing workforce skill demands.

Such a new mandate can speak to the needs of local workforce planning, adult education and training. It should have a framework which establishes certain levels of quality assurances and accountability mechanisms which will provide clarification of roles, responsibilities and targets. Furthermore, this new mandate must give leverage and some level of jurisdictional control to regional literacy networks and workforce planning boards, so that they have the ability to influence the way training is delivered and how resources are allocated in their communities. With a basic

level of control in their mandate, boards and networks will be able to utilize their resources to realize their potential to create a stronger workforce development pipeline in Ontario.

Both parties can enhance the outcomes of their collaborations in the five broad areas of development:

### **1. Utilize and Access Relevant Labour Market Information and Cluster Data**

Workforce planning boards and regional networks need to take a leadership role in correctly defining their local workforce planning data and highlighting the mismatch of skills and educational requirements in conjunction with the demands of the local labour market. They can assist in bringing other local actors to the table and leveraging their resources and knowledge of the issues so that programs and services can be appropriately coordinated. This can be used to develop a whole host of alternative measurements which can help map local regional and community labour market and training supply and demand.

### **2. Develop a balanced Long-term Strategy**

When developing a local workforce planning and basic skills strategy, it is important to recognize that many workforce issues faced in a community may be of a systemic nature. Boards and networks need to set forth a plan to delineate between long-term issues and short-term interventions. When setting out a strategic plan, it is always important to address the issues of today and make a concerted effort to plan for tomorrow. This could include short-term skills training initiatives which could be used to address very specific skills up-grading needed for specific sectors and longer-term career pathways which could be a solution for long-term projected workforce shortages.

### **3. Map and outline Industry Clusters to the use of Career Ladders**

Employment Ontario (EO) has made great strides in connecting employment and training services, however many education, training and employment services are still disconnected from employer and labour groups. There is great promise in connecting these services to the needs of the employers, and regions within the EO system. Joining up disparate educational and training systems is crucial to helping people build on their skills and employment opportunities over time – within or outside of employment. *Career Pathways* and integrated adult basic education and skills training models can be the bridge of literacy and basic skills and higher-level training and education, which is intrinsically aligned to local sector and occupations that are in demand in the community. It is important that in our communities we provide stackable learning options – this allows individuals to have the occupational mobility to move up a career ladder, whilst employed or unemployed and have their prior levels of learning be recognized.

### **4. Build and Establish Strong Relationships with Employers and other Public Sector Actors**

In order to produce advancements in the local labour markets, workforce strategies need to address problems of both the supply and demand. To do this, boards and networks need to have close working relationships with employers and public service actors. Employers and industry associations are invaluable partners as they are the only ones with the ability to highlight their workforce needs. In addition, the public sector needs to be incorporated in the planning process to

ensure that initiatives and programs align with the existing structures and institutions. It is important that at the local level, services and programs are compatible to their regional clusters. When partnerships are established and share a level of collective responsibility, only then can we create programs and services that address our regional and community needs.

### **5. Look Forward, be Flexible and Adapt to Change**

Given the recent tumultuous nature of our economy and the ever-changing pace of technological change, the future success of workforce development depends on the ability of networks and boards to adapt to the changing needs of the labour market. Strategies need to be subject to regular reviews and adjustable with the natural fluctuations of local economies, skills needs and demographics. In particular, regions need to develop locally-driven approaches that are specialized and flexible in building on their specific opportunities and adapting to new market demands.

### **Conclusion: Shared Responsibility Leads to Competitive Communities**

As Ontario moves towards strengthening the linkages between workforce literacy and basic skills and employer demand is essential. We need to move beyond our traditional planning approaches and create locally-driven, joined-up partnership models that leverage our existing infrastructure and increase a level of shared responsibility. Through this enhanced level of shared responsibility we can use new tools, well-informed frameworks and overlapping intersections and interconnections to improve the way we coordinate and deliver services. When workforce planning boards and regional literacy networks strategically align their activities together, we are then better equipped to address our local workforce employment and training needs. This will make our communities more competitive, allow for industries to grow and provide more sustainable opportunities for all Ontarians.

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### **About Essential Skills Ontario**

Essential Skills Ontario inspires and leads the development of literacy and essential skills solutions through excellence in collaboration, research and innovation. We envision an Ontario where all adults have the opportunities and support to gain the literacy and essential skills they need to reach their potential in an ever-changing world.

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