

2012

QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

PILOT PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Community Adult Learning Services (CALs) Branch acknowledges the contribution of the four (4) organizations who agreed to participate in the pilot project along with their respective Pilot Project Team Members. They include:

Apprentissage pour adultes Sud-Est (APASE)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	Page 4
1.1 Background	
1.2 Quality Self-Assessment Pilots	
2.0 METHODOLOGIE	Page 5
2.1 Planning	
2.2 Information Gathering	
2.3 Analyses and Interpretation	
2.4 Reporting and Action Plan	
2.5 Celebrating Accomplishments	
2.6 Monitoring Improvements	
3.0 IMPLEMENTATION	Page 7
3.1 Communication/Consultation	
3.2 Human Resource/Time Implication	
3.3 QSA Guide and QSA Tool	
4.0 MEASUREMENTS AND OUTCOMES	Page 8
4.1 Successes and Challenges	
4.2 Outcomes	
5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	Page 9
5.1 Recommendations	
5.2 Conclusion	
APPENDIX A	Page 11
APPENDIX B	Page 12

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Department of Post-Secondary Education Training and Labour's (PETL) *Working Together for Adult Literacy: An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick*, outlines a number of strategic priorities for the field of adult literacy and essential skills service delivery; one of which is to "ensure quality and effectiveness of adult literacy programs".

The Quality Initiative was launched by the Community Adult Learning Services (CALs) Branch of PETL to explore and define what constitutes quality as it relates to adult literacy and essential skills programs and services in New Brunswick. The objective of the initiative was to develop a framework that would guide the Department and its partners in their efforts to understand, measure and improve the quality of programs and services in the province.

The Quality Framework outlines eight (8) strategic priorities for adult literacy and essential skills service delivery: management, planning, resources, social inclusion and respect for diversity, human resources, delivery, partnerships, and transparency and continuous improvement.

The framework is intended to apply to all adult literacy and essential skills service delivery undertaken by, on behalf of, or funded by CALs.

1.2 Quality Self-Assessment Pilots

One of the activities identified in the Quality Framework phased implementation plan was the undertaking of mentored quality self-assessment pilots.

Four organizations agreed to participate in the initial quality self-assessment pilot process. They are: Apprentissage pour adultes Sud-Est (APASE), Central Valley Adult Learning Association (CVALA), Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB) and the Southeast WES Regional Team.

The primary goals of the pilot projects were to test and evaluate the Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) process, the QSA Guide/Tool and to gain practical experience with regard to the implementation process.

The QSA Guide was developed to provide practical information to assist and support adult literacy and essential skills service providers' implement the QSA process.

The QSA Tool is organized around the eight essential elements of a quality and effective adult literacy and essential skills program, which are founded on evidence-based practice. The tool was used by organizations to assess the quality of their program delivery and to create an action plan for continuous program improvement.

The organizations, working in consultation with the CALs Quality Coordinator/Mentor, managed the pilot process which began in September 2011 and ended in March 2012. In addition, they were tasked with submitting monthly progress reports and producing a pilot project evaluation report.

A one-day training session, facilitated by Pat Stafford and Dianne Léger, was organized in Moncton on September 8, 2011 for the organizations and members of their project team that were engaging in the pilot project. Organizations were given an overview of the Quality Framework, information on who to involve how and when as well as practical hands-on application of the QSA Tool.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Planning

All the organizations established a project team to oversee the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of the project. The size of the project teams varied from 3 to 8 members and included a mix of individuals who work with or for the pilot organization (paid staff, volunteers, Committee/Board Directors, Director of operations, teachers, trainers, facilitators and Adult Learning Regional Consultants).

Terms of reference for the project team were developed by each organization using the template provided by CALS.

All project teams held an initial meeting to determine the scope of the work to be undertaken and to draft a work plan, with timelines and responsibilities of members. All of the project teams met regularly over the course of the pilot.

2.2 Information Gathering

In most cases, the project teams sought written documentation as evidence that an element met requirements. In some cases, project teams conducted a survey of employees or stakeholders and in other instances they physically visited sites to obtain evidence of conditions.

Overall, a variety of information-gathering methods were used to collect information and feedback to address gaps in the available evidence, validate the evidence gathered and determine performance levels. They include: e-mail, phone, face-to-face communication (interviews/networking), document sampling, round table discussions, surveys (paper form and online), on-site visits (physical inspections), observation (classrooms) and facilitated focus groups.

Input was solicited from various sources including paid and volunteer staff, council/board members, tutors, teachers, learners, employers, trainers, stakeholders and referral agencies.

2.3 Analysis and Interpretation

Two of the project teams choose to assign the 8 elements of the QSA to individual members of the team based on their areas of expertise. Each was asked to look at the quality indicators, assign a performance level, state how they arrived at the assessment level, provide evidence to support their findings and indicate how the area could be improved. Regular meetings were scheduled with the objective of discussing one or two elements per meeting and the person responsible for the element would present his or her report to the entire team. Round table

discussions on the components of each element with the project team members proved to be very beneficial in the analysis of each indicator and in reaching consensus on the performance level.

The other two pilots choose to review the 8 elements and complete the QSA Tool as a group. Regular meetings were scheduled with the objective of discussing one or more elements per meeting. The project team would review each quality indicator within the elements, agree on a performance level for each indicator and provide evidence to support their findings. They found that completing the QSA Tool as a project team prior to involving stakeholders allowed for better clarity on the purpose of the QSA process.

Both methods achieved the desired outcome of analyzing, interpreting and rating their performance. In addition, all the project teams agree that the round table discussions were beneficial in shedding light on each element and in gaining a full perspective on the management, programming and operations of their adult literacy and essential skills programs. They also agree that the QSA process led to an increased awareness of their current practices and the actions required to ensuring quality is maintained or improved.

Although all the project teams noted specific items requiring immediate attention, overall all the organizations scored very well in all the elements and are doing a good job of meeting the needs of learners, staff and stakeholders.

2.4 Reporting and Action Plan

Once the project teams agreed on a performance level (range from 1 to 4), an action plan was developed to address all quality indicators with a performance level of 1 and 2. It's noteworthy to mention that literacy and essential skills service providers are expected to strive for a satisfactory performance level (3) on all the quality indicators within each of the eight elements of program and service delivery.

Actions for continuous improvement were then prioritized by making them in need of improvement "right now", "this year" or "next year". For each of those actions, a key person or sub-committee responsible for taking action was identified and timelines were set. In some instances, actions were immediately implemented to address specific areas in need of attention particularly when a solution was readily available.

All project teams noted that while some processes are in place and commonly used, they are not always formally documented. They also realized that in some instances they assumed a practice was in place but after examination found it was not the case.

Although the format of the action plans differed from one pilot to the other, they all included the following information:

- Element of Quality
- Quality Indicator
- Performance Level
- Timeline for Improvement (Right Now, This Year, Next Year) and Improvement Steps
- Person(s) Responsible
- Resources needed

2.5 Celebrating Accomplishments

Most organizations which engaged in the pilot projects recognized that they were doing a good job meeting the needs of learners, staff and stakeholders. Moreover, they were encouraged to see that they were already meeting many quality indicators at the 3 or 4 performance levels.

Although project teams have yet to formally celebrated their accomplishments, they are all planning a special event for everyone who devoted their time and energy to the QSA process.

2.6 Monitoring Improvements

All of the organizations are committed to implementing their QSA action plan and monitoring improvements. To ensure effective monitoring and improvement of performance, CVALA has established a permanent quality self-assessment committee. They have also developed terms of reference for their QSA committee (see Appendix A).

3.0 IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Communication/Consultation

Pilot project details, updates and results were provided, on a regular basis, to the respective organization as well as the CALS Branch. Stakeholders were informed of the QSA process and in some cases participated in the consultation process.

3.2 Human Resources/Time implication

Because of the condensed period of time in which pilots were conducted (September 2011 to March 2012), most project teams found the QSA process to be quite labour intensive and time consuming (one pilot reported that approximately 180 hours was devoted to the process). It should also be noted that the time required by project team members and staff was in addition to their regular responsibilities. Regardless, all project teams indicated they were aware of the implications (time & human resources) prior to beginning the QSA process. In addition, most indicated they found the process to be relevant, congruent with the goal of the Quality Framework and well worth the time and effort.

3.3 QSA Guide and QSA Tool

In general, the project teams found the QSA guide, tool and templates to be excellent working documents and useful in guiding them through the entire QSA process, nonetheless some areas of improvement were noted.

QSA Guide

Most project teams found the evidence example sheet provided within the QSA Guide to be very helpful. It was suggested by one pilot project that the example sheet could be expanded to include more examples for new service delivery providers completing the process. Another

project team suggested the guide should specify that evidence based materials be written by title and date in order to be able to reference the evidence.

While the QSA Guide included an action plan template, project teams could choose to design their own which all four project teams opted to do. Although the action plan format is different in each case, the information captured is similar. One project team suggested adding a column describing the issues to be addressed for each quality indicator. The action plan templates developed by the project teams will be shared with all the organizations that will be implementing the QSA process in the future.

QSA Tool

All project teams indicated there was some repetition that occurred from one element to the other which led to repetition of evidence to support the statement. In addition, project teams noted that some quality indicators were not relevant, overlapped or did not apply to their organization. In response to these comments, the QSA Tool will be modified to avoid repetition and a fifth box will be added to the performance level section to capture the quality indicators that are not applicable to an organization.

4.0 MEASUREMENT AND OUTCOMES

4.1 Successes and Challenges

A number of key factors were listed by the project teams as being essential to successfully completing the QSA process. They include:

- Organizational commitment to dedicating time and resources to the process
- Establishing a project team tasked with undertaking the QSA process that is composed of representatives from all involved stakeholders, particularly staff members
- Selecting a project team leader to facilitate and lead the process
- Selecting project team members that understand and are interested in the process
- Ensuring time management is realistic and allowing project team members the time required to take part in the process
- Assigning the various elements to individual project team members worked well and kept the group focused at each session
- Dedicating meetings to a single element, or in some cases an element or two, but never more than that helped keep sessions timely and focused
- Round table discussions and the inclusion of staff members in the process provided valuable insights
- Establish a time limit for meetings of 2 hours maximum
- Timelines should be respected and scheduled at the beginning of the process
- Transparency between project team members and stakeholders
- Setting realistic performance levels
- Specific areas of improvement were determined when evaluating the feedback received from stakeholders
- Developing a manageable and realistic action plan
- Mentored approach
- Being honest in evaluating strengths so they can be maintained and built on

Project teams also identified the following challenges:

- Time and resources (human and financial)
- Finding ways to bring learners together, to gather valuable “learner feedback”
- Unforeseen staff turnover (WES)
- Time constraints of project teams limited the sampling size of some elements. In the future, the organization would look at a bigger sample because it would be more reflective of their operation

4.2 Outcomes

The QSA process helps organizations focus on knowing what they do and how they want to do it, learning from what they do, and using what they learn to develop their organization and its services. Some of the outcomes realized during the course of the QSA process include:

- Determination, in some cases, that actions had to be taken where it was assumed that the practice was in place when in fact it was not the case
- Development of a number of forms, processes and procedures
- Development of program evaluation surveys/questionnaires
- Updating the organization’s website
- Sharing the organization’s mission, vision and values statements with stakeholders within and outside the organization
- Reviewing existing manuals, policies and procedures
- Taking time to discuss program and service delivery approaches
- Identifying strengths and areas of improvement
- Good team building exercise

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Recommendations

a) QSA Process

- The QSA process should not be spread over too long a period (within a 12 month period) as to not lose focus and intensity
- When undertaking the QSA process, keep in mind, that answers can reflect both regional and provincial perspectives. To this end involving appropriate representatives at the regional level (i.e. Regional Consultants/Coordinators) to seek evidence and to connect with Central office will facilitate the continuous improvement action planning process
- Change the term Internal Quality Self-Assessment to Internal Quality Management Review

- Undertake the QSA process every two years and gradually move to a yearly process
- The development, review and revision of the Quality Framework, its policies and procedures should be the responsibility of CALS

b) QSA Participation/Consultation

- When possible, involve personnel with expertise or background in quality assurance on the project team to provide additional guidance
- Engage a proportion of staff, learners, teachers, tutors, employers and stakeholders when it is not possible to consult every individual for feedback on a particular element

c) Financial

- Consider some financial compensation to help offset staff time, meeting and travel expenses for visits to complete a more in-depth analysis of programs and services

d) Best Practices

- Sharing best practices between organizations would save time and lead to quality management
- Review the NBCC Quality Management System to adopt and adapt elements of their structure, terminology, policies, procedures, etc, as this could be beneficial to CALS
- Keep the number of policies to a minimum (for example one policy per quality standard) and categorize processes and procedures within each quality standard

e) QSA Tool

- Ensure the terminology in the QSA Tool is clear (lexicon)
- Include members of the Regional Committees (volunteers and paid staff) in the element that addresses Human Resources
- Adding a “non-applicable” box in the performance level section

f) Terminology

- Develop a Quality Management Lexicon. Again, it could be advantageous to use, while adapting to context, relevant terms found in the NBCC lexicon. (see Appendix B)

g) CALS Procedures/Guidelines

- Include the creation of a quality self-assessment committee in the Community Adult Learning Program procedures manual (organizational structure)
- Integrate the QSA process in the WES Guidelines
- Questions found in the learner exit questionnaire could be revised to reflect the quality indicators that are specific to learners
- Send the employer and partner survey to employers at the end of training and to partners at the end of the fiscal year
- Review the Employee Performance Review form of all employees (includes Regional Committee/Board employee) to ensure that action items related to performance are in line with the quality indicators in the QSA Tool
- Recommendations regarding improvements to CALS programs should be sent to the Regional Consultant/Coordinator who will forward them to CALS Central Office for review
- Avoid duplication in getting feedback from employers/learners/stakeholders

5.2 Conclusion

The organizations who engaged in the QSA process were all successful in achieving the goals identified in the pilot project terms of reference. Their participation in this process has provided CALS with valuable information to further enhance the QSA process and QSA Guide/Tool. It also recognizes their effectiveness in delivering quality literacy and essential program and services as well as their commitment to continuous improvement.

All organizations would agree that the QSA process has provided them with a good snapshot of their adult literacy and essential skills program practices and fresh insights on pathways for continuous improvement.

As a next step, CALS will consider the feedback and recommendations provided by the project teams and decide on the actions to be undertaken to gradually progress the implementation of the QSA process to all service delivery providers in the province.

**Central Valley Adult Learning Association, Inc.
Quality Self-Assessment Committee**

Terms of Reference

The Quality Self-Assessment Committee, herein after known as the QSA Committee is a committee of the Board of Directors.

Purpose:

The purpose of the QSA Committee is to participate in a Pilot Project in conjunction with Community Adult Services [CALs] Branch to assess the quality of our adult literacy and essential skills programs and to assist the department [PETL], its partners and ourselves to create an action plan for continuous program improvements.

Terms of Reference:

The QSA Committee is established by the Board of Directors and it is responsible for:

- X Submission of periodic reports to the Board and to CALS Branch as to the progress of the project
- X Providing CALS Branch with performance level ratings for all 8 Quality Standards for Adult Literacy and Essential Skills delivery in New Brunswick as outlined in the QSA Action Plan, specifically:
 - X QS1: The service delivery organization is managed responsibly and meets all regulatory requirements
 - X QS2: Planning processes are in place that leads to a documented strategy and action plan showing how the organization plans to meet the skills needs of their stakeholders
 - X QS3: The service delivery organization identifies, deploys and manages effectively the resources required to support its action plan
 - X QS4: Adult Literacy and Essential Skills services promote mutual respect, equality and diversity and are sensitive to the social, cultural, vocational, and learning contexts of all learners
 - X QS5: Human Resources are qualified and or experienced in line with provincial guidelines, are supported appropriately by the organization, and have access to regular opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills
 - X QS6: Program development and delivery is focussed on enabling learners to meet their literacy and essential skills goals and reflects best practices in adult learning principles
 - X QS7: Adult Literacy and Essential Skills delivery organizations work in partnership with other stakeholders to ensure learner needs are met

- X QS8: The service delivery organization conducts its business in an open and transparent manner and is committed to the continuous improvement of its practices, programs and services
- X The committee will provide performance level ratings from 1 to 4 following assessment and discussion by the committee members on each of the above 8 elements
- X The committee will submit monthly reports to CALS Branch and to the CVALA Board commencing October 31, 2011
- X The committee will develop an Action Plan for continuous program improvements by February 29, 2012
- X The Committee will submit a final Pilot Project report to both CALS Branch and the CVALA Board by March 30, 2012
- X The committee will assume other responsibilities that may be directed or delegated by the CVALA Board of Directors from time to time

Membership:

- X A maximum of six members may sit on this committee of which three must be the CVALA Board Members; the remaining members may be drawn from CVALA employees
- X The President of the Board of Directors can sit in on any meeting at any time
- X The Regional Consultant may be invited to participate by the committee where it is deemed her expertise may assist the committee in its deliberations

Appointment Process:

- X QSA members are appointed by the Board of Directors upon receiving a recommendation from the QSA committee.

Term:

- X Maximum of 2 years, renewable by the Board.

Record of Meetings:

- X Minutes of all meetings shall be recorded by a member of the committee designated to serve as Secretary either by election by the committee or by appointment by the chair at each meeting.
- X Minutes of the QSA Committee shall be circulated to committee members within 10 days of each meeting and shall be approved by committee members prior to be distributed to other committees or the Board
- X All minutes of meetings shall be forwarded to the Executive Committee of the board by the Committee Chair or designate.
- X Meetings will be held at CVALA=s Head Office at 137 MacDonald Avenue, Oromocto, unless the Chair or Committee designate another more convenient location from time to time.
- X Minutes of all meetings will be retained at CVALA=s Head Office.

Administrative Policies:

- X Travel and meeting expenses for the CGA Committee members shall be reimbursed in accordance with CVALA policies and procedures for such items.

- X Members of the QSA Committee will comply with the Board of Directors by-law procedures.
- X All meetings shall be conducted using Roberts Rules of Order

Appendix B

Quality Management Lexicon --- Lexique de la Gestion Qualité

- Quality Framework/Cadre Qualité
- Quality Management System/Système Gestion Qualité
- Continuous Improvement/Amélioration Continue
- Corrective/Preventive Action Plan/Plan d'action corrective/préventive
- Internal Quality Management Review/Revue Interne - Gestion Qualité
- Objective Evidence/Preuve tangible
- Policy/Politique
- Procedure/Procédure
- Work Instruction/Directive de travail
- Process/Processus
- Learner/) Apprenant
- Organization/Organisme