

## **A Tale of Two Workshops**

**June 2005**

### **What the workshops were about**

In June 2005, CAMA sponsored two regional workshops: one in Grand Prairie, Alberta and the other in Fort Erie, Ontario. The Grand Prairie workshop was a day and a half long and the Fort Erie workshop a day. The workshop format was the same in both communities. The format was adjusted for a one-day event in Fort Erie.

The purpose of the workshops was to raise awareness about municipal workplace learning and to assist management and labour in planning a municipal workplace learning project. The workshops included a focus on opportunities and challenges in setting up programs in municipalities that attended. Participants spent time working through the components of joint planning and the steps in planning workplace learning programs. At the end of the workshop, participants from each municipality developed an action plan for next steps.

### **Who attended**

Participants in both workshops were principally municipal managers and union representatives interested in either finding out more about workplace learning and/or how to get a workplace learning initiative going in their municipality. Representatives from the literacy communities also attended the workshop. Literacy representatives were invited so municipalities could take advantage of their advice, expertise and services in their future planning. Conversely, the opportunity provided a learning experience about municipal workplace learning for these organizations.

In Grand Prairie, approximately 20 people attended the evening session with fifteen attending the session the next day. Workshops participants included management and labour representatives from 6 municipalities, and local representatives from the literacy and educational community. Patricia Nutter, Patricia Nutter, CAMA Literacy Project Director and Beverly Norman educational rep, CUPE National also attended the workshop.

In Fort Erie, there were 15 participants. There were 5 management, 6 labour representatives, and one corporate training person representing 5 municipalities. There were 3 literacy representatives. Patricia Nutter, CAMA Literacy Project Director and Sylvia Sioufi, Literacy Project Coordinator, CUPE National also attended the workshop.

In each community, the mayor welcomed participants to the workshops and emphasized the sponsoring municipality's support for and commitment to literacy.

### **What participants said were the benefits of municipal workplace learning**

As part of the workshop, participants discussed what they thought were the benefits of having a municipal workplace learning initiative. These were broken down for management and workers.

*For unionized workers there were many benefits.* Common benefits identified in both workshops included enhanced self-esteem, opportunities for advancement, improved communication with management, and greater satisfaction at the workplace. Greater participation in union activities was also a common benefit identified by workshop participants. In Grand Prairie, participants said that enhanced family and community life was also an important benefit.

In the Fort Erie workshop, participants noted separate benefits for non-unionized staff. These were related to career advancement opportunities, better pay, cross training and flexibility of assignments.

*For managers there were a multitude of benefits.* Some of the common benefits identified across both workshops were improved employee morale and confidence, and higher productivity.

Fort Erie participants thought that better customer service, less down time, and less work for managers were also benefits of a workplace learning initiative.

Grand Prairie participants identified other benefits for managers such as less conflict and fewer accidents.

## **What participants said were the barriers in setting up a municipal workplace learning program**

There were common barriers identified by both groups. Barriers included lack of funding, no training culture, and lack of commitment by Council or management to such an initiative. Another common barrier was lack of awareness about the need for municipal workplace learning initiative in that “ this problem doesn’t apply to us.”

Common barriers for potential participants centre around fear and a negative stigma as well as questions about confidentiality of programs. Time to attend and family responsibilities were also cited as barriers.

Grand Prairie participants said that language barriers, workload and no vision were also barriers to implementing workplace programs.

Fort Erie identified methods of outreach like attaching information about tuition reimbursement or training to pay stubs as a barrier.

## **What participants said about strategies for addressing barriers and available supports**

Participants from both workshops noted strategies and supports for implementing a municipal workplace learning initiative. These are outlined as follows:

### **Funding**

- Pool tuition money available for individuals and use it to run a workplace program (GP, FE)
- Negotiate money for the program through collective bargaining (GP, FE)
- Canvass supportive councillors to get their commitment to funding (FE)
- Build awareness and develop a communication strategy (GP)

### **Fear of getting involved and management perceptions**

- Provide education and awareness about the benefits of learning to all stakeholders (GP, FE)

- Ensure that management endorses the program (GP)
- Ensure the program is confidential (FE)
- Provide one on one tutoring for those who need it (GP)
- First group going through will be the champions and mentors for others (GP)

### **Time, shift work and family demands**

- Offer courses in and around shifts; have multiple offerings to accommodate shifts (GP, FE)
- Find out what time frames would work through an Organizational Needs Assessment (FE)
- Offer financially supported childcare (GP)
- Offer programs 50% on work time and 50% on people's own time (FE)

### **Lack of education and awareness about the issue**

- Develop a communication plan to let everyone know what is happening
- Conduct a needs assessment to create awareness (FE)
- Show what has worked in other municipalities

### **Workload**

- Make it a priority (GP)
- Make the program voluntary (GP)

### **No vision**

- Develop understanding between management and labour (GP)

### **Available supports for implementing municipal workplace learning**

- CAMA offers support through workshops, consultation, resources, newsletter
- CUPE also offer support through workshops, consultation, resources, newsletter
- The literacy community offers free programs and expertise

## What participants said about how joint committee should operate

*Who should lead the joint committees and what are their responsibilities?*

Both groups said that there should be co-chairs (management and labour). The Fort Erie group said that the co-chairs should set agendas, send materials out, control the meetings, delegate, report back to respective parties and make sure that plan are followed through on. The Grand Prairie group said that the co-chairs need to have good leadership and facilitation skills.

*How are decisions made?*

Participants from both workshops said it should be through consensus or democratic process. The Grand Prairie groups expressed this idea as “the will of the group is evident” and Fort Erie participants expressed it as “majority rules.”

*What authority does the committee have?*

Both groups felt that the committee needed to have the authority to make decisions.

In the Fort Erie workshop participants said that the parameters of the committee’s authority should be stated clearly in the terms of reference. The committee should have a budget and have the right people on it to be able to make decisions. There should be equal representation of labour and management.

Grand Prairie participants said that the committee should present plans to senior management who should rubber stamp decisions. The union will present the plans to their membership.

*How can the committee ensure that internal communication is effective?*

The Fort Erie participants said terms of reference, agendas, active listening, and making decisions jointly were important for effective internal communication. They also said that decisions need to be made jointly and that mutual respect was

important. All committee member should be kept “in the loop” for every issue addressed. An outside facilitator might be needed.

*How can the committee ensure that external communication is effective?*

Grand Prairie participants want to use a variety of communication methods including e-mail, bulletin boards and employee newsletters.

Fort Erie participants emphasized the need to listen to what members and staff want and act on this. Committee members should be ambassadors. The committee needs to find out how people would like to be communicated with using existing communication channels.

*What other guidelines for working together would you recommend?*

Grand Prairie and Fort Erie participants emphasized respect, active listening, full participation, effective communication and planning. They said that successes and achievements should be celebrated.

Fort Erie participants also focused on process. They said that time is needed to develop the process, and that follow through and consistency is important. They emphasized positive and active participation, and managed expectations. They said that offering relevant and high quality training was important.

## Participants' action plans

Altogether, eleven action plans were developed from the two workshops, 6 from Grand Prairie and 5 from Fort Erie. Participants based their action plans on the process steps for implementing municipal workplace learning discussed in the workshop. (See below).

### Steps in Organizing a Workplace Learning Program

- Identify literacy champions and supporters
- Form stakeholder committee
- Gain commitment
- Set overall goals and policies
- Conduct needs assessment
- Determine program priorities, goals, approach
- Develop a communication plan to promote programs
- Plan evaluation
- Implement programs
- Conduct ongoing evaluation and improve programs
- Conduct final evaluation
- Celebrate program results

## Action Plans

Participants' action plans reflect the stage municipalities were at in the process of implementing municipal workplace learning. For example, in some cases, there was awareness raising to be done to get commitment and in other cases municipalities were ready to go ahead with the planning process. In one case, a municipality already had a workplace learning committee. The chart below provides highlights of the action plans. Municipalities remain anonymous to protect confidentiality when not all partners attended the workshops.

Municipality	Actions	Time Line
<b>Fort Erie</b>		
Municipality 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain commitment from stakeholders</li> <li>• Form committee</li> <li>• Conduct organizational Needs Assessment</li> </ul>	Completed by December 2005
Municipality 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain commitment from stakeholders</li> <li>• Form committee</li> <li>• Conduct organizational Needs Assessment</li> <li>• Communicate results</li> <li>• Prepare budget</li> </ul>	Completed by October 2005
Municipalities 3 and 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain commitment from stakeholders</li> <li>• Prepare to set up committee and conduct organizational Needs Assessment</li> </ul>	Completed by December 2005
Municipality 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate committee work, program policies</li> <li>• Make improvements to committee process</li> <li>• Review policies</li> <li>• Evaluate committee</li> </ul>	Completed by June 2006

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Time Line</b>
<b>Grand Prairie</b>		
Municipalities 1 and 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain commitment from stakeholders</li> <li>• Form committee</li> <li>• Conduct organizational Needs Assessment</li> <li>• Develop communication strategy</li> <li>• Develop evaluation</li> <li>• Implement courses</li> <li>• Monitor and report process</li> </ul>	Completed by June 2006
Municipality 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build awareness and education</li> <li>• Conduct Needs Assessment</li> <li>• Determine program policies and programs</li> <li>• Promote different options for programs</li> </ul>	Not Known
Municipality 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain commitment from stakeholders</li> <li>• Develop learning policies and strategies</li> <li>• Make changes to budget allocations</li> <li>• Conduct ONA</li> <li>• Designate training centre and implement programs</li> <li>• Evaluate process</li> </ul>	Up to budget allocations complete by 2006
Municipality 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form committee</li> <li>• Gain commitment from stakeholders and set goals</li> <li>• Conduct organizational Needs Assessment</li> <li>• Determine priorities</li> <li>• Develop communication strategy</li> <li>• Implement pilot project</li> <li>• Evaluate project</li> </ul>	Implement pilot program in January 2006
Municipality 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add members to committee</li> <li>• Set terms of reference and develop program action plan</li> <li>• Determine interest and conduct ONA</li> </ul>	Completed by end of August 2005

## What participants said about the workshops

Twenty-eight participants completed workshop evaluations, 16 in Grand Prairie, and 11 in Fort Erie.

Participants gave the workshops and workshop facilitators high praise. In both communities, participants said that they found the workshops interesting and informative and that they learned a lot. For many participants, the workshops exceeded their expectations.

The most useful elements of the workshops were that participants felt they learned the steps to starting and implementing workplace learning programs. They also enjoyed the networking, sharing of ideas, hearing what other municipalities were doing, small group work and the joint nature of the workshop. Developing the action plans was an extremely useful part of the workshop noted participants.

Participants' said that their awareness of the issue of literacy and essential skills was enhanced. The great majority of participants described the action steps they will take after the workshop as indicated in their action plans.

## Detailed summary of feedback from workshop evaluations

Evaluation respondents: 29

	Management	Labour	Literacy	Other	TOTAL
<b>Fort Erie</b>	3 <sup>1</sup>	6	3	1	<b>13</b>
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	6	5	4	1	<b>16</b>

### 1. How well did the workshop meet your expectations for learning more about municipal workplace learning programs?

	Management	Labour	Literacy	Other
<b>Fort Erie</b>	The workshop exceeded expectations. There was great input from other municipalities. The initiative is now much more tangible.	The workshop met and exceeded expectations. It was a good introduction. These programs are needed. Learned about corporate programs and shared my ideas.	The workshop met expectations very well, learned a lot.	The workshop exceeded expectations. Learned numerous ways to apply learnings to my job.
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	The workshop met or exceeded expectations. It was informative, provided awareness as well as tools and resources. Action planning was valuable.	The workshop was interesting, provided great resources and increased awareness of need for work- place programs.	There was great discussion, networking, and learning about what is going on in workplace literacy.	The workshop exceeded expectations.

### 2. What were the most useful aspects of the day's program?

<sup>1</sup> 6 managers attended the session. However, only 3 completed an evaluation form.

	<b>Management</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Fort Erie</b>	Most useful aspects were building joint committees, action planning, networking and sharing, getting resources	Most useful aspects were action planning and learning about what other municipalities are doing.	Most useful aspects were sharing and networking; hearing about issues and barriers to establishing workplace programs.	Most useful aspects were the dialogue, tools and materials; involvement of colleague from the union.
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	Most useful aspects were discussion of barriers and benefits, action planning, discussion and group activities	Most useful aspects were learning how to start and implement a program, goal setting and listening to other's interpretations.	Most useful aspects were learning about the roles and support of employers and unions in these initiatives; group discussion and planning time.	Most useful aspects were hearing from different communities and their stages in the development of programs.

### 3. What changes can you suggest to improve the workshops?

	<b>Management</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Fort Erie</b>	Suggested changes include reviewing literacy programs rather than group work; controlling sidebar conversations.	Suggested changes include having more managers attend, more discussion on planning barriers, and more info to take away.	Suggested changes include having a list of participants with contact information, more success models and identifying challenges early on.	Suggested changes include having representation from all municipalities
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	Suggested changes include more time, more indepth information on case studies, more references and upcoming conferences, having a list of participants.	Suggested changes include having more time and changing the name from literacy to workplace learning.	Suggested changes include having more participation from other employers.	Suggested changes include having more time for discussion; another film to break up activities.

**4. What other types of workshops would you like to see CAMA develop?**

	<b>Management</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Fort Erie</b>	Other workshop or learning ideas include anti-harassment and sensitivity training,	Other workshop or learning ideas include how to prevent harassment in the workplace, vocational training and union shop talks.	Other workshop or learning ideas include an ONA workshop.	Other workshop or learning ideas include quality of work life, succession planning and career path planning.
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	Other workshop or learning ideas include learning about CAMA and “Respect in the Workplace”	Other workshop or learning ideas include a Train the Trainer for literacy.	None	Other workshop or learning ideas include how administrators can contribute to effective governance.

**5. What are three things you learned about workplace literacy and learning in municipal workplaces that were new to you?<sup>2</sup>**

	<b>Management</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Fort Erie</b>	Top 3 learnings are 1) the need to address literacy, 2) various, successful program models	Top 3 learnings are 1) lots of ways to do a program and municipalities involved, 2) different definitions of literacy, 3) lots of help available	Top 3 learnings are 1) need for joint planning and clear communication, 2) benefits and barriers	Top 3 learnings are 1) need for evaluation of initiatives, 2) the need for joint planning, and 3) different definitions of literacy
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	Top 3 learnings are 1) the need to address literacy, 2) learning is for everyone, and 3) needs assessment steps and action planning.	Top 3 learnings are 1) the need for programs like this, 2) benefits, barriers and supports, and 3) joint committee development, program planning steps.	Top 3 learnings are 1) the need for creative programs for municipal employees, 2) CAMA involvement, and 3) literacy resources that are available	Top 3 learnings are 1) how active unions are in workplace learning, 2) best practices, and 3) the need to affect policy changes at all levels.

<sup>2</sup> The top three comments from participants are ordered started with the most frequent learnings.

**6. What specific actions will you undertake back at your own workplace as a result of this workshop?**

	<b>Management</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Fort Erie</b>	Actions to undertake include conducting an ONA, getting all stakeholders on board.	Actions to undertake include speaking to union executive and selecting committee members, lobbying and meeting with senior management, HR, Council, and mayor, telling co-workers about existing programs; identifying a champion and getting started on action planning.	N/A	Actions to undertake include re-evaluating what we are doing and celebrating successes.
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	Actions to undertake include implementing the action plan, awareness and education with management team and Council, developing committee, and conducting a needs assessment	Actions to undertake include promotion and education, gathering information from other labour affiliations, developing a committee and developing a plan for a workplace learning program.	Actions to undertake include connecting with the City and Council for potential partnership and support, sharing information about municipal learning with others and providing information on literacy and essential skills.	Actions to undertake include figuring out how a provincial administrator's association can help support smaller communities in workplace learning.

## 7. Additional Comments

	<b>Management</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Fort Erie</b>	Good workshop. Thanks to facilitator and CAMA coordinator—both were excellent.	Great workshop. Thank you and well done. Glad to attend. The facilitator was a great instructor.	Facilitator was great.	
<b>Grand Prairie</b>	Great opportunity.	The workshop was an eye opener. Thank you and enjoyed the day.	Great informative workshop. Well done and organized. Great facilitator.	Thanks for the day.