



# **BLUEPRINT FOR A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

**A GUIDE FOR THE MUNICIPAL STAKEHOLDER**

**Prepared for the “Municipal Workplace Learning and the  
Community: Bridges to the Future” Project of the Canadian  
Association of Municipal Administrators**

# Table of Contents

<b>1. The case for a Learning Community.....</b>	<b>3</b>
• Raising Adult Literacy Levels – A pan-Canadian challenge	
• Smart Cities	
<b>2. A leadership role for local governments.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. A process to create a Learning Community.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Step 1 – Positioning the leadership role of municipal government	
Step 2 - Clarifying partnerships	
Step 3 - Arriving at a definition of a Learning Community	
Step 4 - Getting started	
<b>4. Designing for success.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Appendix A – Resource List.....</b>	<b>13</b>

## **1.The case for a Learning Community**

### **Raising Adult Literacy Levels – A pan-Canadian challenge**

It is now clearly accepted that skills and knowledge are the keys to economic progress. In February 2002, Human Resources Development Canada released a discussion paper in support of the federal government's National Agenda on Skills and Learning. Titled "Knowledge Matters", the paper stated that, "our knowledge-based economy demands a skilled workforce" and that "a looming demographic crunch will exacerbate the skills shortage" and pointed to "a learning system" that needed strengthening. In addressing the area of labour market development it noted that " The very requirements for literacy have changed. What was sufficient in an industrial era no longer equips people for success in a knowledge society."<sup>1</sup> The paper revealed that "nearly eight million Canadians - more than 40 percent of working age Canadians - lack the basic literacy skills required for successful participation in our rapidly changing economy"<sup>2</sup>

More recently, in correspondence with the Movement for Canadian Literacy, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development stated that the government of Canada agrees with the Standing Committee on Human Resource Development's analysis and with the thrust and spirit of the recommendations spelled out in its paper, *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*. The government believes that raising adult literacy skills will mean that all partners work together as part of a concerted effort to address literacy issues in Canada. The Minister noted that Human resources Skills Development Canada welcomes the continued involvement of all its partners in working towards these goals.

Clearly, in the drive to address the issue of adult literacy skills in Canada, it is at the local level that the effects of literacy/workplace education and lifelong learning are most evident and where the impact on local economies and the quality of community life is most directly felt. In order to guarantee future stability, smart cities must undertake the task of equipping themselves with the skills to ensure that their community will flourish in the knowledge society.

### **Smart Cities**

The concept of a 'smart city' began gaining favour with local governments as far back as 1995 when the Toronto Globe and Mail named Halifax, Saskatoon, Ottawa/Carleton, Toronto, and Edmonton as Canada's five Smart Cities.<sup>3</sup> Each of these cities is moving forward in a proactive fashion to ensure its position for future success. An excellent example of the outgrowth of being recognized as one of Canada's Smart Cities is seen in the Halifax area. The Greater Halifax Partnership is a unique collaboration, bringing business and government together to foster and invest in the economic growth of Halifax, NS. The Halifax Regional Municipality is a major player in the partnership, and as such

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<sup>1</sup> Knowledge Matters, Human Resources Development Canada, February 2002

<sup>2</sup> Knowledge Matters, Human Resources Development Canada, February 2002

<sup>3</sup> Toronto Globe and Mail, Report on Business, August 1995, page 44

is recognized for formalizing a Workplace Education Program that addresses the literacy and workplace education needs of its employees. This innovative initiative acknowledges the importance of becoming a learning community to the success of the partnership.

The City of Ottawa's 2001, Ottawa 20/20 Smart Growth Summit produced a report outlining plans for the future growth of the city that included a section on Knowledge Management.<sup>4</sup>

The City of Edmonton was one of the five cities to conduct a pilot program for the delivery of Workplace Education as part of the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrator's *Literate Cities* project. Edmonton promotes itself as a 'smart city' based on its record of outstanding cooperation between the various levels of government, the University of Alberta, and the business community.

These 'smart cities' have begun to address the critical importance of achieving an educated workforce in a learning community. Such an approach appears vital to the economic success of the region.

There is little doubt that those local governments in Canada who, having built an educated workforce of their own, can lead the way in the creation of a blueprint for a learning community. In so doing they will be recognized as leaders in the vital area of human skills development, and will unquestionably position the local economy for success in a knowledge economy.

## **2. A Leadership Role for Local Governments**

What would the role of local government be in the creation of a Learning Community? Generally, literacy delivery falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. The limited role of local governments to date has been to introduce internal literacy/workplace education programs to benefit service delivery and simultaneously enhance the skills and personal development of employees. A few local governments have been partners with community organizations to enhance literacy/learning initiatives.

Over the past several years, the federal government has placed a greater emphasis on literacy/learning, particularly as it relates to the labour market skills of Canadians. It has acknowledged this as a crucial national issue, recognizing that within ten years, there will be zero net growth in the labour force. Any labour market growth will have to come from immigration. Consequently the federal government plans to ensure that all Canadians have "opportunities and incentives to acquire new skills and knowledge". It emphasizes its role as a "knowledge broker", facilitating research about the relationships between "learning outcomes and key learning determinants in the home, school and the community and measuring and providing information on skills and learning results."<sup>5</sup> In "Knowledge Matters" it outlined two goals to meet that objective:

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<sup>4</sup> Ottawa 20/20 Charting A Course, City of Ottawa, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Knowledge Matters, Human Resources Development Canada, February 2002

1. that the number of adult Canadians with low literacy skills is reduced by 25 percent over the next decade.
2. that within five years, the number of adult learners is increased by one million men and women throughout all segments of society.

The federal government remains committed to working with provinces and territories and to engaging a wide range of partners and stakeholders to achieve this goal.

With this picture clearly in view, a role emerges for local government to act as a catalyst and champion of skill development and continuing education within the community as a whole and the workplace in particular. Commitment of government and non-government partners at the local level is a crucial element in literacy advances. By championing the move toward a Learning Community, the literacy/learning issues that appear over the next decade will be addressed at the grass roots level and can in turn, positively influence the literacy investments of the more senior levels of government.

### **3. A process to create a Learning Community**

Once it is decided that it is in your government's best interests to champion the development of a Learning Community, help now exists to get your initiative up and running.

For the past two years the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) has supported the work of its National Committee for a Learning Community. The Committee, made up of representatives of municipal governments and the fields of education and literacy, examined a series of key steps that will assist municipal stakeholders in launching a program of their own design. The following steps provide a framework to guide municipalities in encouraging and supporting workplace literacy and in developing partnerships with community leaders to maximize the efforts of all.

The four key steps are as follows.

*Step 1. Positioning the leadership of municipal government.*

*Step 2. Clarifying partnerships*

*Step 3. Arriving at a definition of a Learning Community*

*Step 4. Getting started*

#### **Step 1 – Positioning the leadership of municipal government**

*Getting started – Making a Commitment*

*Internal/Workplace*

- Recognize literacy as an important workplace issue
- Look at emerging needs/issues within the workplace

- Appoint a ‘coordinator/champion(s)’ to bring together people (e.g., unions, managers, human resources, workers, literacy groups, volunteers) to develop a strategic plan to address the needs of the workers and the municipality
- Allocate/utilize resources (note – could be internal, or include or consist of community resources, expertise)
- Develop/implement program
- Communicate

### ***External/Community Interaction***

- Articulate the Vision
- Identify important community issues and interactions between the municipality and community (note – this is a key piece that will be instrumental in the formation of partnerships, identification of resources, and involvement of citizens in the public process)
- Get involved in key events (e.g., Literacy Day)
- Form links to the community (e.g., schools, neighbourhood associations, existing literacy groups, community agencies, other levels of government, media, sponsors)
- Use municipal facilities as focal points (e.g., libraries, community centres)

### ***Making it Happen – in the workplace and the Community***

- Seek to integrate literacy issues into business practices (e.g., plain language in reports; new skills required in return to work situations)
- Build on existing activities and initiatives (e.g., orientation for new employees; training, development opportunities; election outreach)
- Link to strategic initiatives and business priorities (e.g., position literacy as one aspect of diversity/equity; consider literacy skills required in an increasingly technological environment; make municipal services more accessible to all members of the community so as to enhance public involvement)
- Provide opportunities for skills development (e.g., language classes, Toastmasters)
- Provide grants to community agencies that support literacy initiatives (e.g., include literacy as one of the factors for consideration in determining how to allocate grant monies)
- Offer programs (libraries, community centres) that address literacy issues in neighbourhoods)
- Focus on individual needs (e.g., learner centered, flexible approach)
- Take incremental steps (e.g., pilot project, small changes)

### ***Keeping it Alive – Sustaining the Vision***

- Actively maintain relationships with partners
- Continue to develop new allies (e.g., seek out business sponsors; encourage local “celebrities” to support literacy initiatives)
- Share stories (e.g., publish articles by learners or participants in literacy initiatives)
- Participate in community/literacy events
- Communicate (e.g., on notice board, posters, websites; in civic newspapers, community flyers, program updates; in Council meetings)
- Celebrate (e.g., Recognition ceremonies, certificates for individuals or groups)
- Talk about the benefits of literacy – to the organization, the community, the individual.

### ***Moving to the Next Level***

- Make Literacy a priority, with a vision and specific goals
- Develop a strategy for an integrated approach where everyone is working together, rather than separately
- Create a steering committee with representatives from the various levels of government, education, literacy groups, unions, business, community
- Link to major issues that affect our communities and citizens (e.g., health and safety, crime, skills shortages, poverty, drugs, neighbourhood development projects, 2010 Olympics and Paralympics)

## **Step 2. Clarifying the partnerships**

Because any plan to become a Learning Community has to build on working in partnership in the broad community, it is critical to the success of the plan to recognize all the partners from the very outset.

### ***Who Are the Partners?***

- The literacy, business, government, health, education, employment, justice, safety and child care communities, along with the unions.

### ***When and how should they be brought together?***

- There are partnerships within partnerships. Much of the change happens at a local level, and often is driven up to the national level. The way cities are operating is starting to influence federal and provincial policy, which in turn, accelerates the rate at which change is occurring. Because we are talking about creating a Learning Community, we should promote the development of partnership circles operating at a local level, entering into dialogue with the provincial and national partners.

- Gaining buy-in at the top with the ‘big picture’ in mind will be essential to designing and maintaining effective communications/processes/outcomes at the local level. To kick start this, support from the national and provincial levels would be helpful (e.g., the Provincial Government in British Columbia has already identified literacy as a priority, and has a “ Developing Community Literacy” program in the planning stages.)

***What would each partner’s role look like?***

It would be very powerful if the partners were to model the behaviours that support a learning community by:

- Talking about the concept, keeping it in the forefront of people’s attention.
- Looking within one’s own constituency to identify specific needs, recognizing and then ‘resourcing’ initiatives that address those needs.
- Sharing information with others.

Different communities face different challenges and are at different levels of learning; it would be important for partners to work within these contexts and look for solutions that fit a particular situation.

Part of the role of each partner when they ‘buy in’ to the process is to:

- Bring forward what they have done/can do and to link these actions to real life situations.
- Consider how they can contribute to the changes needed for the creation/enhancement of a Learning Community.

At the national and provincial level, there is an opportunity for those partners to assist with research, definitions, data, contact lists and informed advice, and funding, while all partners would contribute in preparing working definitions, research, data, contacts, informed advice and funding.

***What would be their initial agenda?***

- Articulate the reasons that each partner is tackling the issues of literacy. There has to be buy-in and payback for the partners or their commitment won’t be sustained. Each partner should, at the outset, express what he or she hopes to achieve for or take back to his or her sector by participating in this initiative.
- Establish a common understanding of what is meant by a Learning Community. The challenge would be to review all the definitions used and arrive at a common one.

- Create terms of reference for the project. Clarify what outcomes are expected of the initiative and what measurable improvements in knowledge, skill, behaviour, attitude, status etc. can be expected. Create ‘doable’ time frames that suit all partners.

### **Step 3. Arriving at a definition of a Learning Community**

As has been stated, it is critical that all the partners can agree on a common definition for a Learning Community. As a preliminary step to putting together the process outlined in this guide, Committee members deliberated and agreed upon the following definition of a Learning Community. It is included here to act as a catalyst for your own discussion with partners.

**“Learning Communities are neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities and regions that make lifelong learning an important value and everyone’s job. The whole community – workers, businesses, service providers, educators, youth, and seniors – cares about continuous learning and shares the responsibility for it. By promoting lifelong learning, a real difference is made in all areas of people’s lives – in society, in their jobs, as citizens, in the economy. Everyone is included in making a long-term commitment to lifelong learning for the benefit of all.”**

### **Step 4. Getting started**

What follows is a straightforward list of actions that will see any new initiative start out on the right foot. It is laid out in a step-by-step format designed to guide each initiative to success.

- A. Determine why you are doing it – what specific needs are you addressing and what benefits do you anticipate? Need to get below ‘political correctness’ to real stuff that resonates with people.
- B. Establish links/connections to other key initiatives (e.g., skills shortages, succession planning, building a more inclusive workforce, technological change, and engagement of citizens in election process) Look within your organization to identify priorities that have budgets/projects/reports attached to them.
- C. Get commitment at a high level (political/management). “Recruit” a high-ranking, enthusiastic, influential champion(s). Consider what you are doing within your organization and see how you can expand that to the larger community- any ‘blueprint’ needs to be flexible and customized to a particular situation.
- D. Identify who else is doing something similar. Scan your program’s service area. What else is happening related to literacy initiatives? Look at the databases of other programs you are aware of. These contacts should be able to identify databases of community organizations based on their own environmental scans. Check with provincial agencies, Education Departments etc. for help.

- E. Secure funding – from within the municipality and other institutions/the community/businesses.
- F. Find partners and determine what they are going to contribute (e.g., funds, space, advertising, expertise, in-kind contributions)
- G. Establish a ‘points’ person and determine rules/responsibilities/timelines/expected outcomes.
- H. Seek orientation and training from the likes of CAMA to galvanize this person’s enthusiasm and provide them with a background, context, research results, a list of potential community stakeholders and a framework for community development.
- I. The ‘points’ person entices possible partners to a meeting, provides a framework for community development and offers a compelling invitation to join the team.
- J. Start small, but in an area where you can build some momentum and create awareness and excitement. Have a plan to sustain the initiative (e.g., different phases of the project).
- K. Talk about what’s happening – tell the story – celebrate participation/success. This is about people and learning so it shouldn’t be too academic.
- L. Don’t wait until it’s perfect – Just do it!

#### **4. Designing for success**

As part of the September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2002 Speech from the Throne in the section titled, 'A Magnet for Talent and Investment', the federal government noted that "Competitive cities and healthy communities are vital to our individual and national well-being, and to Canada's ability to attract and retain talent and investment". It went on to state that " the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will need workers who are lifelong learners, who can respond and adapt to change. Canada's labour market programs must be transformed to meet this challenge. To this end, the government will work with Canadians, provinces, sector councils, labour organizations and learning institutions to create the skills and learning architecture that Canada needs and to promote workplace learning"<sup>6</sup>

It appears undeniable that communities at large, along with their local governments, will be negatively impacted by the predicted demographic crunch. In order to soften the impact, competitive cities will view the move to become a Learning Community as an attractive alternative.

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<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada / Speech From The Throne to Open the Second Session of the Thirty- Seventh Parliament of Canada, "The Canada We Want"

In undertaking the challenge to become a Learning Community, it is important to keep in mind the scope of the job ahead; after all, these are uncharted waters. Reaching the goal of becoming a Learning Community is not a simple achievement. It can't be accomplished overnight or without a major commitment of time and resources. All the elements have to fall into place, and timing is critical.

This guide has been written recognizing that any major undertaking has to begin somewhere. It is CAMA's hope that the information it contains not only underscores the idea that local government is ideally suited to a leadership role in creating a blueprint for a Learning Community but that it will also provide some basic tools to getting started.

# Acknowledgements

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Michelle O’Brien, project coordinator for the “Blueprint for a Learning Community” project, compiled the guide. The content was suggested by members of the National Committee for a Learning Community: Kathy Brown (Region of Halifax, NS), Gay Douglas Broerse (Literacy Link, Niagara Region, ON), Chris Kelly (Vancouver School District #39 Vancouver, BC), Lorna McCreath (City of Vancouver, BC), Grant McRadu (Delta School District, Delta, BC), Wayne Redekop (Town of Fort Erie, ON). We are indebted to them for providing us with their special knowledge and for their unwavering commitment to this project.

We hope that this guide will be a useful tool for local governments who are ready to champion an initiative to become a Learning Community.

Brian Hamblin,  
President,  
Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators

# Appendix A – Resource List

The following is a list of key organizations that can provide you with additional resources to get you started with your program. As well, they provide links to a variety of other organizations and resources dedicated to literacy issues in Canada.

**ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation**  
**Ana Oliveira, Information Officer**  
**1450 Don Mills Road,**  
**Don Mills, ON M3B 2X7**

**Phone: 1-800-303-1004, 416-442-3447 Fax: 416-442-2987**

**E-mail: [aoliveira@abc-canada.org](mailto:aoliveira@abc-canada.org)**

**Web: [www.abc-canada.org](http://www.abc-canada.org)**

**AlphaPlus Centre**  
**2040 Yonge Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor,**  
**Toronto On M4S 1Z9**

**Phone: 1-800-788-1120, 416-322-1012**

**Fax: 1-800-788-1417, 416-322-0780**

**E-mail: [info@alphaplus.ca](mailto:info@alphaplus.ca)**

**Web: [www.alphaplus.ca](http://www.alphaplus.ca)**

**Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators**  
**Literacy Project**  
**P. Nutter, Project Director**  
**1485 Laperriere Ave.,**  
**Ottawa On K1Z 7S8**

**Phone: 613-264-0111, 613-725-9150 (CAMA): Fax: 613-264-8902613-729-6206**  
**(CAMA)**

**E-mail: [pnutter@lincsat.com](mailto:pnutter@lincsat.com)**

**Web: [www.camacam.ca](http://www.camacam.ca)**

**Frontier College,  
35 Jackes avenue,  
Toronto, ON M4T 1E2**

**Phone: 1-800-555-6523 Fax: 416-323-3522  
E-mail: [information@frontiercollege.ca](mailto:information@frontiercollege.ca)  
Web: [www.frontiercollege.ca](http://www.frontiercollege.ca)**

**Movement for Canadian Literacy  
Wendy Desbrisay, Executive Director  
180 Metcalfe St. Suite 300  
Ottawa, ON K2P 1P5**

**Phone: 613-563-2464 Fax: 613-563-2504  
E-mail: [mcl@literacy.ca](mailto:mcl@literacy.ca)  
Web: [www.literacy.ca](http://www.literacy.ca)**

**National Adult Literacy Database  
Scovil House,  
703 Brunswick Street,  
Fredericton, NB E3B 1H8**

**Phone: 1-800-720-NALD (6253), 506-457-6900 Fax: 506-457-6910  
E Mail: [contactnald@nald.ca](mailto:contactnald@nald.ca)  
Web: [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)**

**National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada  
Yvette Souque, Program Officer  
360 Albert St.,  
Ottawa ON K1A 0J9**

**Phone: 1-800-O-Canada (622-6232), 613-946-0512 F: 613-946-5882 E-mail:  
[Yvette.souque@hrdc-drhc.gc.ca](mailto:Yvette.souque@hrdc-drhc.gc.ca)  
Web: [www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca)**

In addition, each provincial and territorial government has literacy on its agenda and provides a variety of valuable resource material. Each government places the responsibility for literacy in a different government department. Your provincial government directory will assist you in locating the appropriate Ministry.