

***Workforce Literacy in Canadian Municipalities:
A Status Report in the Year 2000***

***By:
Michelle O'Brien***

***For:
Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
Our Legacy for the Millennium Project***

May 2000

Workforce Literacy In Canadian Municipalities: A Status report in the Year 2000 A Synopsis

Literacy in the Municipal Workforce

This report examines the status of workforce literacy programs in Canadian municipalities. A decade ago there were approximately eight municipalities that supported a policy/program on literacy for their employees. In the year 2000, approximately thirty municipal governments have either completed a program, currently have a program in place, or are considering implementing a literacy program in the immediate future

For the purposes of this report, data has been gathered on a range of programs including those that operated in the late 1980's as well as current programs. The early programs were designed as issues of literacy were beginning to emerge in the municipal workplace. These issues were linked to the need to both upgrade existing skills and learn new skills in the workplace, resulting from the introduction of new technology, more complex information systems and increased concentration on the quality of service to the public.

The later programs were driven by such issues as major internal reorganizations, downsizing, the emergence of new partnerships for program delivery, privatization of service delivery and the issue of governance. These later programs benefited from the lessons learned by the program's pioneers and from having access to material specifically designed to support the increasing number of municipal workforce literacy program initiatives.

A Review of Municipal Literacy Programs

The data outlined in the report was gathered from a survey administered to over thirty municipal governments across Canada. Responses were received from over eighty five percent of those surveyed. The data details how programs functioned within each organization by reporting responses under the following headings:

- **Recognizing a Problem**
- **First Steps Taken**
- **Getting Started**
- **Designing a Program**
- **Program Goals**
- **Union Involvement**
- **Learning Issues and Models Used**
- **Successful Communication Strategies**
- **Program Barriers and Successful Resolutions**
- **Feedback**
- **Future Plans**
- **Key Learnings**

The survey respondents identified today's 'best practices' as follows:

- **Explore and develop all opportunities for community partnerships;**
- **Form workplace committees involving all the stakeholders;**
- **Undertake needs assessments to determine program requirements and begin the process of 'buying in' to the new initiative;**
- **Design voluntary, employee centered programs, open to all employees;**
- **Use a multifaceted communication strategy emphasizing face to face communications and use of universal message methods, such as pay stubs;**
- **Evaluate programs on an ongoing basis;**
- **Record impacts and share results and celebrate successes;**
- **When barriers occur, take prompt remedial action;**
- **Adapt programs to meet changing needs.**

Municipal Workplace Literacy Profiles

In order to provide a review of a variety of successful models that have been introduced and tested over the past decade, three municipal government workforce literacy programs are described in detail. The programs offered in the City of Victoria, BC, the Regional Municipality of Halifax, NS and the City of Moncton, NB, demonstrate differing approaches to implementing successful workforce literacy training.

Literate Cities 2025 - A Road Map to the Future

The balance of the report attempts to provide a road map to the future of workforce literacy in Canada by promoting the literate workplace of the future by ensuring:

- **Development and approval of policies to entrench workplace education;**
- **Entrenchment of Clear Language policies for both internal and external communications;**
- **Active identification and elimination of barriers to learning;**
- **Promotion and encouragement for workers to learn at all levels, including the eradication of the stigma attached to literacy learning;**
- **Development through training of a workforce with transferable skills.**

A vision to create literate cities by the year 2025 is described in a municipal model for a Champion for Literacy, evidenced in the City of Ottawa's, 'A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report'¹.

Further, municipal governments are challenged to:

- **develop the means to promote the value and practice of continuous learning within the municipality;**
- **provide support to the Prior Learning Assessment Recognition process (PLAR), a process that identifies, assesses and focuses on the skills and knowledge which individuals have acquired through life and work experience and through formal education and training and establish PLAR centres in their municipality;**
- **seek ways to expand opportunities for literacy learning and instructor training;**
- **model and promote Clear Language practices in all communications.**

Conclusion

The report concludes that while the new decade will demand fresh approaches to literacy learning, the modern workplace will continue to reap benefits by entrenching a culture of continuous learning in its workforce, through training and development. Excellent examples of best practices now exist to support the introduction of new programs in the future. Similarly, lessons learned by the partners for community literacy in Ottawa-Carleton, coupled with the goals and objectives identified in 'A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report' stand as legitimate guidelines for achieving literate cities. Municipal governments, working in conjunction with a variety of partners, including other levels of government across Canada, can be among the leaders positioning the Canadian economy for future success. They can be recognized as community leaders in the vitally important field of human skills development. In doing so, they will achieve a significant and lasting legacy for the literacy movement in Canadian municipal government.

Alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal : un rapport d'étape pour l'an 2000 Sommaire

Alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal

Le présent rapport examine la situation des programmes d'alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal au Canada. Il y a une dizaine d'années, à peine huit municipalités avaient une politique ou un programme d'alphabétisation pour leur main-d'oeuvre. En l'an 2000, environ 30 municipalités ont terminé un programme d'alphabétisation, en ont un actuellement en place ou envisagent d'en mettre un en place dans un avenir immédiat.

Aux fins du présent rapport, des données ont été recueillies au sujet d'un large éventail de programmes, y compris des programmes en vigueur à la fin des années 1980 ainsi que des programmes actuels. Les premiers programmes ont été conçus lorsque les questions d'alphabétisation commençaient à se manifester en milieu de travail municipal. Ces questions étaient reliées à la nécessité de perfectionner

¹ City of Ottawa, May 1991 - A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report

les compétences existantes et d'acquérir de nouvelles compétences en milieu de travail, à la suite de l'implantation de nouvelles technologies, de systèmes d'information plus complexes et d'un intérêt accru à l'endroit de la qualité des services au public.

Les programmes plus récents sont motivés par des facteurs tels que des restructurations internes majeures, la réduction des effectifs, l'émergence de nouveaux partenariats pour la mise en oeuvre des programmes, la privatisation des services et des questions d'ordre administratif. Ces programmes plus récents ont bénéficié des leçons apprises dans les premiers programmes et de l'accès à une documentation conçue spécifiquement pour appuyer le nombre croissant de programmes d'alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal.

Un examen des programmes d'alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal

Les données présentées dans le rapport proviennent d'une enquête réalisée auprès de plus de 30 municipalités canadiennes. Le taux de réponse est de plus de 85 pour cent. Les réponses décrivent le fonctionnement des programmes au sein de chaque organisme en fonction des catégories suivantes :

- **reconnaissance du problème**
- **premières étapes pour commencer**
- **la conception d'un programme**
- **les buts du programme**
- **la participation des syndicats**
- **questions d'apprentissage et modèles utilisés**
- **stratégies de communication efficaces**
- **obstacles au programme et solutions efficaces**
- **commentaires**
- **plans futurs**
- **principales leçons apprises**

Voici les «meilleures pratiques» actuelles mentionnées par les répondants :

- **examiner et poursuivre toutes les possibilités de partenariat communautaire;**
- **former des comités en milieu de travail en faisant participer tous les intervenants;**
- **évaluer les besoins afin de déterminer les critères du programme et amorcer le processus de «sensibilisation» à la nouvelle initiative;**
- **élaborer des programmes à participation volontaire et accessibles à tous les employés;**
- **utiliser une stratégie de communication polyvalente qui privilégie les communications en personne et utiliser des moyens universels pour transmettre les messages, comme les talons de chèques;**
- **évaluer continuellement les programmes;**
- **consigner les effets du programme et partager les résultats et célébrer les réussites;**
- **remédier promptement aux obstacles qui surviennent;**
- **adapter les programmes en fonction des besoins changeants.**

Profils des programmes d'alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal

Afin de présenter un aperçu de divers modèles efficaces qui ont été adoptés et mis à l'essai au cours de la dernière décennie, trois programmes d'alphabétisation en milieu de travail municipal sont décrits en détail. Les programmes offerts par la Ville de Victoria, en Colombie-Britannique, la Municipalité régionale d'Halifax, en Nouvelle-Écosse, et la Ville de Moncton, au Nouveau-Brunswick, illustrent différentes approches efficaces à l'alphabétisation en milieu de travail.

Les villes et l'alphabétisation en 2025 — une carnet de route pour l'avenir

Le reste du rapport vise à fournir un carnet de route pour l'avenir de l'alphabétisation de la main-d'oeuvre au Canada en favorisant le milieu de travail alphabétisé de demain grâce aux moyens suivants :

- **l'élaboration et l'approbation de politiques visant à instituer la formation en milieu de travail;**
- **l'adoption de politiques de langage clair pour les communications internes et externes;**
- **l'identification et l'élimination des obstacles à l'apprentissage;**
- **la promotion et l'encouragement de l'apprentissage pour les travailleurs à tous les échelons, y compris l'élimination de la connotation négative associée à l'alphabétisation;**
- **le développement;**
- **grâce à la formation d'une main-d'oeuvre dont les compétences sont transférables.**

Une vision visant à créer des villes alphabétisées d'ici l'an 2025 est décrite dans un modèle municipal de champion de l'alphabétisation, comme en témoigne le document de la Ville d'Ottawa intitulé «A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report».¹

De plus, les municipalités sont invitées à :

- **appuyer le processus d'évaluation et de reconnaissance des acquis (ERA), qui permet de déterminer, d'évaluer et de mettre en valeur les compétences et les connaissances acquises tout au long d'une vie et en milieu de travail ainsi que par le biais d'études et de formation officielles, et d'établir des centres ERA dans leur municipalité;**
- **chercher des façons d'élargir les possibilités d'alphabétisation et de formation des formateurs;**
- **établir des modèles et promouvoir l'usage d'un langage clair dans toutes les communications.**

Conclusion

En conclusion, le rapport souligne que, même si la nouvelle décennie exigera des approches fraîches à l'alphabétisation, le milieu de travail moderne continuera de bénéficier en instituant une culture de formation continue pour sa main-d'oeuvre, par le biais de la formation et du perfectionnement. Il existe d'excellents exemples de meilleures pratiques pour appuyer la mise en place de nouveaux programmes. De la même manière, les leçons apprises par les partenaires pour l'alphabétisation communautaire à Ottawa-Carleton, conjuguées aux buts et aux objectifs mentionnés dans «A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report», servent de lignes directrices légitimes pour atteindre l'objectif d'alphabétisation de nos villes. Les municipalités, travaillant conjointement avec divers partenaires, notamment avec les autres paliers de gouvernement du Canada, peuvent jouer un rôle de chef de file pour positionner l'économie canadienne de manière à assurer sa réussite. Elles peuvent être reconnues comme des chefs de file communautaires dans un secteur très important du perfectionnement des compétences humaines. En ce faisant, elles produiront un héritage important et durable pour le mouvement de l'alphabétisation au sein des gouvernements municipaux canadiens.

1. Ville d'Ottawa, mai 1999 — A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction		9
2.	A Review of Municipal Literacy Programs: 1988-99	10	
2.1	Recognizing a Problem		10
2.2	First Steps Taken	11	
2.3	Getting Started		11
2.4	Designing a Program		11
2.5	Program Goals		12
2.6	Union Involvement		12
2.7	Learning Issues and Models Used	13	
2.8	Successful Communication Strategies		13
2.9	Program Barriers and Successful Resolutions	13	
2.10	Feedback		14
2.11	Impacts	14	
2.12	Future Plans		15
2.13	Key Learnings		15
3.	Best Practices		15
4.	Canadian Municipal Literacy Programs By Province and Territory		16
5.	Municipal Workplace Literacy Profiles		16
5.1	City of Victoria, BC		17
5.2	Halifax Regional Municipality, NS	18	
5.3	City of Moncton, NB		20
6.	Literate Cities 2025: A Road Map to the Future	22	
6.1	The Literate Workplace		23
6.2	Literate Cities		23
6.3	Champion for Literacy: A Municipal Model for Literate Cities	24	
7.	Conclusion		26
	Appendix		28

Workforce Literacy in Canadian Municipalities: A Status Report in the Year 2000

1. Introduction

The movement in the municipal sector to offer workers access to basic skills training began slowly in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Municipal governments were struggling to meet the challenges created by changes in the workplace. These included the introduction of new technology, more complex information systems and increased concentration on quality service to the public. These changes resulted in the need to upgrade existing skills or to learn new skills in the workplace.

The early basic skills training programs were generally created in response to identifying a lack of these skills, primarily in the "blue collar" workforce and among workers who had joined the workforce with little formal education. The identification of low literacy skills was accelerated by the creation of municipal policies that required new employees to have a Grade 12 education. Many were homemade solutions and limited to single interventions or "pilot" programs that ceased to exist once the immediate employment issue had been corrected. Several of them gained impetus from the 1990 International Year of Literacy. Others sprang from the information made available to them in the 1993- 94 report, "Literacy Initiatives in Canadian Municipalities," commissioned by the National Literacy Secretariat. It was stated in that same report that most of the original municipalities operating literacy programs were "urban" with populations in excess of 40,000. They were major employers in the community, with separate human resource departments, unions, and part time/full time elected representatives.

While some of the rationale that drove subsequent programs and initiatives remained identical to those of the pioneers, new issues such as major internal reorganizations, downsizing, the creation of new partnerships in program delivery, privatization of service delivery and the issue of governance, had appeared on the municipal scene. Newcomers to the movement, while faced with additional literacy issues were able to take advantage of the lessons learned from the earlier programs and, having access to materials specifically designed to support municipalities in determining their needs for literacy training, were able to develop models that featured broader and more thorough program design.

In profiling the various initiatives undertaken over the past decade this report will track the continued growth of the movement across Canada and the gradual evolution of program design and implementation to today's models for workforce literacy training.

In order to suggest a blueprint for future development the report will examine many of the issues attached to workforce literacy training in the municipal sector, describe some of the most successful solutions to these issues and present a picture of the "best practices" as they exist today.

Finally, the report will present a vision for the future movement of literacy in the municipal workforce and recommend ways to achieve the goals of that vision.

2. A Review of Municipal Literacy Programs - 1988 to 1999

In order to provide an overview of literacy programs and initiatives undertaken in the municipal sector since the late 1980's, data was gathered from municipal governments across Canada by means of a survey and a series of interviews. Some of the current respondents were reported on in the 1991 Feldman report and in the 1993 Nutter report "Literacy Initiatives in Canadian Municipalities" prepared for the National Literacy Secretariat. In recent years some of them have been reported on in "The Writing's on the Wall: Investing in Municipal Workforce Literacy," produced as part of the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrator's (CAMA) Literacy in the Municipal Workforce" Project. The information gathered for this final phase report was solicited from more than thirty municipal governments and provides, in detail, a picture of municipal literacy programs from conception to conclusion or evolution, as appropriate.

A significant 85% response rate demonstrates genuine commitment to the principle of a literate workforce by those surveyed, the majority of whom are members of the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators(CAMA) and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities(FCM).

The survey asked for information on every aspect of Canadian municipal workforce literacy programs. The responses painted a clear and comprehensive picture of the field of workforce literacy as it exists today. The data collected is presented below.

2.1 Recognizing A Problem

Respondents recognized low literacy levels within their organization in the following ways:

- **Acknowledging an older, less educated workforce when changes to hiring policies of late 1980's and early 1990's required Grade 12 or equivalent education;**
- **Unions initiating requests for management to provide basic skills training to workers;**
- **Employees exhibiting difficulty completing written and numeracy tasks while on the job and in training programs;**
- **Anecdotal information received from supervisors and employees;**
- **Self identification by workers/employees;**
- **Results from internal education surveys and needs assessments;**
- **A new awareness of workforce literacy issues gained in meetings with other municipal governments and Departments of Education;**
- **Inability of front line workers lacking transferable skills to move into supervisory positions.**

2.2 First Steps Taken

First steps took various forms. Some municipalities conducted needs assessments or tested for General Educational Development, (GED). Many responded by starting Workplace Education Programs, creating Learning Centres, or by approving policies for Basic Skills training. Others began by initiating discussions with managers, supervisors, employees, unions and local community colleges. Frequently, all these initiatives resulted in mandating new or existing committees to address literacy issues in the workplace.

2.3 Getting Started

For the majority of participants, an early step saw them working with a committee to flesh out a program. Respondents were divided almost equally between those using existing committees and those striking a new committee to manage the process. In all cases, these committees were made up of all the stakeholders involved. Where a committee was not utilized, staff initiatives led to the development of specific partnerships, between Departments of Human Resources and the unions, or individual city departments, the unions and human resource staff.

While a limited number of respondents involved City Council at the outset, most chose to apprise Council of the program at various stages in its development and, typically, reported on it annually. In contrast, the majority involved Senior Management early on in the decision-making process.

2.4 Designing A Program

At least 75% of respondents used a form of needs assessment to determine the literacy needs of the organization. These needs assessments were vital on two levels as they identified skills gaps as well as well created interest in the program by highlighting its existence. The remainder did not perform a formal needs assessment, but recognizing a problem existed within the organization, often introduced a pilot program in one department. Once these pilot programs were evaluated, the program was often expanded to other areas in the municipal workplace. In half the cases, programs were open to front-line staff only. The remainder designed programs open to front line staff, supervisors, and managers. Results of needs assessments identified the following skills gaps in organizations:

- **Achieving GED to meet education requirements for certification and provincial standards;**
- **Lack of basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy;**
- **Need for English/French as a Second Language training;**
- **Using new technology from basic to advanced levels;**
- **Writing for the workplace;**
- **Training in math and chemistry;**
- **Need to design training programs that expand and increase literacy skills;**
- **Stress management training.**

2.5 Program Goals

Many early program goals reflected the need to address immediate problems in the workplace, such as health and safety issues, revised job descriptions leading to new hiring policies, meeting the requirements of provincial certification programs, managing internal promotions and improving internal communications. Often very specific literacy programs were designed solely to solve the immediate set of problems and were delivered on a limited basis.

An example of such a program was demonstrated at the City of Ottawa. A problem was identified by training staff in one branch of a single, large department. A delicate partnership was formed between Corporate Human Resources, the department in question and the union. A 'pilot' program using the Basic Education Skills Training model(BEST) was designed and implemented to address the immediate needs of the

employees concerned. Once the needs had been met, the program was not renewed or extended. Although the results in the area in questions were positive and significant, jurisdictional issues, the lack of a good set of evaluation tools and continuing problems over the scheduling of class time marred the marketability of the program to other parts of the organization and weakened the opportunity to make it an established program.

Later programs chose to associate literacy with the concept of ongoing development and designed programs that were part of the organization's Training and Development program, providing access to all employees who might wish to improve their literacy skills in a variety of areas and on many levels. The introduction of such continuous learning programs that increased skills in the workplace and in the personal lives of employees did much to remove the stigma attached to low literacy levels. Such programs forged lasting partnerships for literacy between management and unions and formed new partnerships with other community resources.

2.6 Union Involvement

In all cases where a union was in place, it was involved in program implementation. Unions were partners from the outset in providing ongoing input and support to programs. They played a major role in marketing programs, advising members of opportunities, lending credibility to programs and in championing participant confidentiality. The labour-management partnership was an opportunity to work together collaboratively toward a goal of mutual concern. These partnerships were protected and kept separate from other workplace-contentious issues.

2.7 Learning Issues and Models Used

Individual municipal governments designed programs to address very special needs such as English as a Second Language/French as a Second Language(ESL/FSL), the Inuktitut language and the provision of one-to-one tutoring. Others used existing models such as General Educational Development, (GED) Laubach, Basic Education and Skills Training (BEST), Worker Education and Skills Training(WEST), Worker Education Centre(WEC) in Hamilton and the Hastings Institute model in the City of Vancouver. Many used new programs, custom designed for them by local community colleges and other specialists, such as the unique program, "Writing in the Workplace" in the City of St. John's NF.

2.8 Successful Communication Strategies

Respondents reported the following strategies were successful, but suggested that a mix of all these methods produced the best results.

- **Information sessions/ orientation group sessions/staff meetings/on-site visits;**
- **Information on pay stubs;**
- **Poster campaigns;**
- **Newsletters/memos/letters to all employees;**
- **Electronic billboard;**
- **Word of mouth;**
- **Administering a needs assessment.**

2.9 Program Barriers and Successful Resolutions

The major barrier to employee participation in programs stemmed from the stigma linked to a lack of basic skills. This perceived barrier heightened resistance to learning, fear of job loss, fear of failure and the absence of confidentiality for program participants. Barriers disappeared as early successes were advertised, often by word of mouth.

Municipal governments struggled with manager/ supervisor resistance to programs, the issue of training for shift and part-time workers and the decision to hold classes on employee or shared time. There was concern that ongoing costs would far outweigh the benefits to be gained. Solutions had to be found for workers who were "pulled" from training by supervisors whose first priority remained staffing for unplanned operational needs, such as major snowstorms. Many organizations needed to overcome the confrontational Labour/Management style of the day in order to move programs forward.

Successful programs ensured ongoing communication at all levels. They highlighted benefits regularly and addressed issues promptly. Scheduling became a nonissue once classes were made available at a variety of times in alternate locations and by offering "make-up" classes at the end of sessions. Early programs supported classes held on shared time. New programs have found that their motivated workforce is committed to learning on personal time, if access remains convenient and confidential.

2.10 Feedback

Most respondents reported that they conducted program evaluations on a regular basis. Many of these evaluations involved all parties and reviewed the program components so that they remained current and beneficial. Others performed a two-way review that looked at the program results for content and design and also underwent a review by the organization to measure program effectiveness and overall value. These reviews were often tied to annual budget deliberations.

2.11 Impacts

The introduction of literacy programs in municipal governments has significantly impacted all who participate in them: employer, employee and the unions. Identified impacts are quantifiable and all are considered critical to good management of human resources. They include:

- **High rates of GED completion;**
- **Workforces meeting legislated standards;**
- **Safer workplaces;**
- **Better trained and motivated employees and union members, better equipped to participate in additional training programs;**
- **Improved use of work-related forms and documents/better internal communications;**
- **Enhanced succession planning;**
- **Increased employee self esteem /self confidence and job enjoyment;**
- **Better work habits, team participation and improved overall job performance;**
- **Skilled organizations who move beyond basic skills training to implement a progressive and comprehensive career development system that highlights continuous learning;**
- **Less accidental wastage in the workplace;**
- **Improved customer services and relations;**
- **Excellent process to enhance Union/Management relations and strengthen relationships in the workplace - a “win-win” situation for both sides;**
- **The realization of organizations that value their employees, proud to assist them in addressing literacy issues and supportive of staff training in a corporate culture of continuous learning.**

While most literacy programs did not result in the creation of new policies, there was a recognition and heightened awareness of the need to support ongoing career development within organizations. Examples include commitment to ongoing training with increased funding to training budgets and the rewriting of existing job descriptions. There was also an increased awareness of the need for use of clear language which lead, in one instance, to the introduction of a Human Resources training program in Clear Communication in the City of Vancouver

The City of Saint John, NB introduced a Training and Development policy for Basic Skills Training; the City of Kitchener, ON developed a Tuition Assistance Policy to support accredited academic education; and the City of Calgary introduced a Clear Language policy.

2.12 Future Plans

Respondents were asked to report on the current status of their programs and their plans for the future. Some intend to maintain the status quo in recognition of the need for a well-trained workforce in the face of shrinking financial resources. Others have seen programs cease as internal literacy levels have been met. In most of these cases, access to external programs and resources continues to be advertised and promoted and employees are encouraged to pursue their education and skills development.

Some municipal governments undergoing amalgamation have put programs on hold until new organizational reviews are undertaken. Some programs have been tailored to offer specific training designed to meet provincial certification requirements. The majority of programs continue to evolve and adapt to meet the needs of a younger, better educated workforce utilising the latest training methods, such as technology assisted learning programs.

2.13 Key Learnings

The respondents were asked to identify the three key learnings they observed from their literacy programs. The list included:

- **Excellent union/management partnership;**
- **Doing the “right thing” inspires success;**
- **The multiplier effect - spin-offs to improved morale, job enrichment and work performance;**
- **A small investment for large gain;**
- **Utilizing expertise of an educational partner (i.e., local school boards);**
- **Privacy is paramount to the learning environment;**
- **Anyone can learn within a supportive environment;**

- **Successful programs are open to all employees, and are employee centred with a curriculum arising from the workplace.**

3. Best Practices

Having reviewed the foregoing data, the following list of “best practices” in use in today’s municipal workplace literacy programs can be drawn upon for future reference.

- **Explore and develop all opportunities for community partnerships;**
- **Form workplace committees involving all the stakeholders;**
- **Undertake needs assessments to determine program requirements and begin the process of ‘buying in’ to the new initiative;**
- **Design voluntary, employee centred programs, open to all employees;**
- **Use a multifaceted communication strategy emphasizing face to face communications and use of universal message methods such as pay stubs;**
- **Evaluate programs on an ongoing basis;**
- **Record impacts and share results;**
- **Celebrate successes ;**
- **When barriers occur, take prompt remedial action;**
- **Adapt programs to meet changing needs.**

4. Canadian Municipal Literacy Programs by Province and Territory²

Municipal Workforce Literacy Programs by Province & Territory	NF	NS	PEI	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT
Presently in- place; completed; planned	1	3	0	5	1	6	3	2	3	7	2

5. Municipal Workplace Literacy Profiles

The following profiles of three municipal literacy programs will help to demonstrate the various types of initiatives that have been undertaken in the past decade and the differences between them. Each municipality began their program for different reasons, targeted their workforce in dissimilar fashions and were distinct from each other in the design and implementation phases of their programs. All three have achieved good results that have ensured ongoing commitment to literacy learning in some format. They represent programs from various parts of Canada, begun at different times over the past decade, and have been chosen to highlight the steady evolution of municipal workforce literacy programs.

5.1 City of Victoria, BC

Recognizing a Problem

The City of Victoria took action once it recognized that it had a problem:

- **employees were experiencing difficulty in training sessions, particularly when completing forms;**
- **individual employees were seeking assistance.**

First Steps Taken

- **the City’s Manager of Training discussed literacy training with a consultant and other organizations in the region.**

Designing and Implementing A Program

- **program design was presented to the union for their consideration;**

² Our research and networks have indicated that there are workforce literacy programs in- place, completed or planned in the numbers shown by province and territory. There may be others that are unknown to us at this time.

- **senior management was consulted to obtain their support;**
- **funds were allocated for the program from within the existing training budget;**
- **City Council was provided with progress reports.**

Program Goals

- **to improve self esteem;**
- **to improve spoken, written and mathematical literacy, for use in all aspects of a person's life;**
- **to offer courses on a voluntary basis and open to all employees.**

The model chosen was designed for the City of Victoria based on the program developed by the Hastings Institute of the City of Vancouver. The program, known as the Workplace Language Program is learner-centred and focuses on reading, writing and the expression of individual experiences in written form. Group discussions of individual writing samples assist students to 'make sense in English', increase their vocabulary and understand grammatical structure.

Communications Strategy

The program was advertised through the use of posters and meetings between employees and supervisors. Those employees expressing interest in the program were guaranteed confidentiality.

Program Barriers and Successful Solutions

The following barriers were noted:

- **initial embarrassment of employees to admit to literacy problems;**
- **difficulties in negotiating with the union over the issue of class time being considered overtime.**

These barriers were overcome by ensuring ongoing discussion with employees and unions until all parties were satisfied with outcomes.

Feedback

A program evaluation was conducted by facilitators on an ongoing basis and results were used to adjust the program as required.

Impacts

Program impacts included the following:

- **individual participants lives have been enriched;**
- **improved self esteem through oral and written communication skills;**
- **confidence and ability to continue other training and to pursue job promotion;**
- **the City of Victoria was proud to have been able to assist employees in being more satisfied and effective on the job;**
- **literacy as an issue is automatically considered when designing and implementing communications.**

No specific policy was introduced as a result of the program, but literacy was flagged as an issue to be considered in all future communications and training opportunities. The original program has ceased to be offered. It has been supplanted by courses in clear communication in English, report writing and presentation skills.

5.2 Halifax Regional Municipality, NS

Recognizing a Problem

Following a major amalgamation in the late 1990's, the Halifax Regional Municipality decided to act when they recognized:

- **problems evidenced with employees failing to achieve provincial certification required in legislated programs.**

First Steps Taken

- **contact with the Workplace Education Program of the Department of Education;**
- **setting up a joint management, union, government project team;**
- **Chief Administrative Officer and the Human Resources Manager obtained support from Regional Council to develop the initiative;**
- **reported on developments to Senior Managers;**
- **conducted a major needs assessment to determine learning needs among employees.**

The needs assessment revealed that amalgamation had brought with it problems with job skills. The increased use of technology exposed a need for greater literacy and effective communication skills, critical to working safely and effectively within the Halifax Regional Municipality. An Intervention Team within Regional Operations identified some of the same concerns. It was agreed to move proactively to meet challenges before they caused any job losses or safety concerns.

Designing and Implementing a Program

Halifax Regional Municipality initially targeted all its employees, but focussed in on outside workers as a priority.

Program Goals

Program goals included the following:

- **to promote safety;**
- **to promote literacy and good communications;**
- **to encourage job confidence and continuous learning.**

The training model created in conjunction with the Nova Scotia Department of Education's Workplace Education program was a customized upgrading/General Educational Development program through courses in Workplace Communications and Writing skills development, using computers.

Communications Strategy

The program was advertised as follows:

- **information on pay stubs;**
- **a poster campaign;**
- **information sessions;**
- **meetings with numerous unions, management and work related groups to promote awareness;**
- **development of newsletters;**
- **word of mouth.**

Program Barriers and Successful Solutions

Barriers were presented as follows:

- **employees were uncomfortable with self- identification;**
- **fear of job loss.**

Concerns were immediately addressed and participation increased dramatically. In fact, it became a concern that many more wanted to take part in the program than space permitted. More courses were added and all participants were given an opportunity to attend programs within the first year.

Feedback

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted with all program participants. Evaluation results are shared with Regional Council and the project team. The project team, union and management also evaluate the program.

Impacts

Considerable success has been achieved to date. Successes include:

- **an 80% success rate for those completing their General Educational Development diploma testing;**
- **participants have come forward to indicate their interest in pursuing further education;**
- **employees indicate that it is "worthwhile" giving their time to the program;**
- **employees work in a safer environment;**
- **many one to one tutoring partnerships are still in place;**
- **supervisors report that employees have developed self confidence in what they can achieve;**
- **an excellent partnership exists between the union and Halifax Regional Municipality regarding workplace learning;**
- **unions continue to promote this initiative to their membership.**

While no new policies have been developed as a result of the program, existing principles and policies support such initiatives. The program highlights the need to focus on continuous support to ongoing career development.

The program at Halifax Regional Municipality continues to evolve as a result of ongoing evaluation. The current focus is on employees developing communication and literacy skills through technology assisted programs. Adults are interested in learning how computers work, both for personal and professional gain but also to keep in touch with their children's growth and interests. This increases participants desire to learn and commitment to attend ongoing programs.

5.3 City of Moncton, NB

Recognizing a Problem

As part of Phase 3 of the CAMA, Literacy in the Municipal Workforce Project, five pilot projects were initiated in municipal workplaces across Canada starting in 1998. The goals for each of the pilots are identical. They are to raise awareness about municipal workforce literacy needs, build commitment to municipal workforce literacy, and establish links and partnerships. These pilots are representative of the diversity of municipal government workplaces across Canada. The City of Moncton with a large and diverse bilingual workforce, located in a province where a potential for new partnerships existed, entered into the pilot program.

First Steps Taken

- **the City of Moncton confirmed its Statement of Principles that people are its most valuable resource;**
- **formed a partnership with CAMA, Literacy New Brunswick Inc., and the New Brunswick Community College;**
- **developed a Workplace Education Project;**
- **developed a Workplace Education committee made up of representatives from four unions, management, Literacy New Brunswick Inc. and the Moncton Community College;**
- **performed a needs assessment.**

The needs assessment identified a variety of training areas that could be put under the umbrella of the Workplace Education Committee. They included:

- **literacy, basic math and reading skills;**
- **General Educational Developmental diploma upgrading;**
- **computer training;**
- **special interest courses, such as parenting.**

Program Goals

The Workplace Education Committee determined that:

- **all programs offered are driven by the needs of the employees;**
- **classes are made available at various times from 8.30 am to 8.30 pm daily in five week modules under the direction of two instructors;**
- **employees take these classes on their own time;**
- **adult family members can participate;**
- **computer usage is integral for many of the programs.**

Communications Strategy

Successful communication strategies included:

- **providing information on pay stubs;**
- **discussions held at union meetings;**
- **publicity on the City of Moncton Intranet;**
- **posters and flyers, person to person advertising.**

Feedback

There was some desire by employees to take courses during work time, however, access to a variety of courses at different times proved to be an attractive solution to this issue. Employees conduct a self-evaluation at the end of each module. In addition, the program is evaluated each year by students, supervisors, unions, management and instructors. Course instructors use the information to adjust programs, time changes and add new components. A reception is held for students where certificates of participation are handed out.

Impacts

Noted impacts at this early stage are:

- **evidence of overall job success and confidence to move forward and problem solve;**
- **numbers of employees attending courses has been well above expectations;**
- **a lengthy waiting list existed following the completion of the first set of courses.**

At this stage in the program's history, no new policies have been determined to be necessary. However, the City of Moncton is committed to supporting the Workplace Education Program until employee needs are met.

6. Literate Cities 2025: A Road Map to the Future

It is evident from the data presented in this report that literacy is alive in significant parts of the municipal sector. It is also clear that the benefits of a literate, well trained workforce, are tangible and that there is a positive and direct impact on administrative efficiency and service delivery.

In the early 1990's, the impact of downsizing and restructuring, of occupational health and safety legislation, and the introduction of new technologies highlighted issues of literacy within municipal governments. Labour and Management, in many instances, were able to work cooperatively in an area of mutual interest and benefit.

In the latter part of the decade, literacy issues changed as a new role for municipal government emerged in many parts of Canada. This role, varying from location to location, reflects changes in operation resulting from major internal reorganization, further downsizing, the creation of new partnerships in program delivery and the privatization of service delivery. Similarly, the levels and types of training have broadened beyond basic skills training to include the range of skills needed by the worker in a technological and diverse workplace.

The beginning of the new century will see municipal governments continuing to evolve to meet the needs of today's citizens. This evolution will demand the strategic management of resources in varied and innovative ways, often in new service areas. It will also require that appropriate training and learning opportunities are made available to the worker throughout their employment with the city.

The pool of available employees is shrinking and job seekers increasingly indicate that ongoing training is their reason for choosing one job over another. Consequently, access to a variety of training opportunities becomes an important part of the competitive compensation package. We know that many workplaces, including those in the municipal sector, have tended to offer training to administrative and technical staff, i.e., workers who already have the most education. Workplace education is an important vehicle for providing learning opportunities to workers at all levels of the organization in an equitable and inclusive way.

Many organizations have taken the position that they will offer ongoing training over the life of the worker. Such progressive minded organizations that actively promote and support a literate workforce have benefited greatly from this approach. The fact that many "blue collar" jobs will continue to be filled by an increasingly diverse workforce suggests that learning and training opportunities must be made available to the entire workforce on an ongoing basis.

Unions representing municipal workers have become involved with workplace learning with a view to developing not only workers' skills, but their critical consciousness about the contexts in which they find themselves at home, at work, in the union and in the community.

A worthwhile goal for literacy in the municipal workforce should be to ensure that municipal governments are committed to a literate workforce through a policy and practice of continuous learning.

6.1 The Literate Workplace

In the future, municipal governments seeking to maximize levels of service to the public, must recognize workers as valued assets. Continuous learning programs should become essential rather than discretionary and municipal governments will need to commit sufficient resources to guarantee the survival of such programs. In order to achieve the goal of lifelong learning the following objectives need to be pursued:

- **development and approval of policies to entrench workplace education;**
- **the entrenchment of Clear Language policies for both internal and external communications;**
- **active identification and elimination of barriers to learning;**
- **promotion and encouragement for workers to learn at all levels, including the eradication of the stigma attached to literacy learning;**
- **development through training of a workforce with transferable skills.**

6.2 Literate Cities

As we move into the 21st century, it is conceivable that the role of municipal governments will evolve to include leadership roles in relation to the larger community. The municipality could serve as an advocate for broad-based community literacy, for example. Every opportunity to create a new or renewed mandate should be used to ensure that literacy in its broadest application is clearly examined and thoroughly addressed. Such a process should promote the possibility of the municipal government in question serving as a Literacy Champion within its community with the goal of designating the city a 'Literate City' by the year 2025.

With the municipal government acting as the literacy champion within a community the following objectives should be pursued:

- **municipal governments develop the means to promote the value and practice of continuous learning within the municipality;**
- **municipal governments seek ways to expand opportunities for literacy learning and instructor training;**
 - **municipal governments model and promote Clear Language practice in all communications;**

- **municipal governments support the Prior Learning Assessment Recognition process(PLAR), a process that identifies, assesses and focuses on the skills and knowledge which individuals have acquired through life and work experience and through formal education and training and establishes PLAR centres in their municipality.**

6.3 Champion for Literacy - A Municipal Model for Literate Cities

In order to assist municipal governments interested in pursuing the role of literacy champion, the following describes a model designed by one municipal government to achieve this goal.

In 1991, following the International Year of Literacy, the City of Ottawa established The Mayor's Task Force on Literacy. Chaired by a prominent business person and made up of literacy experts and others from a broad spectrum of the community, this task force began to examine the issue of literacy in Ottawa in all areas of community life. Public hearings, interviews and surveys throughout the community uncovered an array of literacy activities and presented a comprehensive overview of the potential benefits to be gained by addressing these needs in a timely and practical manner.

The Task Force determined that it is the right of every Canadian to be literate since limited literacy skills prevent people from participating fully in society. It agreed that there was a need to develop a continuous learning culture within its community that included but went well beyond formal education. It concluded that every Canadian would benefit from increased adult literacy but that to command the resources needed to promote change, literacy needed to be recognized as a major economic issue.

The Task Force determined that, based on Statistics Canada data, fully 16% of the local population in Ottawa-Carleton was in need of basic literacy education. Since about 3% was receiving training, ways needed to be found to encourage those in need of literacy training to come forward. It further determined that as 38% of Canadians had literacy levels below the level needed to confidently deal with most written material, staff communicating or working with the public, needed training to write clearly.

Following much deliberation and consultation, The Task Force concluded that "The City of Ottawa can serve as a model for other communities". Its 1991 report to the Mayor, "A Capital Challenge, The Ottawa Literacy Report,"³ recommended the following action be taken.

1. A Champion for Literacy

The Council on Literacy

The City of Ottawa should take the lead with the Regional Municipality, other area cities, School Boards and community colleges in the region to establish the Council on Literacy of Ottawa-Carleton. The Council on Literacy should define and coordinate the delivery of a Strategy for Literacy in Ottawa-Carleton. The goal of the Strategy should be to increase the person hours of basic literacy and numeracy training in the region by a minimum of 20% each year until the year 2000.

The Literacy Advocate for Ottawa-Carleton

To deliver results the Council on Literacy would need a small but effective staff of three to five persons - the Literacy Advocate. In order to provide support to the Council on Literacy, the Advocate would be provided with a budget to develop the Strategy for Literacy and to cause actions to be taken throughout the Region to achieve the goals of the Council.

2. Employee Basic Skills Office

Establishing an Employee Basic Skills Office within the Corporation of the City of Ottawa, would demonstrate commitment to its own employees, and could be an effective voice to communicate with other public and private sector employers in the area and encourage the establishment and implementation of policies and programs that would:

- **protect the job security of employees participating in skills upgrading program;**
- **promote a culture of continuous learning for employees at all levels.**

The resulting increased literacy levels and improved job performance among employees would benefit both employees and the citizens of Ottawa.

3. Plain Language Zone

The City should declare Ottawa to be a "Plain Language Zone". Within its own offices it should make plain language the norm in all communications with employees and the public.

³ City of Ottawa, May 1991 - A Capital Challenge: The Ottawa Literacy Report

Further, the City should:

- **initiate an Office for Plain Language to provide advice on and encourage plain language practices by all sectors in the region;**
- **assist public sector organizations in designing communications and determining methods of assistance for people to respond to these;**
- **coordinate counselling of front-line municipal service workers to respond in a proactive and meaningful way to people with literacy problems.**

In the early 1990's, this recognition of a role for municipal government in the field of literacy was both innovative and bold. By supporting literacy initiatives within its workforce and in the community at large, the City of Ottawa would directly impact the economic well-being and social fabric of its citizens.

While the model described above was never fully implemented following the approval of the Task Force Report by Ottawa City Council, the City took action to validate its evolving role in literacy. The original proposals were perceived by some to be flawed and difficult to implement given the call for new human and financial resources in a time of fiscal restraint. As well, the proposed structure had been made redundant since the role of literacy advocate and coordinating services was now established in the region.

Acting on information gathered at briefings on community literacy issues, the next mayor continued to champion the cause of literacy within municipal government by continuing to support a union-based literacy program within its Department of Engineering and Works. She was also committed to linking the City's efforts to those of the Ottawa Carleton Coalition for Literacy and the proposed community-based Foundation for Literacy. This new approach proved to be acceptable to the literacy stakeholders and allowed the various agencies and levels of government to proceed with support to the issue of literacy in a variety of ways.

The strengths of the Mayor's Task Force on Literacy were demonstrated in the political will to make it happen, the incredible energy and commitment to the process of the community players involved, the huge response from members of the public to the public hearings process and the concept of promoting front-end partnerships with other agencies and levels of government. The process was considered worthwhile as it served to assist in the redefinition of literacy objectives for the community, supportive of achievable future goals for the literacy movement in the Ottawa-Carleton region.

7. Conclusion

While the new decade will demand new approaches to literacy learning, the modern workplace will continue to reap benefits from entrenching a culture of continuous learning in its workforce, through training and development. As evidenced in this report, many fine examples of "best practices" in municipal workforce literacy already exist and can be used to expedite the introduction of new programs in the future. Similarly, the lessons learned by the partners for community literacy in Ottawa-Carleton coupled with the goals and objectives as identified in "A Capital Challenge, The Ottawa Literacy Report", will stand as legitimate guidelines for achieving literate cities. In reaching these objectives, municipal governments can attain their overall goal of achieving a literate workforce in a literate city by 2025, thereby doing business better.

Municipal governments will not have to travel this path alone. Potential partners, including other levels of government across Canada, have already recognized the significance of a literate community to their constituents and clients and are moving forward with similar goals for the future.

Canadian municipal governments who undertake the challenge of ensuring a literate workforce in a literate city, will be among the leaders positioning the Canadian economy for future success. Further, they will be recognized as community leaders in the vitally important field of human skills development.

Achieving these goals must be seen as a significant and lasting legacy for the literacy movement in Canadian municipal government.

Appendix

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the following municipal governments and agencies who so graciously provided much of the data contained in this report :

Newfoundland

City of St. John's

New Brunswick

Town of Anfield

City of Moncton

City of Bathurst

Town of Quispamsis

City of Saint John

Nova Scotia

Halifax Regional Municipality

Truro/Colchester Regional Municipality

Cape Breton Regional Municipality

Quebec

Ville de Montreal/City of Montreal

Ontario

City of Hamilton

City of Kingston

City of Kitchener

City of North Bay

Regional Municipality of Ottawa Carleton

City of Ottawa

Manitoba

City of Winnipeg

City of Thompson

City of The Pas

Saskatchewan

City of Regina

City of Saskatoon

Town of Kindersley

Alberta

City of Calgary

City of Edmonton

City of Medicine Hat

British Columbia

City of Burnaby

City of Prince George

City Port Moody

City of Richmond

City of Surrey

City of Vancouver

City of Victoria

Northwest Territories

City of Iqaluit

Kugluktuk

Yukon Territory

City of Whitehorse

Yukon Literacy Council