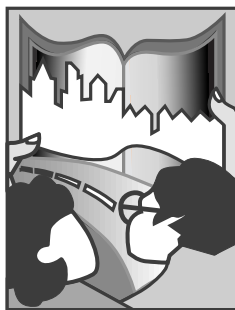


LITERATE  
CITIES



LES VILLES ET  
L'ALPHABÉTISATION

# AFTER THE PILOT PROJECTS

## Revisiting the process



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## **Acknowledgments**

We wish to thank the members of the Literate Cities Steering Committee for their guidance, advice and assistance in the preparation of this report: Michelle O'Brien (Chair), Sylvia Sioufi (Vice Chair) (CUPE National Office), Paul Stapelton (CAMA Board of Directors), Wendy Desbrisay (Movement for Canadian Literacy), Ray Smith (CUPE 503, City of Ottawa), JoAnne Werner (Heritage College), Patricia Fernandes (City of Ottawa), and Craig McNaughton, (SSHRCC).

This report was researched and written by Patricia Nutter, Project Director of the Literate Cities Project, and Michelle O'Brien, consultant. It would not have been possible without valuable input from the five pilot projects and their committed planning committees: City of Moncton, City of St. John's, City of Bathurst, City of Edmonton, and the City of Port Moody. The City of Winnipeg, City of Kitchener, Halifax Regional Municipality, and the City of Prince George also provided supporting information for the report. For her patient and careful editing of the report, the authors wish to thank Debra Huron.

We are indebted to the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) for its continued support and partnership. Particular thanks goes to Brigid Hayes, Program Manager with the NLS, who provides sound advice and encouraging feedback every step of the way.

We hope this tool will help municipal stakeholders and their partners who are looking for informational support as they plan workplace education/literacy programs. The report shows that while there are common themes in the development and implementation of workplace literacy initiatives, a wide variety of approaches can be used to achieve the same goals.

David Johnstone  
President, CAMA



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## Introduction

In the early 1990s, only a few municipal governments had literacy programs to help workers upgrade existing skills, and prepare them for the new realities of the workplace. The introduction of new technologies, including more complex information systems, and the increased pressure for quality public services and accountability meant that municipal governments had to find new ways to ensure that all workers would be able to adjust to the new realities. Internal challenges were a part of the picture, too, as municipal corporations sought new ways to 'do business better and more efficiently'. It was a decade of downsizing, re-organizing, alternative service delivery, privatization of some services, and governance changes.

The early literacy programs mostly targeted blue-collar workers, many of whom had entered the municipal workforce with little formal education or who held jobs where there was little requirement for reading, writing and numeracy skills. During this same time, most municipal corporations were instituting hiring policies that required Grade 12 education. Within the existing workforce, this new requirement accelerated the need for upgrading among employees who might be seeking promotions.<sup>1</sup>

By the mid-1990s, municipal corporations began to explore workplace education alternatives that could meet the training needs of *all* municipal employees. Because many provinces were adding new service areas to the municipal mandate, employees were faced with demanding workloads, the need to fulfill expanded job functions and the requirement, in some cases, for specialized training or upgrading. Municipal governments faced other challenges at this time, including recruitment and retention of people with key skills, a lack of financial resources for training, and competition from the private sector. Morale among employees was low.

Faced with all these challenges, municipal employers and unions began to work together to develop strategies for managing change in their workplace. It was a 'win-win' opportunity for both management and labour.

In 1996, the Literacy in the Municipal Workforce Project, sponsored by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), began a journey of discovery with municipal stakeholders in five different workplaces. The five pilot projects were ahead of their peers as they attempted to meet these issues 'head on', in a collaborative manner. While they tailored their programs to meet the unique needs of their workplaces, they also demonstrated many common themes and impacts. It is these pilot projects, their achievements, and the lessons learned that are highlighted in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Low literacy skills can be a significant barrier to integration in the labour market. Approximately 40 per cent of Canadians of working age do not have the basic literacy skills to enable them to participate in today's workplaces. Source: *International Adult Literacy Survey*, Statistics Canada, 1994.

## **Methodology**

Data was collected in the following manner:

- ◆ Notes from meetings of stakeholder committees;
- ◆ Interviews with stakeholders;
- ◆ Information contained in program award submissions; and
- ◆ Testimonials from learners and supervisors.

As well, in both 1999 and 2001, CAMA surveyed about 50 municipalities with workplace education programs to determine the impacts and benefits of such programs, and to assess what kinds of systemic changes might have emerged from them. These surveys supported the information collected directly from the pilot projects. Section 6 of this report provides readers with highlights of data gathered from these larger surveys.

## **Definition of Literacy**

The term *literacy* is generally perceived to mean the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic/math) – the basic skills necessary for most jobs today. Broader terms that have come into use are *essential skills* (critical thinking, problem solving, use of computers and continuous learning), and *employability skills* (basic and essential skills as well as attitudes and aptitudes desired by employers). Literacy is not a static set of knowledge or skills. It is a foundation that allows employees to adapt and respond to the demands of the workplace, the home and the community.

The pilot projects generally used aspects of all three definitions to respond to identified needs. By creating a climate that promoted *lifelong learning*, these training programs have reflected a broad and inclusive approach to workplace literacy/education. They recognized that the skills necessary 20 or 30 years ago in the municipal workplace were no longer adequate if employees were to adjust to the ‘knowledge based workplace’.

# **1. The Five Pilot Projects**

The five pilot projects represented municipal workplaces across Canada. They served unilingual English and bilingual (English/French) communities. They were situated:

- ◆ in four Canadian provinces (Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia);
- ◆ on the east and west coasts; and
- ◆ in small, medium and large (urban) municipalities.

Each pilot project followed a model which required a joint labour-management stakeholder committee. “*A joint labour-management committee has a greater ability to ensure that workplace literacy programs become an ongoing part of municipal*

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*training and development strategies. Programs are more likely to be sustainable in the long-term when all parties are involved.”<sup>2</sup>*

The pilot projects set their own time frames and progressed at a pace appropriate for each workplace. Some were able to implement programs quickly, while others deliberated for long periods of time about the needs, policies and appropriate learning approaches that would suit their workplaces.

### **Goals for the Pilot Projects**

The pilot projects’ goals were broad enough to allow them the flexibility to create programs and partnerships that would meet the needs of their particular workplace. The goals were to:

- ◆ raise awareness about municipal workforce literacy needs;
- ◆ build commitment to municipal workforce literacy; and
- ◆ establish links and partnerships.

A manual entitled *The Writing’s on the Wall: Implementing a Workforce Literacy Program; An Organizer’s Guide* describes the guiding principles and processes for municipal corporations and stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> All the pilot projects followed these guidelines.

### **Descriptions of the Pilot Projects**

#### **City of St. John’s, Newfoundland, Workplace Self Improvement Program (WSIP)**

The City of St. John’s serves a population of 100,000 residents with 1,200 full time and 400 seasonal employees in eight municipal departments. There are four unions: CUPE Locals 569 and 1289, NAPE Local 7808 and the IFF Local 1075.

In 1997, a stakeholder committee was established to address the issue of workplace education. It was composed of representatives from all the union locals and from the Human Resources Department. An organizational needs assessment conducted in 1998 indicated that basic writing and computer skills, as well as techniques to address stress in the workplace were key areas requiring attention. A new model called *Writing in the Workplace: Writing Process with Workplace Content* was developed for the City of St. John’s workers by Dr. William Fagan.

With City Council and senior management support, the WSIP developed a communication plan that involved dissemination of information about the new program on pay stubs, as well as on bulletin board notices and posters, in the employee newsletter and by word of mouth.

<sup>2</sup> Nutter, Patricia, *The Writing’s on the Wall: Implementing a Municipal Workforce Literacy Program; An Organizer’s Guide*, Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators, March 2000, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Nutter, Patricia, *The Writing’s on the Wall: Implementing a Municipal Workforce Literacy Program; An Organizer’s Guide*, Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators, March 2000.

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**From a learner's perspective:** "The Workplace Writing Course made me realize that effective writing isn't just putting words on paper but that there is a standard set of guidelines to follow. If these guidelines are followed correctly you will certainly see a noticeable difference in your writing. If writing is a part of your daily work schedule you should certainly consider taking this course."

The goals for the WSIP Program were to:

- Raise awareness among all employees about workplace literacy issues;
- Assure all employees that a policy of strict confidentiality would be adhered to;
- Ensure that all employees understood that the program would be voluntary;
- Help workers realize their full potential;
- Create a comfortable and non-threatening environment;
- Recognize that people learn in different ways;
- Remove the stigma of 'low literacy skills' by highlighting the advantages of education.

In October 1999, the first of two courses began with 40 participants from all levels of the corporation (management, supervisors, union and non-union). The courses spanned 10 weeks, requiring two hours a week on employees' time. Two instructors guided the learners through the materials. Related training courses included plain language writing, time management, and report writing.

In 2001, City Council provided further funding to help the WSIP committee set up courses in basic computer skills.

### **City of Moncton, New Brunswick, Workplace Education Program**

The City of Moncton's population of 112,000 can be broken down into two main groups: 65% anglophones and 31% francophones. There are 12 municipal departments with 600 full- and part-time employees. Three organizations represent City workers: CUPE Local 51, Firefighters Local 999, and the City Employees' Association.

With a joint labour-management committee in place, the planning for a Workplace Education Program began in 1998. The primary goal was to help educate their employees and family members, and prepare them for the emerging realities of the workplace.

External partners for this pilot project included Literacy New Brunswick Inc. and the New Brunswick Community College in Moncton. An organizational needs assessment identified a variety of training areas that could be incorporated into a program, such as writing, basic math, reading, GED upgrading, computer training and special interest courses. A key element of the program was that it was driven by the needs of the employees, not those of the employer.

With two full-time instructors, the City offered a variety of courses to employees and adult family members at times that were accessible to all workers. Classes were held in the City Learning Centre. Because computer technology was being used in a majority of municipal work sites, the planning committee decided to offer all courses using computers. This approach had two benefits:

- employees were not identified by the type of instruction they were receiving, since all work took place on a computer; and
- while all employees enhanced their computer skills, those who had never used this technology before felt a reduced 'fear factor' because the work took place within a group context.

**From a learner's perspective:** "My reading has improved so much that I am constantly looking for something to read. Instead of just glancing through a magazine, I find myself reading most of the articles. Even reading is not enough. I understand at the end of the article what I have read."

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Courses were offered in five-week modules, in small groups, with one-on-one tutoring available, as required. Major program activities were basic math, reading and writing; English grammar; basic computer skills; introduction to Windows, Word and Excel; basic parenting; and income tax completion. At the end of each module, learners self evaluated the program. Once a year, learners, supervisors, union representatives and managers evaluated the program. Based on the evaluations, adjustments were made to the courses offered and to course times. As well, new segments were added. The program communication plan included notices with pay stubs, posters on bulletin boards, information in the employee newsletter, and word of mouth (mostly through the Learning Centre staff).

In 2001, WEP introduced basic French language training for municipal employees.

To-date, approximately 350 municipal employees and family members have participated in the program. Each year, those who have completed the courses are awarded Certificates of Participation at a formal ceremony.

### **City of Bathurst, New Brunswick, Workplace Education Program (WEP)**

The City of Bathurst serves a population of 13,000, half of whom are francophone; the other half is anglophone. There are five municipal departments with 143 full-time and 100 part-time/seasonal employees. Four CUPE locals represent the workers: Locals 1282, 550, 1497 and 3040.

#### **From a learner's**

**perspective:** "Since I participated in the PowerPoint workshop, I changed my working methods at work. My work looks more professional and I feel prouder."

This city began its workplace education program in 1998, under the guidance of the Director of Administrative Services. On the basis of his advice, and with the support of Literacy New Brunswick Inc. and the local community college, a program was established with a focus on GED upgrading and basic skills. The program was offered to the Outside Workers group. Eight workers and their spouses signed up for the courses, but when attendance gradually declined, the City administration decided to start over, with all the stakeholders at the table.

#### **From an instructor's**

**perspective:** "A 5 hour workshop can be offered many times, but since the program is learner oriented, it's never the same. I had learners coming to the same workshop twice knowing they could learn new things with others. I guess in the end, I'm the one who gets to learn the most."

In 1999, a Workplace Education Committee composed of labour and management was formed to re-focus the program. With the guidance of this Committee, Literacy New Brunswick Inc. conducted a needs assessment to help set priorities for the program. The report recommended courses in computer/Internet at several levels, oral and written communications, French grammar and conversation, as well as a variety of interest courses such as public speaking, leadership, and horticulture. Course were offered one or two evenings a week, or on weekends, on employee time. By May 2001, approximately 50 city workers (from all levels of the Corporation) and adult family members had participated in WEP programs.

WEP had one full-time instructor. As well, community professionals were asked to volunteer their time for workshops on a variety of subjects such as real estate, insurance, and investments. The Mayor and members of City Council often volunteered to help with one-on-one instruction in grammar and reading. The WEP Committee believed that by stimulating workers desire to learn, they would be encouraged to adopt a philosophy of lifelong learning, with benefits for the workplace, home and community.

The Committee and WEP instructor developed a communication plan that was designed to catch the attention of all workers. The City's bilingual employee

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newsletter announced a competition to see which department could attract the greatest number of course registrants. The newsletter made the programs sound interesting and fun, in order to stimulate workers' interest.

### **City of Edmonton, Alberta, Workplace Education Program**

Eight City Departments currently serve the 650,000 citizens of Edmonton.

In 1996, a Steering Committee composed of front line supervisors, management, and representatives of CUPE Local 30, was formed. Over the next three years, the Asset Management and Public Works Department organized programs for the Custodial Services Unit, the Construction and Design Branch, and the Drainage Engineering Branch. The Alberta Vocational College (AVC) conducted a needs assessment of each Branch to help define the programs.

Working with staff from the AVC, the Steering Committee held a planning session to set the goals for a program, which were:

- To provide essential skills training to enable workers to meet the challenges of change;
- To help people be more successful in future training and education;
- To provide people with workplace essential skills to help them perform daily workplace tasks with confidence and self esteem; and
- To provide people with the skills to enhance their personal lives and community involvement.

The program consisted of five segments taught by staff from AVC. Seminars on learning to learn, basic computer skills, workplace reading, writing and pre-trades math were offered. Workers signed up for one or more segments. The skill level of learners was tested prior to taking courses to ensure that training was at the appropriate level.

Approximately 80 learners took courses on an equal time-share basis between employer and employees.

### **City of Port Moody, British Columbia, Workplace Communication Skills Development Program (WCSDP)**

Port Moody has a population of 27,000. There are approximately 160 full-time staff and 200 part-time/seasonal workers in eight municipal departments. They are represented by CUPE Local 825, CUPE Local 2896, a police union and IAFF Local 2399.

In the spring of 1999, a joint labour-management committee (with equal representation from each) was established to address the literacy needs of the City's workers. The goals of the WCSDP were to:

- Identify the needs for communication skills in the workplace;
- Design and plan programs to meet those needs; and
- Present the objectives of the program in a positive, non-threatening manner.

**From a learner's perspective:** "At work I feel more confident about writing and reading. At home I read a lot more."

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The needs assessment survey showed that basic computer/Internet training, as well as basic reading, writing, and math skills were worth exploring. The local school board conducted individual assessments to determine levels of competency. During 2000-2001, the WCSDP offered courses in computers, introduction to the Internet and math fundamentals in five-week modules.

Employees were informed about the initiative and the opportunity to participate by means of notices on bulletin boards and with pay stubs, and in face-to-face interactions. Registration was set up through the reception desk in City Hall. This process was intimidating to workers who wanted to sign up but did not want to be identified. The Committee continues to explore alternative ways to register participants.

## **2. Responding to Early Challenges**

Although the five pilot projects encountered a variety of barriers when they were setting up workplace literacy programs, their joint planning committees responded with sensitivity and creativity to the challenges they encountered. The barriers can be grouped under the following headings:

- ◆ Negative perceptions of the term 'literacy'
- ◆ Belief in the myth that hiring policies requiring high school education (or its equivalent) means that you have a 'literate' and skilled workforce
- ◆ Workers' fear of failure
- ◆ Workers' need for confidentiality regarding both participation and progress
- ◆ Workers' ability to access the programs
- ◆ Management of internal operational functions when workers are taking courses

*Negative perceptions of the term 'literacy':*

Using words like 'literacy' or 'illiteracy' creates a negative perception of an employee's abilities. It can also discourage people from participating in a workplace education program. The simple acknowledgement that one has low literacy skills can affect job promotions and job security.

There are many reasons why a person may have low literacy skills. They include socio-economic indicators (such as poverty), learning disabilities, living in an isolated or remote community, family demands, as well as non-use of skills over a prolonged period of time.

**Resolution:** The pilot projects used program titles that did not use the word 'literacy'. Most called their programs the *Workplace Education Program*. Others used terms found in their goal statements, such as "communication skills" or "self improvement". Using such terminology allowed the pilot projects to add other programs (both general interest and academic) to the basic skills courses offered. It also created an incentive for *all* municipal employees to participate. The City of Bathurst, for example, offered computer and academic courses, as well as horticulture and public speaking. While stimulating all workers to want to learn a variety of new skills and hobbies, this approach often dovetailed with a corporate philosophy of 'continuous learning'. The key was to promote the concept within each individual learner.

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*Belief in the myth that hiring policies requiring high school education (or its equivalent) means that you have a 'literate' and skilled workforce:*

Most municipal governments now require a Grade 12 or high school education equivalent for employment purposes. This has created the myth that there is no literacy problem in municipal workplaces. Certain facts help to dispel this myth: 1) The youngest recruits to the municipal workforce, namely, recent high school or community college graduates, may NOT have the kinds of literacy skills required to do the job. 2) Because the demands of the workplace have changed significantly in the last 20 years, a Grade 12 diploma earned in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s does not guarantee the range of skills needed by today's municipal workers. 3) Until recently, many municipal jobs did not require workers to read or write extensively on the job or to use technology, such as computers. As a result, such employees may not have the skills required to apply for promotions, or to adapt to the needs of the new "information" workplace. Having debunked the myth of the literate workplace, what can we replace it with? With the reality that today's municipal workers must meet certification requirements, be able to multi-task, use new technologies in a variety of situations, and be accountable for the services they provide.

**Resolution:** The pilot projects promoted their new programs in a positive and non-threatening manner. They involved all the key stakeholders in helping to recruit workers to the program in order to upgrade their skills. Based on this constructive approach, when workers realized that their jobs were secure, they self-identified for workplace education programs.

*Workers' fear of failure:*

Many municipal workers have not taken educational courses since leaving the school environment. They are afraid of failing tests, and of not being able to understand the instructional materials.

**Resolution:** The pilot projects did not use formal tests. Instead, a quiz for the whole group might help to determine understanding of the materials. The programs used work-related materials (forms, manuals, etc.) for instruction. Because such materials were familiar to the learners, they were able to measure their individual progress based on increased understanding of the materials. Instructors were challenged to make the instruction interesting, flexible and creative. This helped to keep the level of interest and commitment high.

*Workers' need for confidentiality regarding both participation and progress:*

It can be difficult for adults to admit that they may not have the skills they need to do their jobs. If they draw attention to their need for upgrading, they may not be eligible for promotions and transfers. Some people may jeopardize their job security if they acknowledge that they are having difficulties.

**Resolution:** The planning committees for all five pilot projects agreed to protect learners' confidentiality. Neither management nor unions received records of learners' progress. Management's knowledge of worker participation was not an issue in the pilot projects that required all classes to be on learners' time (the cities of Moncton, Bathurst, and St. John's). For those municipalities that had a policy of shared course time (the cities of Edmonton and Port Moody), supervisors had to agree to time off for instruction. Once the programs were in place for awhile, the issue of confidentiality became a non-issue. The programs had established a credible reputation that stood the 'test of time'.

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*Workers' ability to access the programs:*

When workplace education programs are being planned, each joint committee has to consider where and how to offer its program. Some of the options available to the pilot projects included: community-delivered programs in local schools or community colleges, and existing adult education programs. There was also the possibility of delivering the programs in the workplace.

**Resolution:** The pilot projects wanted to make the workplace education programs as accessible and comfortable as possible for learners. Because the workplace was a familiar, non-threatening place for employees to begin and continue their learning, all the pilot project programs have taken place in City facilities, such as training rooms and boardrooms. The Cities of Moncton and Bathurst have dedicated Learning Centres.

*Management of internal and external operational functions when workers are in courses:*

Managers may be concerned that course time will impact on their operational tasks and that the cost of replacement personnel will have budget implications.

**Resolution:** When programs were offered on employee time, operational functions and budget costs were not impacted, except in extreme cases. With shared course time (50% employer-50% employee) there was general agreement that operational functions had to be met to protect public safety. When learners were forced to miss a class in order to do their jobs, extra course time was added to the end of the module.

### **3. Common Themes that Led to Success<sup>4</sup>**

While the five pilot projects started their planning and programs in different ways, and with a variety of partners, many common themes emerged. These shared elements can be found, generally, in most workplace education initiatives, even when the essential components of the programs are quite different. The themes we have identified evolved over time, and are detailed under the following two headings: organizational process and program focus.<sup>5</sup>

#### **The Organizational Process**

◆ **Partnership Development:** Often one or more people in the municipal corporation championed the notion of a workplace literacy program. At the same time, it was vitally important for all groups within the municipal structure to take part in the process. The combined commitment of

<sup>4</sup> For information on the process and guiding principles for planning a workplace literacy program, please refer to *The Writing's on the Wall: Implementing a Municipal Literacy Program, An Organizer's Guide*.

<sup>5</sup> Recent research on the subject of workplace literacy confirms many of these principles. Please consult the bibliography for more information.

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management, unions and workers gave everyone ownership of the process, ensuring that it was employee driven.

The pilot projects used the joint union-management committee model and added other partners, such as instructors, learners, community college staff and community literacy organizations, as they deemed necessary. These partnerships enhanced the process, gave it a broad base of support within the municipal workplace, and provided access to a wide range of experiences and programs. For example, at the beginning of its process, the City of Bathurst did not have all the partners at the table. Their program floundered until the unions were brought into the initiative.

- ◆ **Governance and Program Funding:** The pilot projects' stakeholder committees believed that they should use a consensus model of decision making. All members of the committees brought suggestions and issues forward for discussion, and decisions were made as a group. Equity and flexibility emerged as key components of the joint process. The committees had to ensure open communication with all municipal employees, at all levels.

Program funding was often one area where decisions had to be made at another level. The City of Port Moody committee, for example, left funding issues to the Human Resources Department staff. The Cities of Moncton and Bathurst cost shared the programs 80%-20% with Literacy New Brunswick Inc. (with the cities bearing the smaller proportion of costs). The City of St. John's initially received funding from the Newfoundland Literacy Development Council for its program. Then, in 2001, City Council itself made a substantial donation to the Workplace Self Improvement Program (WSIP).

The type of curricula chosen by the committees determined the financial investment required for the program. All five pilot projects chose to use professional instructors and multi-use program materials. (Other kinds of literacy curricula are readily available if projects do not have funds to hire professional instructors. This can be an important consideration when it comes to long-term funding.)

- ◆ **Planning Time Frames:** When the pilot projects were in the early planning stages, CAMA's Literacy in the Municipal Workforce Project anticipated that the planning and implementation phases would be relatively short. What we did not consider were the tremendous time constraints that municipal staff were experiencing as a result of municipal reorganization, service downloading and amalgamation of structures and service delivery. These new realities impacted on the ability of stakeholder committees to plan workplace literacy/education programs in a timely fashion. The joint will and commitment were there but the actual time to meet, plan, and implement decisions did not exist. In the end, the planning time to establish the programs ranged from one to three years.
- ◆ **Organizational Needs Assessments (ONAs):** All five pilot projects conducted ONAs to help them identify the skill areas that their new initiatives should tackle. This 'snapshot' helped committees make informed decisions about appropriate curricula and learning strategies.

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ONAs were conducted in a variety of ways. The Cities of Edmonton, Moncton and Bathurst used community college staff to do their assessments. The City of Port Moody seconded City staff for this purpose. The City of St. John's hired a university professor to oversee the ONA. In all cases, the committees worked with the ONA facilitator to develop the survey and interview formats, and to set up the communication plan for the ONA.

The pilot projects demonstrated the importance of ONAs. Not only did ONAs lay out the framework for the proposed workplace literacy initiative, they were also key communication tools that 'tweaked' workers' interest by letting them know that something good was going to happen. Workers began to reflect on their participation in the new program. Unions and managers began to think about how they could encourage employees to register for courses.

- ◆ **Creative Communication Strategies:** The pilot projects used similar communication strategies to inform and recruit learners. A key strategy was to put a notice on/in pay stub envelopes, since most employees will access and read information provided in this manner. Another important strategy was person-to-person conversations with potential learners. Union representatives used this method extensively. Municipal newsletters, bulletin boards, and on-site presentations by municipal staff, instructors or external partners were also used to communicate with workers about the new initiatives. No matter what the method, the message was always delivered in a positive and non-threatening manner.
- ◆ **Supportive Program Policies:** The pilot projects were encouraged to commit to policies that ensured the program was driven by the needs of the learner (using learner-centred and learner-driven approaches). This meant ensuring that learner participation was voluntary, that progress and participation were confidential, and that program delivery locations and times were easy to access and flexible. The Cities of Moncton and Bathurst also decided to extend the programs to adult family members of municipal workers.

These policies gave learners and potential program registrants a comfort level that allowed them to learn at their own speed, in a familiar location, with familiar instructional materials, and with no threat to their jobs or job security. It was a 'win-win-win' situation for the employer, for learners and for the unions.

- ◆ **Evaluations:** The pilot projects all incorporated some evaluation method into their literacy programs. The City of Bathurst instructor involved learners in an oral evaluation after each module. The other projects asked learners to complete a short written evaluation. The City of Moncton continues to consult managers, supervisors and unions once a year to get feedback on its ongoing Workplace Education Program.

Evaluations helped the committees and instructors to adjust the course content, the time and length of instruction, and to review suggestions that might enhance the programs.

## **The Program Focus**

- ◆ **Focus on a Holistic View of Education:** The pilot projects saw the new programs as an opportunity to instill in all employees a philosophy of continuous/lifelong learning. The new skills, values and attitudes that learners adopted would have impacts not only in their workplaces, but also in their homes and communities. Four of the five pilot project programs were inclusive or open to all employees of the corporation – blue collar workers, managers, supervisors, etc. Everyone worked at their own level to achieve individual goals, such as learning to write reports and letters. Instructors were also able to add non-academic programs to the course, in response to the ONA and learner needs. Examples are as follows:
  - the City of Bathurst: horticulture;
  - the City of Moncton: parenting and income tax preparation courses;
  - the Cities of St. John’s and Edmonton: stress management; and
  - the City of Port Moody: introduction to the Internet.

By responding to the diverse interests and learning needs of the employees, both individual and corporate requirements were met.

- ◆ **Technology:** Cities involved in the pilot projects, like municipal workplaces all across in Canada, have felt the impact of technological change and improvements. During the last decade, very few municipal employees have not had to use and adapt to new operational systems and functions. As well, provincial governments have issued new and updated certification requirements for trades, including the use of new technology.

The pilot projects seized the need for computer skills as the segue to upgrading a variety of work-related skills. Workers who had a chance to sign up for a computer course did not feel the same stigma as if they had signed up for basic skills upgrading. While they were introduced to and practiced computer techniques, learners also improved or learned writing skills, grammar, reading, and possibly mathematics. Change happened on many levels when this non-threatening route to learning with adults was in place.

The following list describes the kinds of components that are valuable in ensuring a program’s success. Although they were identified using a larger group survey, they support the common themes that have emerged from the pilot projects:

- ◆ Explore and develop all opportunities for forming community partnerships;
- ◆ Identify supports for long-term commitment to the program;
- ◆ Budget for success;
- ◆ Design voluntary, employee-centered programs, open to all employees;
- ◆ Record impacts and benefits and share results with municipal stakeholders and partners;
- ◆ Celebrate success; and
- ◆ Adapt the program to meet changing needs.

## **4. Advice from the Pilot Projects**

The pilot project committees reported that there was no one way to ‘do it’. Programs worked best when tailored to meet the criteria identified in ONAs and the corporate goals. They also needed to be able to adapt to the changing needs of the learners and the employer.

The following advice was offered, in hindsight, by the five pilot project committees:

- ◆ **Ground the new initiative in sound values and principles:** In the process of creating a new ‘learning culture’ within a municipal organization, it is important to set down the values and principles that will guide the program. These include a commitment to a learner-centred program, equity and inclusivity for all employees, and treating learners with respect. Entrenching and supporting these values and principles will move the new workplace education program toward successful implementation in the municipal structure.
- ◆ **Get the key stakeholders on the planning committee:** It is vital to a new program that the right partners be invited to the table. The committee should include municipal managers and unions, who have the ability to spread the message about the new program among their colleagues in a positive manner. All committee members must have the support of their supervisors and unions so they can spend the time and energy required to make the program work, and to maintain it in the long-term. Other partners may be added depending on the type of program chosen. They can include instructors, learners, community literacy program representatives, members of provincial/territorial governments or literacy coalitions, and representatives of a funding agency.
- ◆ **Ground the new initiative in sound planning and support:** Conducting an organizational needs assessment (ONA) is one of the most important steps the committee can take. It provides decision makers with the impartial information they require to plan a workplace education program that it can meet both corporate and individual needs. It can give committee members evidence to persuade council and senior management to support the new program. As well, the ONA lays the foundation for identifying measurable criteria when it comes time to evaluate the program.
- ◆ **Develop a communication plan:** A key component in developing a successful program is to establish open lines of communication that touch every level of the municipal corporation. The results will be two-fold: there will be widespread trust that the program is being planned and run effectively and responsibly, and workers will have easy access to information about what the program is and how to register for it.
- ◆ **Be patient:** It will take more time than you anticipate to determine the type of curricula necessary, plan the new program, and communicate it to colleagues. Don’t rush the process. Small victories eventually lead to big success.
- ◆ **Reward learners:** Organizing an award ceremony for learners has positive impacts for both the learners and the corporation. When the ceremony takes place, some supervisors realize, for the first time, that workers have been involved in a workplace education program. They may recognize that some subtle changes they have observed in an individual could be as a result of

newly acquired skills and attitudes. This recognition on the part of supervisors, and the ceremony itself, are important to the learners because they can see tangible evidence of their achievements, in a context that includes all the other learners, their families, and their workplace colleagues.

- ◆ **Recognize impacts:** Some impacts of workplace education/literacy programs can be measured, such as less supervisory time for daily functions. Others (known as soft impacts) are reflected in the learners' values and attitudes, such as increased self esteem and better communication skills on the job. Both 'hard' and 'soft' impacts have positive results in the workplace, as well as in the learners' homes and communities.

## **5. Benefits and Impacts of Workplace Education/Literacy Programs**

A national survey of municipal government organizations that have successfully implemented workplace education/literacy programs, including the five pilot projects highlighted in this report, was undertaken in 2001 with managers, union representatives, and other stakeholders. This survey exposed a variety of systemic impacts and changes that have taken place within municipal organizations.

The following list, based on the survey results, shows the kinds of **systemic changes and impacts** that have occurred within municipal organizations:

- ◆ Corporations have formally recognized and promoted a culture that builds on the material benefits and positive emotional experience gained from life long learning.
- ◆ They have recognized and promoted the concept that the benefits of workplace education/literacy programs extend beyond the workplace to home, family, and social life in the community.
- ◆ They have adopted a commitment to life long learning expressed in an inclusive and equitable training and/or workplace education/literacy program.
- ◆ They have promoted a workplace education/literacy or training program designed to ensure the existence of a pool of skilled employees, prepared for advancement and able to integrate within the workplace using newly acquired skills.
- ◆ They have developed an organizational plan that seeks to fully engage the skills that employees acquire.
- ◆ They have entrenched, in policy, the principles that support the culture of learning within the organization.
- ◆ They require the use of clear language in both internal and external communications.
- ◆ They have developed and implemented policies that support employee development in the areas of pay equity, equal opportunity, wellness programs, performance appraisal, and training and education.

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The following benefits and impacts were also noted in three specific areas:

**EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT**

- ◆ Employees experienced greater self esteem, pride in themselves and their achievements.
- ◆ Employees achieved GED and a greater number of employees qualified for certification in specialized areas, such as water management.
- ◆ More employees accessed other types of training and/or education programs.
- ◆ More employees made lateral transfers and/or obtained promotions.

**UNION INVOLVEMENT**

- ◆ Employee participation in union activities increased.

**ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS**

- ◆ Employee programs like Occupational Health and Safety worked better.
- ◆ Health and safety statistics improved.
- ◆ Employees were better trained to adapt to a changing workplace; an increase in the number of employees with transferable skills resulted in greater opportunities to re-tool and reorganize the existing workforce.
- ◆ Employees demonstrated more competent and frequent use of technology.
- ◆ Employees showed improvements in work effort, productivity and work quality.
- ◆ Higher rates of job completion and reduced errors decreased the need for supervisory input.
- ◆ Statistics show reduced absenteeism and tardiness on the part of employees.
- ◆ Employees demonstrated improved customer relations with both internal and external customers (the public).

Many of the municipalities surveyed were in the very early stages of developing and implementing workplace education/literacy programs when the survey was done. Once their programs have matured, it may be possible to identify further benefits and impacts.

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## **Appendix A:**

# **Developing Policies to Help Entrench Programs**

Proponents of successful workplace education/literacy programs understand how important supportive policies and/or the inclusion of appropriate language in collective agreements can be to long-term success. Despite this, in the fall of 2001, a CAMA survey of policy development in 25 municipalities with workplace education programs failed to uncover a single example of an approved policy that deals specifically with workplace education/literacy programs.

Nevertheless, among the municipalities surveyed, including the five pilot projects, several good examples of policies and a number of examples of collective agreement language showed support for the principles of workplace education/literacy programs.

The kinds of policies and collective agreement language identified as a result of the survey are listed below. They could be useful as starting points for the creation of umbrella policies on workplace education that might be adopted by municipal corporations and their unions.

### **EXISTING MUNICIPAL POLICIES**

#### **City of Prince George, British Columbia**

- Policy on Training and Development

#### **Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia**

- Policy on Employee Learning and Development

#### **City of Kitchener, Ontario**

- Tuition Assistance Policy

#### **City of St. John's, Newfoundland**

- Education Policy

#### **City of Bathurst, New Brunswick**

- Staff Training and Development Policy
- Employee Assistance Program
- Language Policy

#### **City of Winnipeg, Manitoba**

- Staff Training and Development Policy (includes an Education Leave clause)
- Health and Safety Policy
- Workplace Wellness
- Deferred Salary Leave Plan
- Employee Assistance Program

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**COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS AND EMPLOYER/UNION  
CONTRACTS**

**General Motors and CAW – Canada**

- Basic Education Skills and Training (B.E.S.T. Program)

**Licensing Commission, Metro Toronto CUPE Locals 43 and 79**

- Education, Training and Retraining Committee

**City of Burnaby, CUPE Local 23**

- Letter of Understanding re: Sabbatical Educational Leave Program

**City of Hamilton, CUPE Local 5167 (formerly CUPE Locals 5 and 167)**

- Leave of Absence with pay to employees enrolled in the *Literacy in the Workplace* program

**City of Prince George, CUPE Locals 399 and 1048**

- Articles in the collective agreement re: Employee Development (including tuition reimbursement and time off for completion of exams); Apprenticeship Training; and On-the-job Training

**City of Winnipeg, CUPE Local 500**

- Letters of Understanding re: Education, Training and Staff Development; Change Initiatives (including technological change); Redeployment; and Flexible Workplace Hours
- Articles in the collective agreement re: Job Sharing (for educational purposes); Technological Change; and General and Educational Leave

**National policy statement**

In November 2001, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) issued a policy statement called *On the front line: Building power through union education*. To obtain a copy of this statement, contact Sylvia Sioufi at CUPE's National Literacy Project. Telephone: (613) 237-1590 ext. 341. E-mail: ssioufi@cupe.ca