

Each year, Calgary Learns hosts a community consultation where we invite local providers of foundational adult learning programs to discuss needs and trends in the field. As part of this process we completed an extensive needs assessment for Calgary in 2013.

The input we gain from these processes guides our work and helps Calgary Learns shape future funding priorities.

On October 13th, leaders and educators of Foundational Learning programs gathered and shared their perspectives and experience. Groups of similar programs (English Language Learning, Adult Basic Literacy, Indigenous, Essential Skills and Foundational Life Skills) each reflected on:

1. What has changed/evolved since 2013
2. The needs of their organization related to learners at the foundational level
3. The needs of the learners

Changes

There have been many changes since 2013 that have impacted Calgary: changes in national and provincial government, the economic downturn and the flood. The participants reflected on a number of changes their programs have experienced over the past three years including:

- Increase in learners
 - Increased complexity of learner needs
 - Loss of literacy organizations
 - Impact of technology
 - Finding volunteers
 - Less funding available
 - Fewer trained teachers available
 - Portfolio Based Language Assessment evaluation program
 - The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) guiding force
 - Understanding learning styles
 - Community collaboration on learning needed-go where learners are best served
- } English Language Programs
- } Indigenous Programs

Organizational Needs to Support Learners

Through conversation with like programs (English Language, Adult Basic Literacy, Indigenous, Essential Skills, Foundational Life Skills), participants discussed their organizational needs to support learners at the foundational level. Of course, **time and money** was identified as one of the top priorities. Other areas of priority that the group identified specific to programming included:

- **Finding different ways to present content** in practical, interesting and interactive ways
- Need to **modify programs to meet learner requirements** (e.g. training staff to work with learners with learning disabilities, cultural groups and high risk learners)

- **Evaluation challenges** –funders have different requirements, accessible to learners, design, complying etc.
- **Shared Resources (bank of information)** – across the field, includes curriculum, teaching materials etc.

Learner Needs

Although the learner needs may vary depending on specific programming area, the following were prioritized needs across a variety of programming areas:

- **Recognize where learners come from:** context, culture, complexities of learners
- **Specialized Assessments**
- **Computer Literacy**
- **Overcoming Multiple Barriers**
- **Understanding triggers/culture**

Addressing Needs

The group believed learner needs and the organizational needs to support learners could be supported through: **funding, professional development** and **information sharing**. They suggested having focus groups and a PD Advisory Group to ensure community needs are being met. Their initial brainstorm of PD opportunities to support identified priorities included:

- Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA)
- ESL Literacy
- Cultural Training,
- Mental Health Strategies,
- Addressing Learning Disabilities
- Teacher training about teaching through technology
- Peer Mentorship training
- Understanding Refugees and complex needs
- A variety of PD including: brainstorming, facilitated and focused networking, email groups, sharing updates and ideas, resources, tips and tricks, mentorship

It was expressed that a number of organizations could help support the organizational and learner needs including:

Professional Development and Information Sharing

- ATESL
- Calgary Learns
- FESA
- Propellus
- Learner Alumni
- In-house training

Funding

- Calgary Foundation
- Advanced Education
- United Way
- City of Calgary FCSS
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada
- Calgary Learns

What Next?

Calgary Learns greatly appreciates the input from participants. As we look at future program funding, these identified priorities will be part of our review team discussions. Calgary Learns is currently limited in the amount of professional development that we can do with our current funding. Input from the community helps us to focus these limited funds, as well as see the community needs so we can explore other funding possibilities.

Final acknowledgements: We thank our participants who represented the following organizations:

Bow Valley College
Calgary Chinese Community Service Association
Calgary Immigrant Educational Society
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
Calgary Public Library
Calgary Scope
Calgary Society of Community Opportunities
CanLearn Society
Centre for Newcomers
Community Learning Network
Elizabeth Fry Society
Families Matter
Further Education Society of Alberta
Alberta Advanced Education
Immigrant Services Calgary
Inside Out Theatre
Metis Calgary Family Services Society
Momentum
Mount Royal University