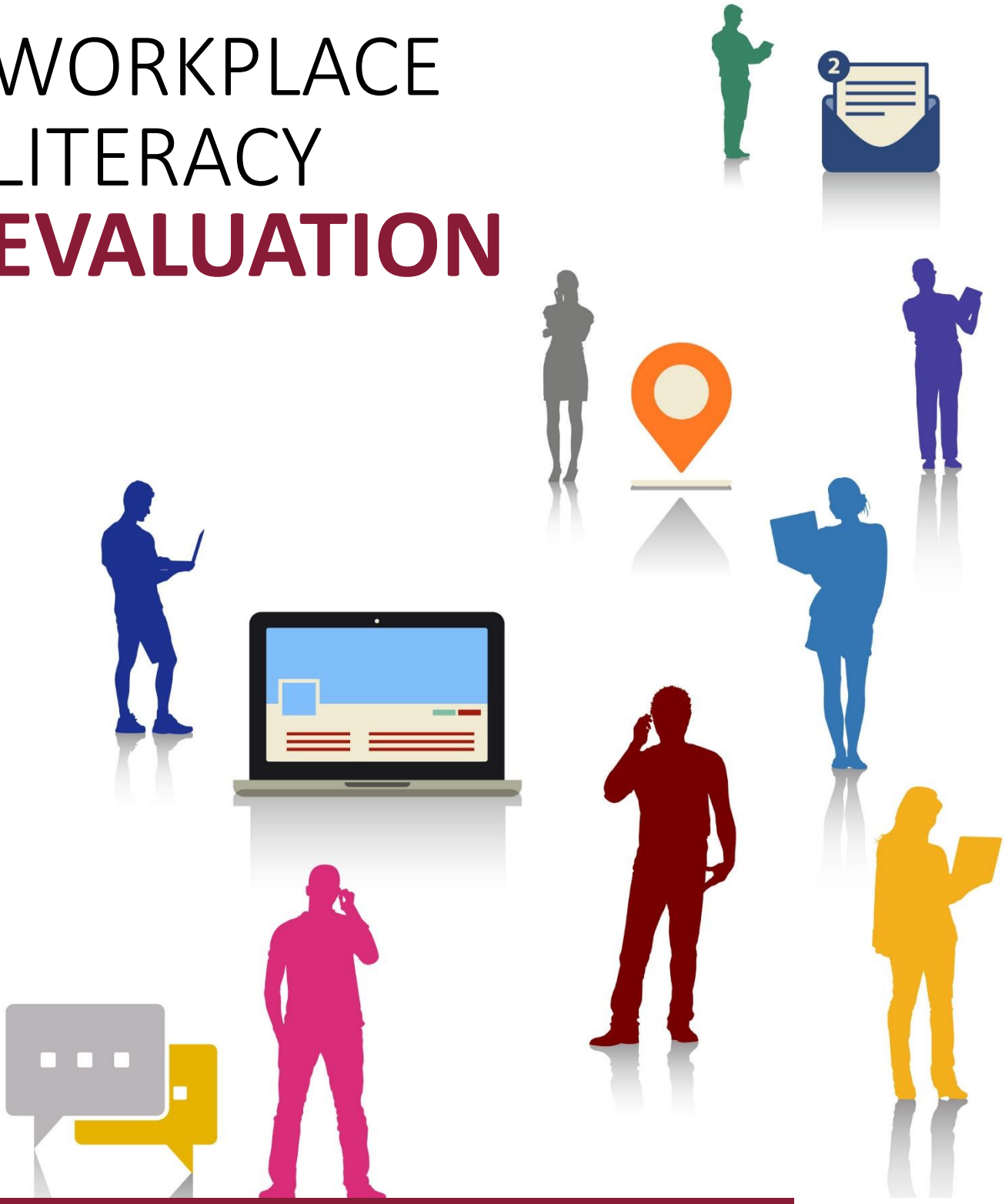
WORKPLACE LITERACY **EVALUATION**



Laubach Literacy Ontario

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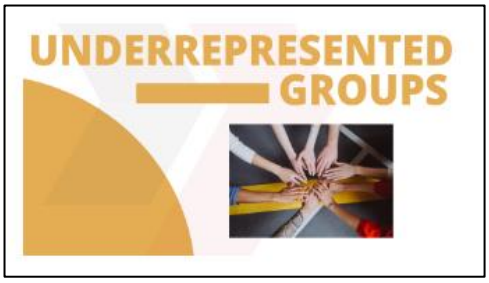
Introduction

Laubach Literacy Ontario is pleased to offer you this module on Workplace Literacy Evaluation. Workplace literacy has a higher profile now in Ontario than perhaps ever before. Ontario is experiencing a constricted labour market which means that there are more jobs available than there are people to fill them. As a result, employers are hiring some individuals who have less than the desired level of skill and so are interested in potentially working with adult literacy agencies to address skills gaps.

Also, the nature of skills needed to perform effectively in the workplace has changed and continues to evolve. Continuous learning is becoming an expectation of, and an asset for, employers and job seekers alike.



As a result, adult literacy agencies are increasingly being drawn into the world of providing workplace literacy. This reality represents a change for many adult literacy agencies that, historically, have welcomed all individuals who came to them to seek service. However, workplace literacy often means that adult literacy agencies seek out partnerships with employers who see upgrading needs among their employees.

In 2022/2023, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) and Literacy Link Eastern Ontario (LLEO) received Skills Development Funding to execute a Workplace Literacy project. Through this project, four webinars were developed and delivered to the Literacy and Basic Skills field. Topics included:

- Marketing to Employers
- Organizational Needs Assessments
- Workplace Literacy Program Delivery
- Workplace Literacy Evaluation

While these webinars provide a good starting point, we know there is much more to share about workplace literacy in each of the four areas noted above. The goal now is to make each of these topic areas more fulsome as learning materials/workbooks for LBS agency managers and practitioners. This module will expand upon *Workplace Literacy Evaluation*.

What is Evaluation?

We begin this module with a basic review of what evaluation is. Evaluation for some is an exciting opportunity. For others, it is a chore. And for the rest, it's something that has to be done to satisfy the needs of external forces – usually funders.

At its essence though, program evaluation just makes a lot of sense. It's the process of collecting information about the program and the outcomes you intended to accomplish so that people can make good decisions about whether the program was effective.

But there are other good reasons to do evaluation – besides just satisfying requirements:

- Determine program effectiveness
- Use funding accountably
- Document testimonials
- Use testimonials in marketing and promotion

It's important to know if programs are effective. If they are ineffective, evaluation helps LBS agency staff to make changes to the program to increase its effectiveness and outcomes. It's also important for non-profits, particularly Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies, to know that they're using their limited funding responsibly. Evaluation can also play an important role in providing LBS agencies with data they can use to demonstrate that programs are worth continued investment. If done well and if processes are put in place from the beginning of a program, an LBS agency can receive testimonials from satisfied adult learners and other program partners. These testimonials can be very effective in documenting program accomplishments and can be integrated into marketing and promotional efforts.

Evaluation involves the systematic collection of information about the program characteristics, activities, and/or outcomes for use by people to make decisions about what the programs are doing and how to improve program effectiveness. (attributed to Michael Quinn Patton)

The Role of Evaluation in Workplace Literacy

Now that we've discussed evaluation in general, let's shift our focus to evaluation and Workplace Literacy. It's hard to find the time to evaluate Workplace Literacy programming. Sometimes it feels like all you can do is complete the programming within the desired timelines. So, why should you evaluate Workplace Literacy? Especially when government funding for it waxes and wanes, making it difficult to gain significant traction or to put into practice what you might learn from an evaluation.

Evaluating workplace literacy programming is important for the same reasons it's important to evaluate any type of literacy programming – to find out what works and what doesn't, to improve programming and to be accountable. The purpose of evaluation is to get information you can work with and to focus on continuous improvement. Think of evaluation as a cycle. Ideally, evaluating workplace literacy programming will encourage you to: Learn, Document, Improve, and Reflect.

What we want to do is to amass and use information that we can use to continuously improve our programming.

The goal is to make evaluation work for you and your program, even though there will be other audiences who are interested in results.

So, how do you effectively integrate evaluation into a workplace literacy program? It can be hard enough just to market to employers, identify employer and employee needs, design programming to meet those needs and deliver the training – let alone evaluate. If you're fortunate, you may be able to apply for funding to hire an External Evaluator. Think of an External Evaluator as another one of your staff – in this case, a staff person whose sole purpose is to support evaluation efforts. However, increasingly, funders are asking for an evaluation plan, or at least a framework, to be submitted as part of funding applications. So, it's a good idea for any Literacy and Basic Skills organization to have some experience in evaluation.

Evaluation can sound intimidating, especially when you start looking at its more advanced aspects and hear terms like standard deviation! However, not all evaluation plans and methods need to be large scale, longitudinal (lasting years) or expensive to provide meaningful information. You can scale an evaluation plan to support the stated needs and goals of LBS agencies. And that's really the point of evaluation – to support adult literacy practitioners and managers in their main purpose, which is to provide credible learning opportunities to adult learners.

The Characteristics of an Evaluator

But wait, you say! I'm not an evaluator. Don't you have to be an evaluation expert to plan for and implement evaluation strategies? Well, no, you don't. Chances are good that while you may have little or no experience with evaluating workplace literacy programming, you probably have a lot more evaluation experience than you are giving yourself credit for. LBS agencies are well versed in getting evaluation feedback from clients, for example. Many LBS agencies may also survey community partners to determine how aware partners are of adult literacy and local adult literacy supports.

Instead of thinking about how much formal evaluation you may or may not have done in the past, we encourage you to think about some common characteristics that most evaluators tend to possess and which you may already have.

Think about each of the following characteristics and, as you do, ask yourself if you or someone else in your organization possesses them. Consider how you may have demonstrated this skill – even if it wasn't in a workplace literacy setting. For example, strong evaluators are aware of their own bias. Being aware of bias helps them to maintain neutrality when they are creating evaluation questions and interpreting evaluation results. But it's also important to be aware of your own bias when you are conducting a hiring process.

Characteristic	Do you have this characteristic?	How do you/have you demonstrated it?
Example: Aware of own bias	Yes	During hiring processes
Curious		
Process-focused		
Observant		
Comfortable failing forward		
Analytical		
Independent		
Interpersonal skills		
Critical thinker		
Creative		
Tolerance for ambiguity		

Are there any characteristics on this list that surprise you? For example, being creative? Some people are surprised that an evaluator would need to be creative. Analytical sure, but isn't that the opposite of creative? Creativity is a good skill for an evaluator to have when they want to get feedback or input from a certain audience, but that audience can be very difficult to engage. Take employers, for example. Employers may well want to have a workplace literacy program within their company, but all their time is spent managing their business. Getting a half hour of their time to reflect on workplace literacy programming is not easy. A 20-question survey with lots of open-ended questions may not be the answer. And so, an evaluator will need to be creative to find out how to get meaningful information in a way that suits the employer's schedule.

What about the characteristic of being comfortable failing forward? This means that you are comfortable with failure and that you perceive failure (or negative results) to be an opportunity to change your delivery plans. Not every workplace literacy activity that you undertake will be successful. They say that you shouldn't do an evaluation with the goal of getting an A+. You want to evaluate so you can understand and analyze to make things better – not to show that there is nothing you need to change.

Tip: Find an evaluation "buddy" – someone you can speak to candidly and who can learn alongside you. Ideally, your evaluation buddy will be prepared to question you and be okay with you questioning them so that you can both build your skills without fear of being judged.

Types of Evaluation

There are many kinds of evaluation. In this module we are going to focus on two of the most common – outcome evaluation and process evaluation.

An outcome evaluation will tell you whether a workplace literacy program achieved its goals. An outcome evaluation measures a program's results and determines whether intended outcomes were achieved. It tests hypotheses by comparing conditions before and after participation, by comparing participants with similar individuals who did not participate or by comparing a combination of both.

A process evaluation tells you how and why a workplace literacy program evaluation achieved its goals (or didn't). A process evaluation describes a program's services, activities, policies, and procedures. It provides early feedback as to whether the program is being implemented as intended, what barriers have been encountered and what changes are needed. Most importantly, it may reveal why outcomes were or were not achieved.

Outcome Evaluation	Process Evaluation
Will tell you whether a workplace literacy program achieved its goals.	Will tell you how and why a workplace literacy program achieved its goals.
Focused on the changes in comprehension, attitudes, behaviours, and practices that result from modifications in programs activities. Outcome evaluations are summative in nature.	Conducted periodically throughout program implementation and are useful in helping to adjust during implementation. Process evaluations are formative in nature.

Sources:

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

- https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/latest/process-and-outcome-evaluation-a-brief-overview

TSNE® Partners in social change

- https://tsne.org/blog/process-evaluation-vs-outcome-evaluation/

Evaluation Questions for Different Types of Evaluation

Just as the two types of evaluations have different purposes, the kinds of questions you would ask for each type of evaluation will also differ. Outcome evaluations tend to have a narrower focus – did the program do what it was intended to do, while process evaluations can cover a much wider range of topics, delving into processes you used to:

- Implement the workplace literacy program
- Identify challenges related to marketing and delivering the program
- Determine if the length of the program and the intensity were appropriate
- Identify good practices worth repeating
- Allocate resources for program expenditures

Questions for Outcome Evaluation	Questions for Process Evaluation
Did the workplace literacy program succeed in building employees' foundational skills?	What were specific interventions put into place by the program to fight the problem being tackled? Did the interventions work or not — and how and why?
Was the program more successful with certain groups of employees than others?	What were the kinds of problems encountered in delivering the program — were there enough resources from the beginning to do it well?
Which aspect(s) of the program did participants think were most useful?	Is there skill at facilitating/teaching the program processes from beginning to end?
	Did the program cover all that it was intended to cover? If not, why not?
	Was there adequate support to the program?

A lot of what we do in adult literacy tends to be outcome evaluation. Consider the learner survey that may be done at the end of an adult literacy course on Customer Service as an example – an evaluation that is done when an adult learner has finished the course. The goal is to find out if the course was successful in building the learner's Customer Service Skills.

And it makes sense that knowing whether learners are building their skills is critical to adult literacy programs. But there are other critical learnings that may be overlooked if LBS programs that deliver workplace literacy programming only focus on outcome evaluation. Process evaluation can give LBS programs important information on how they are supporting their programs in areas like marketing, staff training, and the use of resources. Process evaluation can also be useful if an LBS program has hopes of replicating workplace literacy programs – with the same employer or with other employers in the community.

Reflect

Take a moment and think about or reflect on where you may currently be using outcome evaluation and process evaluation. Note your thoughts here.

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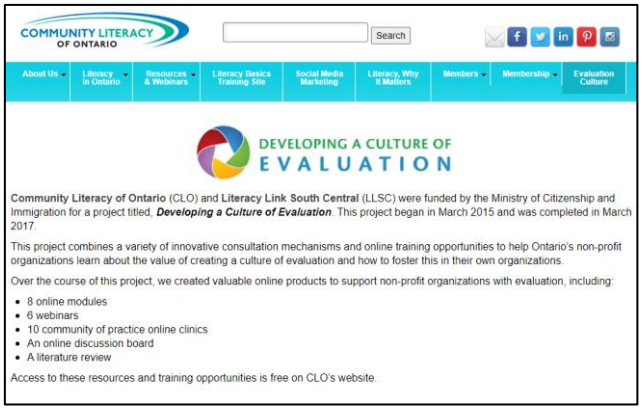
Still not sure of the difference? Deepen your learning by reviewing *Community Literacy of Ontario*'s and Literacy Link South Central's *Developing a Culture of Evaluation* project.



Audiences for Workplace Literacy Evaluation

If you are delivering a workplace literacy program, then your adult literacy agency will obviously be concerned with the results of the evaluation. Was it effective? Did you do what you set out to do? However, your program is not the only group that has an interest in the results of the program you delivered. Employers, employees, and the funder will all be interested in the results. But do they all have the same interests in the workplace literacy programs?

Take a moment and brainstorm what you think the different audiences for workplace literacy delivery will be looking for in terms of results.

Employers:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Employees

_____

_____

_____

_____

Funders:

_____

_____

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_____

Did you note any similarities among the audiences? Differences? You might ask why it even matters who the various audiences are for workplace literacy evaluation and whether they are looking for similar or different results.

It matters in terms of the evaluation questions you ask, the way you ask them and who you ask them of. And it matters in terms of accountability. If employers don't perceive value in the results of your workplace literacy evaluation, they will see no reason to invest. If employees don't see any value, then they will not want to participate nor will they encourage other employees to do so. And if funders don't perceive value… well, they will find other organizations and initiatives to invest in.

So, there is more than one audience for workplace literacy evaluation and their needs must be considered when you are developing your evaluation framework.

Different Audiences Want Different Results

Here are some of the desired results of workplace literacy programs by audience. Note that these are not exhaustive lists – either of Audience or of Desired Results. You may include other audiences or have different results you'd like to see as a result of a workplace literacy program.

Audience	Desired Results
Adult Literacy Programs	• increased skills gains • increased confidence • identification of next steps • participant program satisfaction
Employees	• increased skills • increased self-esteem • aspirations for more education • relationships with family and fellow workers, group work and co-operation • learning more about the company • greater loyalty to company • empowerment • improved attitude towards self and toward learning
Employers	• retained workers • prepare employees for future training • reduced errors or waste • meet safety or health requirements • improve customer relations • improve teamwork and other soft skills • increased financial literacy • become an employer of choice • empowerment
Funders	• accountable use of funding • achievement of targets and stated outcomes • evidence of replicability and scalability

When you are identifying desired results, it's important to make sure that they are realistic for each potential audience. Remember, it's always better to overdeliver or overperform than to underdeliver or underperform! And of your various audiences, it is unlikely that any will understand the nature of adult learning and skill building the way that you do. Take for instance the employer who might think that in just 12 weeks (at 2 hours/wk) you can build the language skills of employees who are functioning at a low-level LBS Level 1 in writing to the point where these same employees can write comprehensive Health and Safety Reports. You can build the skills of these employees, but a more realistic goal or set of desired results may be to state that, by the end of training, employees will understand what information is being asked of them and why and that they become familiar with vocabulary associated with writing Health and Safety Reports.

The Role of the Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA)

When it comes to developing an evaluation framework for a workplace literacy program, it's important to recognize that you will not be starting from scratch. There are some useful tools to draw upon them, one of which is the Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA) template.

Some ONAs are done formally, and some are done informally, but some form of ONA will always need to be done because through the ONA you will determine what it is that the employer/employees are actually hoping will happen or change as a result of workplace literacy programming.

So, ONAs are a great tool for identifying outcomes when practitioners begin designing training.

Theory of Change

Another useful tool you can use to document what changes you expect to see and why is called a Theory of Change. According to the United Nations Development Group in their document titled Theory of Change, a Theory of Change is a "method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, are expected to lead to a specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence."

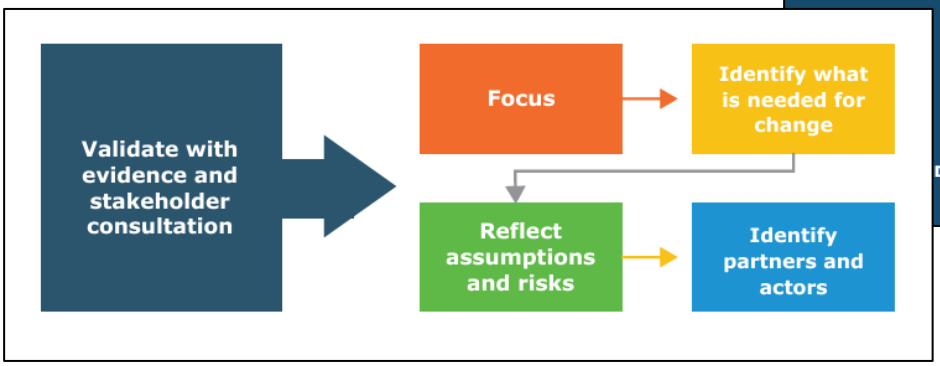
There are many models for developing a Theory of Change. Typically, a Theory of Change will identify:

- Inputs – resources you will need to make the workplace literacy program happen
- Activities – what you will actually do in order to implement the program
- Outputs – the results of your activities – a program of x weeks or x hours
- Outcomes – what will result from your workplace literacy program
- Impact – the changes or overall impact as a result of the program

More importantly, a Theory of Change will identify **why** you think that the program will achieve the results you predict it will. If an employer says they'd like their employees to become familiar with and competent with the use of a computer program specific to their workplace, you will, of course, need to think about how much time it will actually take for these employees to achieve that goal.

The changes you want to see will lead you to:

- The questions you will ask
- How you will ask the questions
- The people you will ask them of
- How many evaluation tools you will need
- Any baseline data you might want to establish/collect



Methods to Gather Data

There are many ways that LBS program staff can gather the data they will need for an evaluation. Different methods of data collection require different amounts of time to implement and different levels of resources. Some result in very rich information while others offer basic information. The methods you choose will depend on different factors such as:

- What kind of data you want to collect – qualitative or quantitative
- What resources you have available to engage in data collection – some data collection methods are more resource intense than others
- How much time the people you want evaluation information from have to give you – you may choose data collection instruments that encourage respondents to choose options from a pre-populated list if time is limited

It's common to think that the most desirable (or the only) way to get evaluation results is from individuals. However, it can be equally effective to get information from a group of respondents as you would if you were doing a focus group. Getting evaluation information from a group can often result in richer data as respondents build off of each other's answers.

The following chart identifies methods of gathering data and examples of where you might use them in a workplace literacy evaluation.

Method	Where and how you might use it
Pre- and post-assessments	• Can be used to evaluate gains in learning • Can integrate workplace-specific reading scenarios
Self-reflection tools	• Can be used in situations where substantial learning gains might not be possible (for a shorter workplace literacy program) but where employees may be able to demonstrate increased confidence and knowledge
Scenarios	• Can be used to determine changes in employee knowledge and behaviour (for conflict resolution or problem-solving training) such that they may not have to take their issues to supervisors or managers within the workplace • Can be used in written surveys or in focus groups
Classroom observation	• Instructors can note their observations on employee learning
Observations from other employees/supervisors	• If a workplace literacy program takes place over an extended period of time, you may wish to get evaluation feedback from other employees or supervisors on employee performance or attitudes
Interviews with learners and instructors	• While more time consuming, you may choose to get data from learners and instructors through interviews or Key Informant interviews
Focus groups	• Focus groups are good for getting rich information and for giving evaluation respondents an opportunity to build on each other's observations and ideas • They are also good for asking open-ended questions
Data review (mistakes made, absenteeism, productivity, health and safety, complaints to HR)	• This method of collecting data makes use of information that is already being captured. Here it is a matter of reviewing data to look for trends that you can reasonably expect are the result of your workplace literacy program.
Surveys	• Perhaps the most common method for collecting data. They are versatile and can be short or long, contain qualitative or quantitative questions, and be administered on paper, orally, or online.

Evaluation Tools and Evaluation Questions

When developing evaluation questions for a workplace literacy program or initiative, there are several considerations. Will you develop your own evaluation tools (customized) or use standardized tools? Will you administer pre- and post-assessments in your evaluation? What, exactly, do you hope to measure? We will look at each of these considerations in turn.

Customized or Standardized Evaluation Tools

It is most likely that you will use customized evaluation tools. Why? Because you will be developing evaluation tools that satisfy a variety of audiences (your program, the employer, employees and possibly your funder). It is unlikely that all of these audiences will be interested in all of the same outcomes each time you deliver a workplace literacy program. Developing customized tools means you will be able to tailor and ask all the questions you need to ask in order to gather data related to the outcomes you envisioned for your workplace literacy project.

Standardized questions, on the other hand, are exactly as they sound. You ask the same questions in every workplace literacy initiative you evaluate. There are pros and cons to each.

Customized	Standardized
Are practical	Tend to be of short duration
Can include employee rating scales and job-related reading scenarios	Measure only general literacy ability
Limit large-scale comparisons	Can be expensive to produce

Pre- and post-assessments

When you talk about evaluation, many people think that pre- and post-assessments are a critical part of any evaluation, including workplace literacy evaluations. While there can be value to pre- and post-assessments, there are also some potential drawbacks. On the pro side, it's good to establish a baseline by doing pre-assessments. You know where employees (evaluation participants) start from. However, it's possible that evaluation participants respond to a pre-assessment based on their knowledge at that particular time. This may not sound like a detriment, but here is an example:

Employees are being asked to rate their numeracy skills before a numeracy program is introduced to build their math skills. Employee A thinks her current math skills are good, so she rates herself as an 8 out of 10 (with 1 being low and 10 being high) on the pre-assessment. After Employee A takes the training, she realizes that there is quite a lot about math that she didn't know. When asked to rate her comfort level with her math skills **after** the training, she rates herself as a 7 out of 10.

So, according to the pre- and post-assessments, Employee A appears to be worse off as a result of taking the training, which is probably not true. So, does this mean there is no place for pre- and post-assessments in workplace literacy evaluation? Not necessarily.

When we were talking about important characteristics that evaluators have, one of the characteristics was creativity. It is possible to ask an employee, after workplace literacy training has been delivered, to reflect on their abilities before (pre) the training and to also reflect on their abilities now that the training has been completed (post). In this way, you can still get an idea of whether the employee believes their skills have increased, but the results will be less influenced by a potential bias on the part of the employee regarding abilities they had before the training.

Evaluation dimensions

One of the interesting things about evaluation is that you can ask questions to evaluate virtually anything you want. Unfortunately, this is also one of the challenging things about evaluation.

When you are determining an evaluation strategy and the associated tools, you want to think about the types of things you want to discover or learn through the evaluation – also known as evaluation dimensions.

Often, adult literacy agencies want to learn about the degree to which, if at all, participants' skills have increased as a result of workplace literacy training. And it makes sense given that this is the primary business that adult literacy agencies are in. However, there are other dimensions that you might want to explore depending on the outcomes you want to see. We will explore learner gains in literacy skills as well as a few other dimensions to consider in your workplace literacy evaluation planning phase.

Employee skills gains:

Adult literacy agencies in Ontario already have access to an array of tools that can document learner skills gains. With workplace literacy though, there is also an opportunity to contextualize assessment materials to the employer or sector with whom you are working. For example, if you are assessing reading competency, you may wish to us a piece of written text that is commonly found in the company you're currently working with to make the evaluation more practical and less like a "test."

Employees' beliefs about literacy and themselves:

In adult literacy we know that many adult learners lack confidence because of their challenges with foundational skills development. And we also know that adult literacy agencies play a key role in supporting adult learners in building their confidence. The same situation applies in workplaces. Through increasing people's confidence in their skills, you can change the way they think about literacy and about themselves.

To get evaluative (and probably qualitative) information about employees' beliefs about literacy and themselves before the workplace literacy instruction, you could ask:

- Please describe how well you see yourself at reading? At writing? At math?
- What examples can you share with me to support your answer?

Employees' literacy practices:

You may also wish to gather evaluative information on potential changes in employees' literacy practices – both on and off the job. Again, these questions could be qualitative. Before the workplace literacy program, you could ask employees about the extent to which they use their literacy and/or numeracy practices on a regular basis.

You could ask:

- What sorts of things do you read and write on the job during a normal week?
- How about at home?
- Can you give me any more examples?

The goal would be to see an increase in the number and/or complexity of things that employees read and write **after** they have taken the training.

Employee plans that may involve literacy use:

Another aspect or dimension you may want to include in your evaluation is the extent to which, if at all, employees have plans that involve literacy use. We know that for some people, exposure to adult learning after a period of not being involved in learning can cause individuals to begin to think about learning in different ways and can be a catalyst to further learning. In an evaluation, you might say:

- Now I'd like to ask you about your plans. Explain how you see reading and education as part of these plans. What are your plans for the next year?

The dimensions that we have discussed are not an exhaustive list. There may be other lines of inquiry or dimensions you'd like to investigate based on the desired outcomes for your particular workplace literacy program.

Why add multiple dimensions?

- Learners who had discussion of literacy beliefs and plans as a deliberate part of their course had a mean gain on the reading scenarios that was nearly three times that of the other learners.
- Learners who had discussion of literacy beliefs and plans as a deliberate part of their course made significant gains in the area of beliefs and perceived self-efficacy in relation to literacy, but the other learners did not.
  Source: Workplace Literacy Programs: Variations of Approach and Limits of Impact

Tip: It can be tempting to ask lots of questions because you are interested in the answers that evaluation participants may provide. However, a rule of thumb in evaluation is don't ask questions for which you don't need the answer. Your curiosity is not a good enough reason to pursue a line of inquiry. Every question you ask makes your evaluation(s) longer and reduces the chances that someone will complete the evaluation. It's a balance.

"Employers won't want to answer a ton of evaluation questions. They are just too busy – and your evaluation isn't their top priority. But employers will answer a few relevant evaluation questions, so make EVERY question count."

Dosage

When you are thinking about delivering workplace literacy programming, it's important to think about the length and intensity of the programming you will provide – also known as dosage. Dosage relates to workplace literacy evaluation because the length and intensity of programming that you provide can (and should) have a significant impact on the results you expect and are planning to achieve.

There are no hard and fast rules for how long or how intense Workplace Literacy programs should be. It can be difficult for employers to release employees to attend programming as part of their paid workdays and it can be difficult for employees who have worked a full shift to then give additional hours to learning in a Workplace Literacy program. For these reasons, Workplace Literacy programs tend to have fewer hours associated with them than programs that are designed for individuals who are unemployed (for example, 2-5 hours of instruction a week for 6-8 weeks).

However, once you have demonstrated to the employer and employees that Workplace Literacy programs can yield positive results, you may get brought in for longer and more intensive programs. Or if a program supports most of the employees but some are still working to grasp and apply all the concepts that were introduced in the program, you can always suggest that these employees continue their learning in your LBS program and come on their own time.

Use of Authentic Materials

The LBS field in Ontario has been using authentic tasks and materials for decades – to facilitate the application and integration of learning. The practice of using authentic materials also applies to Workplace Literacy programming as the use of such materials leads to gains in reading and to learning transfer.

Research suggests that you use workplace materials in the classroom (20-30% of the time, at least) to promote increased comprehension of workplace literacy scenarios and increased educational planning among learners.

The use of authentic materials has other benefits as well. By using materials that employees are familiar with, they may see more reason to attend classes before or after a long shift. They may see more purpose for the learning they are being asked or invited to do. And the successful use of authentic workplace materials can support employees in being safer and more productive at work.

"Evaluation and assessment are a standard part of what we do in LBS. Evaluation matters, and it's baked into the LBS program. Therefore, extending evaluation to the workforce training initiative was standard practice for us."

Develop a Culture of Evaluation

Instead of thinking of evaluation as one more thing that needs to happen as part of delivering workplace literacy instruction, we encourage you to think about how you can develop a culture of evaluation within your LBS organization – a culture that doesn't have to be limited to workplace literacy delivery, but one that ties many of the things your agency wants to learn about and, in some cases, must learn about because of funder requirements.

But easier said than done. Perhaps one of the most important things to keep in mind is the intention not to become a victim of evaluation. That is, don't let evaluation become yet one more thing that you "have" to do. Developing a culture of evaluation is about developing ownership over evaluation processes while still making them realistic and meaningful for your agency.

It is likely that you will be given some performance metrics as part of applying for funding to deliver Workplace Literacy programming. Or if you choose to address the needs of employers through core LBS funding, you will need to address the performance metrics that are part of the LBS program. However, you don't need to limit yourself to these metrics.

You can talk to instructors or other program staff about other types of information you may wish to know as a result of Workplace Literacy programming. All staff will have something to contribute to the conversation and if you want to develop a culture of evaluation within your organization you will need to make sure that all staff feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and suggestions. Bring people in from various backgrounds and with different skill sets and perspectives. Managers will have different perspectives than practitioners, for example.

If you feel you have gaps in learning that are preventing you from achieving a culture of evaluation, then we suggest trying to build in some training to give you and your staff a boost. Training doesn't have to be high-level or academic. In fact, there is sometimes a disconnect between academic approaches to evaluation and what happens at the community level. It's not a criticism of academia, but have you ever googled "steps to evaluation" and, as a result, reviewed a resource on how to conduct evaluation only to discover that taking all the steps outlined would be very time consuming and overwhelming not to mention completely outside of your budget?

If your agency doesn't have a lot of (or any) staff, you may not feel it's possible to even begin to develop a culture of evaluation. But remember – you can learn from and with others from within the LBS field. Reach out to your regional network and tell them what you're looking for. They can introduce you to other small LBS programs and colleagues and you can increase your knowledge through a couple of conversations. Ongoing strategic learning, no matter how small, in evaluation will slowly but surely build your agency's culture of evaluation – not just for Workplace Literacy, but for all of our activities. After all, evaluation is a transferable skill!

How to Use Evaluation Results

So, once you have evaluation results, what do you do with them? Put them into a report and shelve or file them? Absolutely not!

Not only do you want to share the evaluation results with your staff and funder, but you also want to share the results with the employer. But what if the results are bad? And are not at all what you were expecting or hoping for? This can happen and offers a reasonable rationale for conducting process evaluation (not just waiting until the end to see if you are successful). Chances are very good that whether you implement a formal process evaluation or not, you will know or at least have a sense of if things are going as planned. Your instructor(s) will know if employees are receptive to the material and if they are learning. If employees are not receptive and/or learning, then you and your staff will hopefully be making continuous improvements and changes along the way.

And it's important to recognize that even bad evaluation results provide good information. It's what you do with this information that matters- to build upon the learning to improve the next Workplace Literacy program you deliver. You can use each set of evaluation results you gather to inform the next Theory of Change because you will have more information about the cause and effect of delivering Workplace Literacy programming. You may decide that the dosage wasn't high enough and that employees needed more exposure to and practice with the concepts. Or perhaps you learned that employees' levels of abilities were too varied for one instructor to cope with as effectively as you had hoped. You can use evaluation results to predict future success.

Sometimes evaluation results need to be interpreted. Evaluation isn't just about the collection of numbers – it's about deciding what the information you gathered means. If only one person from your LBS agency looks at the evaluation results, you may be overlooking some important learnings. Here we cycle back to the idea of developing a culture of evaluation. Discuss the evaluation results with other colleagues – even if they are not part of your LBS program. What you learn from your evaluation is of value to others in the LBS community!

Good Practices from the LBS Field

Ontario's LBS agencies have always been able to develop and implement Workplace Literacy programs. The costs of marketing to employers and developing or contextualizing curriculum to meet employer needs is too resource intensive for most LBS agency budgets, so there isn't a lot of Workplace Literacy activity unless the Ministry that funds LBS has a special initiative or is able to fund projects that are specific to working with employers.

For the last half of 2022/2023 and for the fiscal year 2023/2024 the LBS field in Ontario was invited by the Ministry to work with employers to conduct Organizational Needs Assessments (ONAs) and deliver Workplace Literacy programs through Skills for Success funding obtained from the federal government. Many ONAs were conducted throughout the province and over 40 Workplace Literacy pilots were undertaken by agencies. In addition, the Provincial Support Organizations for Literacy were invited to develop new Workplace Literacy resources to support the LBS field.

As part of developing this resource, LBS practitioners and regional literacy network staff were invited to participate in Key Informant Interviews to share their experiences and learnings around evaluating Workplace Literacy programs. What follows here is a summary of how these seven Key Informants conducted their evaluations and good practices they identified. The appendix contains the full results of each interview and offers additional information on challenges encountered.

How Did You Evaluate?

Key Informant interviewees offered the following when asked how they evaluated their Workplace Literacy programs.

Keep it simple:

- Employers are very busy. They aren't interested in more paperwork. Employers will answer a very short survey (2 to 3 questions). They do not respond well to a long survey with many questions. Employers will also answer and potentially appreciate verbal evaluation questions. Ongoing conversations with employers during the ONAs and training delivered resulted in evaluation insights.

Use external help:

- Consider hiring students from local colleges or universities to help with the evaluation. This approach can build capacity and take pressure away from the delivery agencies having to do this work.
- Collaborate with your regional literacy network for support in evaluation.

Use process evaluation:

- Engage in ongoing evaluation and expect that changes will need to be made to improve delivery. Don't wait until the Workplace Literacy program is over to see if you met your goals.

- Do evaluation in real time – listen to and watch participant responses to the training and gain input from employers and instructors.

Promote success:

- Gather impactful materials to showcase success – client pictures, testimonials, and highlights of the results of previous training to share with employers and other partners.

Learn from others:

- Learn from others involved in Workplace Literacy activities by participating in Communities of Practice (CoP) meetings and reviewing materials on the CoP website.

Monitor staff capacity:

- Track the time required to deliver and evaluate Workplace Literacy training so you can monitor staff capacity.

Create a culture of evaluation:

- Be brave and try new things to achieve intended goals.

Good Practices

Here is a list of the good practices that the Key Informants offered.

Share at Literacy Service Planning (LSP) meetings:

- Share Workplace Literacy marketing, delivery and evaluation strategies and results at LSP meetings to create buy-in from LBS partners. Rely upon LSP members to provide feedback on training being offered to employers.

Share provincially:

- Attend Community of Practice (CoP) meetings to share successes and challenges.

Tip: Consider sharing tools, materials, and resources with others so that all LBS programs involved in Workplace Literacy and in Workplace Literacy evaluation can benefit.

Create marketing messages:

- Work with LBS colleagues to craft solutions-based marketing instead of talking broadly about building skills.

- Approach employers about how LBS can help them; don't approach them about what they are doing wrong.
- Create impactful, relevant outreach to employers and use language that employers understand. Ensure your marketing materials identify clear goals, timelines, and anticipated outcomes.

Do your research:

- Research good Workplace Literacy evaluation practices and messaging.

Don't reinvent the wheel:

- Evaluation and assessment are standard parts of all LBS programs. Extend your knowledge and practices around evaluation to workplace training initiatives.

Get employer buy-in:

- Make sure that employers are involved in setting the goals for the training. They will care if the goals are reached.

Don't just focus on numbers:

- For best results, engage in both qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

Think about what matters to you as an LBS program:

- Think about what you want to learn from the Workplace Literacy evaluation. Then build questions, tools, and processes to give you the data you want. Don't just collect the bare minimum of information.

Other Good Practices

There is a small body of literature about evaluating Workplace Literacy programming. Here are some other good practices that have already been identified:

Suggestions for program development:

- To have an impact on improved literacy processes and performance, a course should include a large proportion of time for learners to practice reading and writing (70%-80% of course time) and a substantial proportion of workplace examples (about 30% of course time).
- Integrated into this, there should also be planned regular discussion both of learners' beliefs and plans concerning literacy and of reading and writing processes. With such a mix, the results above suggest that learners ought to make gains in their reading abilities and sophistication of strategy knowledge, in their beliefs in their own literacy effectiveness, and in their abilities to plan for a future connected to literacy and education.
- In addition, for longer-running courses (i.e., 200+ hours), changes in learners' everyday literacy practices may also be expected.

Conclusion

Workplace Literacy programs have always been an important part of adult literacy delivery. The ability of Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills agencies to promote, develop, provide, and evaluate Workplace Literacy programming has always been subject to employer demand and to funding.

When employers believe they can hire employees with the skills they require, they tend not to invest in employee training programs – at least not for non-management employees. However, in today's labour market many employers are struggling to find enough employees, never mind employees that have all the skills that employers desire. Add to this reality the increasing number of positions in the labour market that are being filled by newcomers and immigrants due to Ontario's increasing reliance on immigration to fill vacant job postings. And last, but certainly not least, bear in mind that most employers, while being very adept at training for the business they are in, are less comfortable and prepared to teach adult literacy, language development and soft skills development. For all these reasons, it seems likely that the need for Workplace Literacy programs will continue to grow.

LBS programs, through Skills for Success and other Workplace Literacy projects, have shown that they have the ability to develop and deliver strong Workplace Literacy programs. It is our hope that this resource will contribute to the strengthening of evaluation practices among LBS agencies and that LBS agencies in Ontario will begin to build their own repository of evaluation strategies, learnings, and good practices so that they can continue to contribute to Ontario's prosperity by strengthening Ontario's labour force.

Appendices

Key Informant Interview #1: Jane Tuer

Overview of Your Skills for Success Workplace Literacy Activity

As a regional network, Project READ was involved in coordinating Organizational Need Assessments and the work of local delivery agencies.

In Year 1, 2022/23, Project READ invited all delivery agencies in their region to participate in the Workplace Literacy Initiative. In Year 1, three LBS programs participated: two community-based programs and one school board program.

The three LBS programs were:

- The Literacy Group
- Action Read
- St. Louis Adult Learning Centre

Project READ trained these three programs on how to do an ONA. The programs then went out and conducted the ONAs with employers. Some training delivery occurred, but timelines were often too short.

In Year 2, 2023/24, these same three LBS programs continued with this Workplace Literacy Activity, and the Wellington County Learning Centre also joined the group.

These programs delivered some training to employers, but timelines were often too short.

What evaluation activities did you undertake?

- Paper-based surveys. Employers are very busy. They aren't interested in more paperwork. Project READ found that employers would answer a very short survey (2 to 3 questions). They would not respond well to a long survey with many questions.
- Long, formal evaluations will not work with employers. The evaluation questions need to be clear and have a purpose that resonates with employers.
- Verbal evaluation questions. Employers would also answer evaluation questions verbally.
- Ongoing conversations. As well, ongoing conversations with employers during the ONAs and training delivered resulted evaluation insights.
- External help. Project READ hired students from Conestoga Colleges to help with the evaluation. This built capacity and took pressure away from the delivery agencies having to do this work.
- Jane recommended that outside evaluators take on the evaluation role in the future. This would relieve pressure on the delivery agencies.

What good practices for evaluating Workplace Literacy activities emerged?

- Information on the Workplace Literacy initiative was shared at the Literacy Service Plan meetings regularly. This created buy-in from local LBS agencies and allowed for the sharing of information and resources.
- LSP meetings also resulted in the sharing of:
    - Practical strategies to approach employers
    - Connections that various agencies had with employers
    - marketing materials
- LSP members also reviewed the content of the training being offered to employers.
- Important knowledge transfer occurred on the topic of workplace literacy because of the sharing that occurred at the LSP table.
- Project READ has a great deal of knowledge of workforce development. Working with LBS programs to train them to do the ONAs resulted in knowledge transfer in their region.
- Finding a way to describe what LBS can offer employers in highly practical terms is critical. Employers are too busy for vague offerings. How can we help employers solve a problem they face – that is the critical angle to approach marketing to employers! Solutions-based marketing is the only way that works.
- On Basecamp (a private online group for literacy network staff from across Ontario) some sharing of marketing materials and approaches to employers were shared. These materials were very helpful to the entire Workplace Literacy initiative. However, many network staff unfortunately did not share their materials and resources on Basecamp.

NOTE: A recommendation going forward would be to have funding available for one person to actively collect sample marketing materials, templates, and tools from across the province on how to engage employers. This would allow for better knowledge transfer and less duplication of effort.

- It is important not to approach employers about what they may be doing wrong from a skilled training perspective. Instead, approach employers about how LBS can help them improve.

What challenges did you encounter while evaluating Workplace Literacy activities?

- The timelines set by the funders were too short for the work required. Contacting employers, developing relationships, developing agreements on training delivery, developing the training, and delivering the training is very time-consuming. It is highly unrealistic to do this in one fiscal year.
- LBS programs are very busy. When they take on enhanced project work, it would often be more effective if they contracted out this work, rather than doing it in-house. Sometimes the capacity at the LBS agency level is just not available in-house to do the work needed in addition to their regular work.
- Employers do not work to our timelines. They are very busy and external training initiatives aren't a top priority for most of them. Employers fit us in with their work schedules. This makes timelines longer and difficult to plan for.

- There was a lack of existing marketing materials on how to approach employers. Having sample materials would have made marketing more effective and would have shortened the time required for each region to do this function. Marketing must be done right, or it will not be effective. LBS capacity to market to employers needs to be built, rather than assumed to be present.
- Many LBS program deliverers were not aware of the amount of, and content of, the Skills for Success literacy curriculum being developed by the provincial LBS support organizations. That is unfortunate because some of this curriculum could have been used with employers. More marketing of the new SFS literacy curriculum needs to occur.
- Virtual cross-training for delivery agencies across the province on this initiative would have been helpful and eased pressure on the regional networks. Also, provincial sharing would have then occurred, rather than just regional.

"Employers won't want to answer a ton of evaluation questions. They are just too busy – and your evaluation isn't their top priority. But employers will answer a few relevant evaluation questions, so make EVERY question count.

Key Informant Interview #2: Shahina Suleman

Overview of Your Skills for Success Workplace Literacy Activity

PTP Adult Learning and Employment Programs delivers both LBS and Employment Services. It is a community-based organization located in Toronto. PTP has long experience in working with employers and developing and delivering workforce-related curricula to its students.

PTP was asked by its regional network, MTML, to conduct Organizational Needs Assessments. In 2022/23, PTP conducted one ONA. In Year 2, it conducted two ONAs.

PTP also delivered workplace literacy programming in Year 2. The target was 18 participants, which was met. The training was called Skills for Success – since that name resonated with employers. Using the title "Skills for Success" also allowed PTP to link with the federal SFS messaging and their website tools. The Skills for Success are broad and allow for more training delivery opportunities for employers, as they move beyond reading and writing. They also allow for a great deal of flexibility.

The timelines for delivering training (one fiscal year) were too short.

What evaluation activities did you undertake?

Ongoing evaluation

- Based on their organizational culture of evaluation and risk-taking, PTP engaged in ongoing evaluation – and fully expected that various changes would need to be made at various points in the Workplace Literacy initiative.

Real-time evaluation

- They did some evaluation in real-time – listening to and watching participant responses to the training and gaining input from employers. Organic, real-time, and flexible were hallmarks of their evaluation process.

Adapt the "Round Two" training

- PTP modified their round two training and ONA assessments in the second year based on evaluation results from Year 1.

Gathering impactful materials to showcase success

- PTP gathered client pictures, testimonials, and highlights of the results of previous training to share with employers and other stakeholders.

Learning from others

- PTP learned from others who were involved in Workplace Literacy activities by participating in the CoP meetings and reviewing materials on the CoP website.

Listening and responding

- PTP listened to and responded to informal feedback from employers, trainees, and other stakeholders. They then adapted their products accordingly.

An organizational culture of change and evaluation

- PTP has an evaluation culture. "Let's try this and see what works and what doesn't" is their attitude, so informal evaluation and a willingness to try new things are embedded.

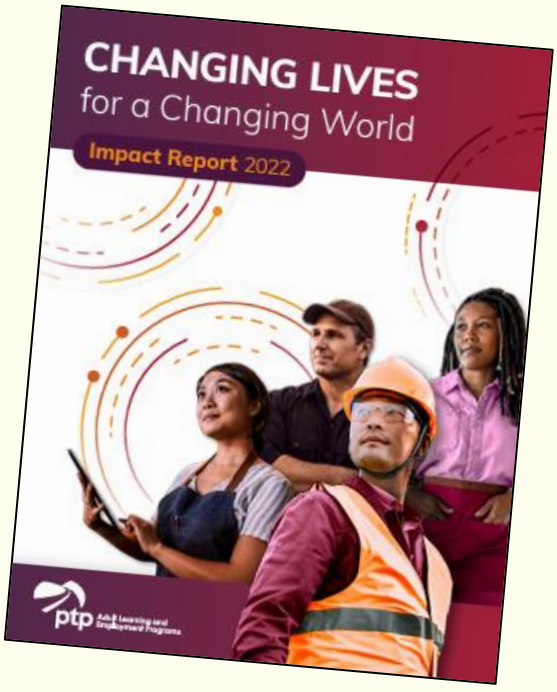
What good practices for evaluating Workplace Literacy activities emerged?

Do background research prior to start-up activities (pre-evaluation!)

PTP prepared in advance for Workplace Literacy activities. For example, they researched good practices (i.e., resources available on the Community of Practice website). PTP also reviewed its existing Workforce Literacy materials and training experiences. They looked at the Skills for Success website to find helpful resources that would impact employers. One great example is the SFS videos. They are short and resonate with employers. This was a form of "pre-evaluation" – to try to get things right before starting. With the short timelines involved, this was important to the success of this initiative.

Clarity in communication with employers is important

PTP believes that most employers are interested in workplace training. It is all about how it is pitched to them by LBS providers. (And, that additional resources are available to provide this training). PTP knew that they needed to create impactful, relevant outreach to employers that met their needs and spoke their language.



PTP knows that clarity in outreach is important so that clear goals and expectations are set for all. This impacts evaluation because if employers, participants, and training providers aren't clear on what the workplace literacy activity is, then the evaluations will not succeed.

For clarity in outreach, PTP developed a PowerPoint presentation, a flyer, and a standardized email to reach employers with clear goals, timelines, and anticipated outcomes.

Build a culture of evaluation and openness to change

Shahina noted that part of evaluation is the type of culture that exists in an organization. PTP has a culture of experimenting with new ideas and taking chances. They recognize (and expect) that not every idea is going to succeed – and that this is okay. Instead of fearing risk and change, they typically proceed with innovative ideas – and evaluate and make changes and improvements along the way – rather than conducting a big evaluation at the end.

Shahina feels that PTP (and its clients) get a better product with ongoing evaluation, rather than focusing on conducting one end-point evaluation.

Sharing of tools, sample materials and resources is important

Shahina notes that she attended Community of Practice meetings and found them to be helpful. She also reviewed the CoP website and used some of the resources available there. Regular MTML meetings and communication were also a good source of information.

However, more sharing from around the province of Workplace Literacy materials, tools and resources would have been helpful.

Everyone is busy though, so sharing must be intentional, or it is less likely to happen.

Impact Report

PTP did not do an impact report on the workplace literacy initiative, due to lack of resources and time for this function – and because it was not in scope for their initiative. However, PTP standardly does an impact report on all of its activities in general (see: https://ptp.ca/impactreport2022/ptp-impact-report-2022.pdf).

An impact report could be a great way to capture evaluation results in the future – though additional resources would be needed for this function.

What challenges did you encounter while evaluating Workplace Literacy activities?

- The timelines set by the funders were too short for the work required. Contacting employers, developing relationships, developing agreements on training delivery, developing the training, and delivering the training is very time-consuming. It is highly unrealistic to do this in one fiscal year. (*Same point as Jane made*)
- They have developed good partnerships and are delivering valued training to employers. But since this is just a short-term initiative, it is a concern that this good practice and relationships will now be lost.
- The common evaluation process of evaluating at the end does not work. Firstly, due to the short timelines of this initiative. Secondly, employers are looking for tangible results in the short term. If something isn't working well, it is better to adapt mid-stream and create a better product, than wait until the end.

- Employers are busy – you must adapt to what **they** are willing to do in terms of evaluation, not what your organization or the funder wants or requires.
- There was a limited amount of existing outreach materials to reach employers. PTP created their own. It would have been better to be able to access existing samples and adapt from there. It would have saved everyone time and would have also resulted in more impactful materials and better knowledge transfer.
- One of the most challenging aspects of working with employers is marketing and outreach. PTP used its experience in working with employers and built on this for the Workplace Literacy activities initiative. PTP researched and paid attention to what engaged employers and developed a pitch for Workplace Literacy training based on this knowledge.

"Employers are interested in impact. To engage employers in LBS training, make your pitch relevant to them. Show employers testimonials, pictures, and previous results of workplace training activities."

Key Informant Interview #3: Nelida Forero

Overview of Your Skills for Success Workplace Literacy Activity

Fanshawe College (St. Thomas / Elgin Regional Campus) did five ONAs in total.

They also offered workplace training. The college asked what the needs were and found that employers were requesting workforce training in the soft skills of communication, holding difficult conversations, and, for supervisors, basic leadership skills. Nelida thought employers were more likely to ask for training in areas such as Excel, but it was the soft skills that were requested.

Forty-four participants have taken their training to date. A final class will be offered in March 2024.

What evaluation activities did you undertake?

Fanshawe College engaged in informal evaluation with employers as part of the ONAs. This required ongoing check-ins with employers. It can be hard to get their time and attention, so these check-ins must be brief and to the point.

They also listened and learned at the Community of Practice and regional network meetings held by LLSC. These meetings were helpful.

For the workplace training offered by Fanshawe College, they evaluated by:

- Assessing what employers wanted in terms of workforce literacy training.
- Requiring the students to complete OALCF milestones to track progress in the training they offered. Each student completed three milestones that were most relevant to that course.
- Gathering ongoing feedback from the instructors who delivered the training.
- Assessing how the training could be improved after each training session.

What good practices for evaluating Workplace Literacy activities emerged?

- More direction on the evaluation process and the sharing of evaluation tools at regional network or COP meetings would have been helpful. It would have saved everyone time and effort.
- Marketing to employers takes time and skill. There needs to be a proper budget for marketing to

employers with support from the government funder. Workplace Literacy should be an important strategy for what the government does to support employers.

- A good evaluation strategy is to collect testimonials from satisfied employers. These testimonials can then be used to engage other employers.
- There were some communication glitches with employers during the start-up phase. This was all new to everyone involved and was a new way of operating. A good practice would be to pay particular attention to communication in the start-up phase and ensure that all communication with employers is crystal clear. Short and clear communication with busy employers is key.
- The CoP and regional network meetings were helpful for learning and sharing resources and ideas. Much interesting and helpful sharing occurred.
- Brief check-ins with employers to gain input from them work well for evaluation purposes. Employers are very busy and they appreciate it when you make evaluations short and easy for them to do. Your training isn't their priority.

What challenges did you encounter while evaluating Workplace Literacy activities?

- More direction on the evaluation process and the sharing of evaluation tools at the CoP would have been helpful and saved everyone time and effort.
- These Workplace Literacy training activities were a low priority for employers. It is hard to get their time and attention for evaluation. They are busy. And evaluation is far from the top of their list. In fact, it may not even be on their list!
- The timelines set by the funders were too short for the work required. Contacting employers, developing relationships, developing agreements on training delivery, developing the training, and delivering the training is very time-consuming. It is highly unrealistic to do this in one fiscal year.
- Employer engagement takes time. Long-term funding would have been more effective. If we had more time, we could have created a culture of workplace training. We were just getting started.
- They developed good partnerships and delivered helpful training to employers. But since this is just a short-term initiative, it is a concern that the good practices and relationship building will now be lost.
- If employers think that they are signing up for a short-term initiative, they are less likely to engage. Employers are looking for long-term partners. They are too busy for short-term one-offs.

"This is a small community. The best evaluation is often testimonials from satisfied employers. These testimonials can be provided to other employers and serve as "voice-to-voice" ambassadors for workplace training."

Key Informant Interview #4: Sally McDonald

Overview of Your Skills for Success Workplace Literacy Activity

The Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) conducted one Organizational Needs Assessment for its regional network, Tri County Literacy Network. It was conducted for a small business, a Molly Maid Franchise. Sally recruited this employer to do the ONA due to the owner being a friend.

GECDSB also offered training under the SFS initiative. During the ONA, it was determined that soft skills training was the main need. The process took longer than anticipated, with the ONA process starting in April and training being delivered in September. Given that GECDSB is a school board, formal processes for hiring instructors to deliver the training must be followed. The timelines for recruiting instructors, conducting the ONA, planning for, and delivering training in one fiscal year were too short.

GECDSB delivered the Soft Skills Solutions training developed by the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board (https://www.smwdb.com/soft-skills-solutions). This training is 30 hours in length. Participants receive a certificate upon completion of this training. Seven participants from Molly Maid successfully completed the soft skills training.

A second workplace literacy initiative was provided by GECDSB. They already offer LBS instruction under the Corrections Literacy Initiative at the South West Detention Centre (https://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/cli-qs-as-expansion-general-en.pdf).

GECDSB offered SFS Workplace Literacy training at the South West Detention Centre. Once again, it was determined that soft skills training was the top need. This training started in September 2023 as well. A total of 14 people successfully completed this training. Training and the ability to earn certificates are very important to inmates in correctional facilities, given their low skills and lack of learning opportunities.

What evaluation activities did you undertake?

Required evaluation

- The Soft Skills Solutions training has built-in requirements. For example, participants must be present for 90% of the 30 hours of training.
- There are regular check-in points as participants go through the training.

Milestones

- All participants in the training had to complete milestones to track progress and follow OALCF curriculum requirements.

Informal and ongoing evaluation

- Instructors made adjustments to the training based on input from participants.

Reports from instructors

- The instructors submitted quarterly reports on the training.

Learning from others

- GECDSB learned from others who were involved in Workplace Literacy activities by participating in the CoP meetings.

Listening and responding

- GECDSB listened to and responded to informal feedback from employers, trainees, and other stakeholders. They then adapted their products accordingly.

What good practices for evaluating Workplace Literacy activities emerged?

- Evaluation and assessment are a standard part of what we do in LBS. Therefore, extending evaluation to the workplace training initiative was standard practice for us.
- Employer support and involvement matters in all aspects of Workplace Literacy training, including evaluation.
- For the Molly Maid training, the employer was very supportive of the participants. She brought prizes and treats (pizza and donuts) to encourage and support the participants. The employer believed in lifelong learning and wanted to show her support. This really helped with all aspects of the training including evaluation.
- Use excellent curriculum resources for the training – that will make evaluation (and training delivery!) much easier when you are using good training resources. Soft Skills Solutions is excellent!
- Participants liked participating in training that resulted in getting a certificate that was linked to outcomes. (For example, the soft skills training was 30 hours long and participants had to attend 90% of the time).

- The COP meetings were helpful. Sharing tools, resources, and ideas with our peers is really important. However, more COP meetings and/or regional network meetings – held earlier on – would have been helpful. We were all reinventing the wheel in our own areas in the early stages especially. More planning and sharing – especially at the early stages would have been helpful and more efficient.

What challenges did you encounter while evaluating Workplace Literacy activities?

- The timelines set by the funders were too short for the work required. Contacting employers, developing relationships, developing agreements on training delivery, developing the training, and delivering the training is very time-consuming. It is highly unrealistic to do this in one fiscal year.
- Employers have internal processes, scheduling issues, and other priorities besides our training. Employers are very busy. Extra time is needed to accommodate the needs of employers. Short timelines set by the government are not realistic.
- ONA processes and assessments take time too.
- It is very unfortunate this Workplace Literacy funding had to come to an end after only two years. Getting random funding every few years isn't helpful to building long-term capacity in workforce literacy. Employers don't like to engage with short-term initiatives either.
- They have developed good partnerships and are delivering valued training to employers. But since this is just a short-term initiative, it is a concern that this good practice will now be lost.

"Evaluation and assessment are a standard part of what we do in LBS. Evaluation matters, and it's baked into the LBS program. Therefore, extending evaluation to the workplace training initiative was standard practice for us."

Key Informant Interview #5: Jacky Catterick

Overview of Your Skills for Success Workplace Literacy Activities

The Niagara West Adult Learning Centre undertook both conducting Organizational Needs Assessments and workforce training delivery. They also did Better Jobs Ontario assessments.

Organizational Needs Assessments

NWALC was contracted to do one ONA but did two. Literacy Link Niagara created a tool to help organizations conduct ONAs. NWALC field-tested the tool with several employers.

The Niagara West Adult Learning Centre converted this tool to an online ONA survey to try to reach more employers and promote what their centre could offer in the area of workforce training. NWALC hopes to reach a broader audience in their community with an online tool.

Once this fiscal year is over (it has been an extremely busy year due to the Workplace Literacy Initiatives), NWALC will promote this tool in their community to try to engage employers. Here is the link: https://www.nwalc.ca/skills-training/for-employers-organizational-training-needs-assessment

Workplace Training Delivery

NWALC delivered soft skills workforce training called Skills for Success. The Skills for Success name resonates with employers. They hired someone to write the curriculum. Staff delivered and tested the soft skills curriculum with learners. They did 12 different soft skills units.

It is now being delivered online one evening per week on Teams with a tutor.

They also field-tested six of Community Literacy of Ontario's Skills for Success curricula with learners as part of their initiative.

Better Jobs Ontario Assessments

NWALC conducted 11 Better Jobs Ontario assessments. These assessments are very time-consuming and very involved. They included assessments for reading, writing, and math. Most adult learners did not have the reading, writing, and math skills to succeed in Better Jobs Ontario programming. Most learners did not have their grade 12. It was a time-consuming experience and only one person was able to meet the requirements of BJO.

What evaluation activities did you undertake?

Tracking and measuring learner progress

- For their Skills for Success training, NWALC set up an intake-to-exit chart for these SFS learners. They registered the learners, tracked the work completed, and noted whether the learners completed a Milestone. The same was true with Better Jobs Ontario where NWALC tracked how many learners successfully completed the process.

Regional network support

- Literacy Link Niagara evaluated the results of the ONAs and Better Job Ontario activities for all programs in the Niagara region, including NWALC.

Informal evaluation

- NWALC did informal evaluation activities on an ongoing basis for training, ONAs, and BJO. They noted participant responses to the training and BJO assessments, and employer responses to the ONAs and adjusted processes and activities accordingly.

Adapted their Skills for Success training

- Based on participant responses, NWALC adapted their training as needed.

In-house tracking of organizational capacity

- NWALC informally tracked staff capacity. Given the short timelines and expectations, these Workplace Literacy activities put a great deal of stress on staff capacity.

Learning from others

- NWALC learned from others who were involved in Workplace Literacy activities by participating in the COP meetings and linking with their regional network peers.

What good practices for evaluating Workplace Literacy activities emerged?

- For the best results, engage in both qualitative and quantitative evaluation.
- Track:
    - Learner successes and challenges
    - Working with employers – success and challenges
    - Partnerships
    - Staff capacity
- Don’t be afraid to try Innovative approaches – for example, NWALC created an online Organizational Assessment Tool for employers.

- Use the Skills for Success resources created by the provincial support organizations. There are many valuable teaching resources available. NWALC piloted six of CLO's resources with LBS students. More awareness of these excellent resources from the provincial organizations needs to be created.
- It is important to build relationships with employers first. Then it is easier to get them to engage in Workplace Literacy training. They are too busy otherwise. You need to get on their radar with good marketing tools, products, and wording that resonates with employers.
- Having a Community of Practice is very helpful for learning and sharing about evaluation and other topics related to workforce literacy. Peer learning is so important. It would have been good to start the CoP earlier, so more ideas and approaches could have been developed at an earlier stage.
- Share tools and resources with others working in workplace literacy. This is new to all of us, and more mutual sharing would be helpful.

What challenges did you encounter while evaluating Workplace Literacy activities?

- The timelines set by the funders were too short for the work required. Contacting employers, developing relationships, developing agreements on training delivery, developing the training, and delivering the training is very time-consuming. It is highly unrealistic to do this in one – or even two – fiscal years.
- Despite all the relationship-building over many years, in some cases, it was still difficult to get referrals from Employment Services for our Workplace Literacy activities.
- Even if the workplace training is free, some employers are reluctant to pay for release time for training.
- These initiatives brought many benefits but stretched staff capacity to the limit.
- It was demoralizing to staff to do so much good work with Workplace Literacy, learners, and employers only to have the timeframes last just two years. Through the Workplace Literacy initiative, they built pathways to employers and workforce training that now won't continue.
- Employers also don't want to engage with LBS programs on such short timeframes. They are more wary of short-term initiatives than something of a longer-term nature.
- Ongoing informal evaluation works best – continually adapting your processes and products to meet the needs of employers and learners. But it's important to track quantitative data too.
- Employers are busy – informal evaluation works well for this reason as well.
- Most learners aren't eager to do evaluations. You need to build learner evaluation into your processes and expectations at the very beginning of the training. Otherwise, you won't get any results back.

"Informal evaluation worked well for us. For example, seeing what worked to engage employers and partners, and then tailoring our approach from there. Learning from our peers at the Community of Practice about what was working (and not working) was helpful too."

Key Informant Interview #6:
Alyssa Fast and Patrick Carew

Overview of Your Skills for Success Workplace Literacy Activity

ONAs

In the last fiscal year, the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) was involved in supporting Literacy Link Niagara to complete one ONA. In this fiscal year, they completed two ONAs.

In fiscal year one, the DSBN worked with an employer they had previously connected with. In the current fiscal year, the DSBN is working with two new employers whom they recruited specifically for the workforce literacy initiative.

Training Provided

Deaf Stream SFS Training

The DSBN is the only LBS provider in their region to offer services to Deaf individuals. The DSBN as part of their workforce literacy initiative wanted to serve an under-represented group. They selected Deaf sensitivity and awareness.

As part of their work in this project, the DSBN looked at employers who had hired their Deaf learners. They offered training in Deaf awareness, Deaf sensitivity, and how to be more inclusive in the workplace so that Deaf employees feel more included.

Anglophone SFS Training

The demand for DSBN services from learners in their community is high, which means that they could approach workforce literacy training with a great deal of creativity. For the Workplace Literacy initiative, they weren't tied to seeking to increase learner numbers – they are already exceeding them.

Under their Anglophone program, the DSBN delivered three workplace programs as part of the Skills for Success project.

- Custodial training
- Housekeeping training
- General pre-employment skills training

The DSBN successfully more than doubled its target numbers through the SFS training! They provided training to 200 new participants as part of their workplace literacy initiative.

Other SFS Training

The DSBN had two other SFS projects that were not part of workplace literacy. This included pre-PSW training delivered to under-represented groups.

Better Jobs Ontario

The DSBN had great success with Better Jobs Ontario assessments. In year 1, the DSBN did 30 BJO assessments. In year 2, they did 40. They found the Better Jobs Ontario assessments fairly straightforward to do.

What evaluation activities did you undertake?

Standard LBS evaluation

- The DSBN used standard LBS evaluation requirements required by the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework. They conducted Milestones with participants.

Individualized learner plans

- The DSBN created individualized learner plans. They then monitored these plans to ensure progress.

Linking with employers

- The DSBN linked with employers to assess their needs and skills gaps. They checked in with employers on an ongoing basis to ensure success. They held regular meetings with employers around specific needs and goals. Employers don't have time for meetings that are not focused on their needs.

Linking with employment services

- The DSBN linked closely with Employment Services and relied on their expertise when needed. This allowed for incorporating additional support and changes related to employment issues as needed.

Community of practice

- They connected with the Community of Practice to gain a provincial perspective on Workplace Literacy issues. This helped them know what NOT to do as well as resulted in learning about some promising practices at the provincial level.

Real-time evaluation

- They paid attention to participant responses to the training, gained input from employers, and adapted the training as needed.

Happy employers and clients

- The DSBN had enormous success with the Workplace Literacy training. Serving 200 participants via the SFS workplace training and creating new dynamic employer partnerships is a powerful kind of evaluation.

Culture of service excellence

- Evaluation is made easier by the DSBN's intentional focus on creating a culture of LBS service excellence for clients, employers, and the community. They seek to build this culture of excellence in everything they do.

What good practices for evaluating Workplace Literacy activities emerged?

- The DSBN provides meaningful client engagement and centres everything around client needs. They meet clients where they are at, and everything is individual to each person. They create individualized learner plans. This makes it more effective for monitoring progress. They work with learners to set clear goals for what they need and help them to reach those goals.
- The DSBN uses Milestones and all OALCF practices to monitor and demonstrate progress. It is a good system for tracking progress and instructors are experienced in using this format.
- The DSBN maintains open lines of communication and holds regular meetings with employers. They find that offering real solutions to real problems for employers is key – and very welcomed.
- The DSBN creates close links with Employment Services. In their case, Employment Services is co-located with the school board. They find this very beneficial. It is easier to connect with employers and meet their needs. Employment Services can help to support and adapt the SFS training given based on the needs and skills gaps of the clients.
- The DSBN cleaned up their data and used more data than they were required to collect, to learn more about what was working more effectively and what any challenges were. They believe in strong, ethical data and base their decision-making on that.
- They found that linking and sharing with their peers can give helpful promising practices. Through the CoP, it was helpful to learn about what is happening provincially.
- Employers are keen on Workplace Literacy if LBS programming is presented in a way that's relevant to them. LBS and Employment Services have a great deal to offer employers. LBS needs to approach employers with more confidence – LBS can provide employers with valuable training to support clients and employers.
- Through this project, the DSBN has demonstrated that there is a significant need for Workplace Literacy. The DSBN has made effective and strategic use of the Skills for Success funds, and they have experienced an outstanding demand from employers for our LBS services.

What challenges did you encounter while evaluating Workplace Literacy activities?

- The DSBN had sound existing policies and practices in place and did not mention any challenges with evaluation.
- Their main concern is around continuation. The DSBN has developed good partnerships and are delivering valued training to employers. But since this is just a short-term initiative, it is a concern that this good practice and relationships will now be lost.

"Through this project, we've clearly demonstrated that there is a significant need for Workplace Literacy. The DSBN has made effective and strategic use of these Skills for Success funds, and we have experienced an outstanding demand from employers for our LBS services."

"Our LBS program has focused on providing excellent and consistent service delivery to employers, clients, and our community. Our messaging to both employers and individuals is that we can provide you with real training to support real needs. The response to our services and our marketing has been spectacular."

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