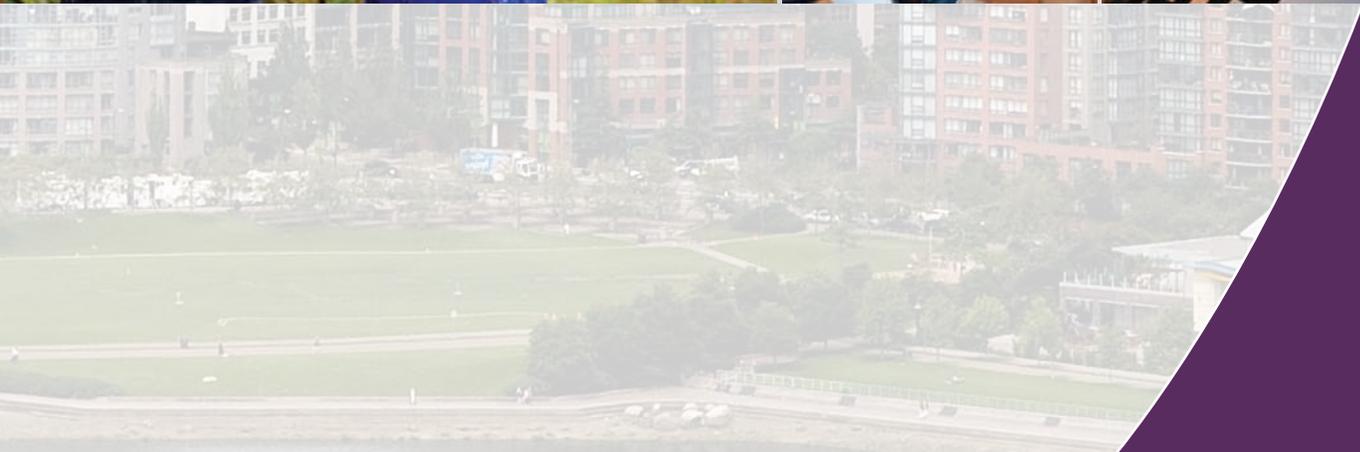


A British Columbia Workforce **Literacy and Essential Skills Plan**





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In March of 2013, Decoda Literacy Solutions, in partnership with the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, brought together senior public, private and non-profit leaders to learn about the impact of low adult literacy rates and contribute to solutions for addressing the current and looming labour and skill shortages in British Columbia.

This initial forum put us on the path to developing this *Workforce Literacy & Essential Skills Plan*, which is designed to provide current and future generations of adults with literacy and essential skills to thrive in the workforce.

Following many meetings with industry, community, employment, Aboriginal and immigrant representatives, an advisory committee was formed to assist in laying out a plan, which is reflected in this document.

It is wonderful to have such a richly diverse group of people ready and willing to address the challenge of workforce literacy and essential skills. Everyone involved contributed to a thoughtful process to find solutions for this complex social and economic issue.

As the CEO of Decoda Literacy Solutions, I felt honoured to be a part of this project and I would like to thank all those who are responsible for the development of the plan and any future success that may occur as a result.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Le Clair".

Brenda Le Clair
CEO, Decoda Literacy Solutions

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Context and Rationale for a Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan	3
Filling Jobs in British Columbia	4
The Challenge	5
The Return on Investment	5
Development of a BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan	6
Business Sounding Board	6
Helping Adults Get Their Diplomas	6
Engagement and Consultation Process	6
Guiding Principles	7
Families Find Success in the Comox Valley	7
BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan	8
1.0 Strategy – Increase literacy and essential skills (LES) program capacity	9
2.0 Strategy – Increase literacy and essential skills (LES) program quality	11
3.0 Strategy – Reduce the need for adult workforce literacy and essential skills (LES) programming	13
4.0 Strategy – Increase business capacity to support literacy and essential skills (LES) development	14
5.0 Strategy – Enhance engagement and understanding between literacy and essential skills (LES) providers and with employers	16
6.0 Strategy – Clearly describe the workforce literacy and essential skills (LES) system	18
7.0 Strategy – Develop a policy framework for Workforce LES	18
8.0 Strategy – Provide strong coordination and leadership	19
Immediate Action Checklist	20
About Decoda	22



A British Columbia Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent attention on the development of resource-based industries in British Columbia offers an opportunity to develop a more skilled local, regional and provincial workforce. As government and industry are both interested in ensuring local labour force participation and more people trained for trades and technology jobs, attention to the development of literacy and essential skills is imperative, particularly for more vulnerable populations.

The tremendous benefit to the economic and social well-being of the regional population will not be realized without significant effort. Furthermore, time is of the essence and there are too many potential barriers to wait until the construction of projects are underway before developing local workers (BC Natural Gas Workforce Strategy and Action Plan, July 2013).

Of particular importance is the fact that for some of the potential local workforce it will be necessary to have at least short term literacy and essential skill training before these individuals can participate in the more skilled, technical training that is required for many of the expected job openings in the near future.

Research over time and around the world supports the understanding that key competencies for participating in the knowledge economy are reading, writing, math, oral communication, problem solving, digital skill, and working both independently and with others.

These literacy and essential skills are required for the workforce in any business or industry. In order for British Columbia to build its resource industries and the communities that support those, it is critical that all people in the labour force have the literacy and essential skills required to participate.

Currently, literacy and essential skills training is offered by various formal and non-formal providers using delivery models that include workshops, one-to-one tutoring, classroom instruction, mentoring and embedding literacy learning in community or business-focused initiatives.

At the community level, literacy task groups made up of representatives from many different community services coordinate this work within individual communities. However, regionally and provincially there is no overall coordination and collaboration of services.

A BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan supports more collaborative efforts and the use of various innovative models of delivery in more places. It also supports the goals of provincial, regional and industry sector skills and training plans.

In today's knowledge-driven economy, even entry-level or lower-skilled employment requires reasonable levels of literacy and essential skills. Many industries have invested heavily in technology in order to attain higher levels of productivity. Yet, the promise of productivity increases from technological change assumes the ability of the labour force, as much as industry, to incorporate those changes into everyday work practices (Essential Skills Ontario).



CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR A WORKFORCE LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS PLAN

Over 150,000 British Columbians aged 25-54 have not graduated from high school (BC Stats 2011). In addition, approximately 600,000 working-age British Columbians – over one quarter of those currently employed – do not have the minimum literacy and essential skills required to successfully participate in a knowledge economy (*Skills for Growth: British Columbia's Labour Market Strategy to 2020*).

The BC Government has predicted that there will be over 1.1 million new job openings by 2020; and yet there are only about 600,000 young people in the BC education system (*Skills for Growth: British Columbia's Labour Market Strategy to 2020*). Combined with other demographic trends and economic growth, there will soon be more jobs than qualified workers. This is happening already in some sectors and occupations. In addition to recruiting workers from outside BC, we must make better use of existing labour force participants – in particular those unemployed and wanting to work.

Whether it is enabling unemployed people and/or the employed with low levels of education to take advantage of economic opportunities in Fort Nelson, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Tumbler Ridge or Vancouver; or whether it is helping a First Nation's population become employed in economic development on its land – literacy and essential skills are often the first step required to seize, maintain or enhance employment.

As a result of the *BC Jobs Plan*, the BC Government launched the *Skills and Training Plan* and more recently the *BC Skills for Jobs Blueprint*. Also, three regional skills training plans have been developed – for the Northwest, the Northeast and the Kootenays. The major focus of these plans is on trades and technical training. There is reference,

however, in the regional plans to significant proportions of people with minimal formal education. Notably, there are higher than provincial averages of people aged 24-54 without high school completion in these regions, particularly in the north. This is a challenge as the majority of the high-demand occupations identified in the plans will require at least high school completion

Focus group and interview participants raised concerns about a surprisingly large/potentially growing group of people with literacy and/or life skills challenges that prevent them from connecting to or remaining in the labour market often referred to as "multi-barriered." Many felt that people with these challenges were largely hidden; either out of the labour market, recently unemployed after a long history of employment and unable to re-train, or about to become unemployed and unemployable. To assist these individuals, training providers need to gain better understanding of the scope and nature of the problem (Kootenay Regional Skills Training Plan, 2013-2020).

The *Northwest Regional Skills Training Plan* has a goal about helping lower-skilled workers to upgrade to gain access to jobs that major projects will create. The provincial *Skills for Growth Strategy* identifies an objective about expanding essential skills programs to accelerate the participation of British Columbians in the knowledge economy.

"Helping to improve workforce literacy and essential skills helps build conditions for economic growth."

*The Honourable Don McRae, then Minister of Education
Addressing the Skills Gap Forum, March 25, 2013*



Filling Jobs in British Columbia

The BC Construction Association developed the Skilled Trades Employment Program (STEP), which provides support for people to get and keep work in the construction trades, including referral to short term upgrading and training programs.

The pilot program focused specifically on employing First Nations people: two hundred people were placed in construction jobs! The Association then did a program for new Canadians and landed residents called ISTEP and then came a program specifically for women.

STEP is addressing skill shortages in the construction industry by finding and developing workers for construction employers. It seeks to support people who are underrepresented in the industry to find work within it and to grow more skilled in it. Eligible participants are often in low-skilled positions and lack certification, high school diplomas or essential skills.

STEP has evolved from only being able to place non-EI eligible people in work situations to providing service for all British Columbians and it has been very successful.

Over the last seven years, STEP has placed over 6000 people into jobs – not just labour jobs, but opportunities that lead to apprenticeship and skilled trades positions.

The BC Government has promised to promote employment for local people and the *BC Natural Gas Workforce Strategy and Action Plan* identifies goals about increasing local talent pools and addressing barriers to local labour force participation.

Since literacy and essential skills are an important foundation for employment and further training, the development of a long-term sustainable *British Columbia Workforce Literacy & Essential Skills Plan* will contribute to the achievement of the skills and training objectives of the current government.

Further there are a large number of literacy and essential skills programs and service providers, but there is only a limited amount of provincial or regional coordination and cohesion. Meanwhile in the face of significant financial challenges, governments are finding it increasingly difficult to provide adequate literacy and essential skills funding. Thus we have to ensure such investments are used most efficiently and effectively.

“People are the common denominator of progress. So...no improvement is possible with unimproved people, and advance is certain when people are liberated and educated.”

John Kenneth Galbraith, The Affluent Society (1958)



The Challenge

The world is changing at an unprecedented rate. In order to keep up in today's challenging economy, businesses need skilled workers who can adapt and innovate. Literacy is the essential foundation that allows workers to build their skills and build businesses and industries.

Current demographic challenges include crisis-level literacy rates for many children, youth, immigrants and seniors, all of which are expected to worsen in the future. For example, 36 per cent of BC's job openings over the next decade will need to be filled by immigrants. While immigrants may come to Canada with considerable skills, studies have shown us that 60 per cent of immigrants with a first language other than English have literacy levels below a high-school graduate.

The cluster of key literacy competencies – also known as essential skills – are under increasing pressure, particularly in the workplace where 35 per cent of working age people (15-64) do not have the literacy skills needed to achieve their goals.

Literacy is a key business strategy. Whether filling out a job application, learning a new process or studying for life-saving certifications, literacy skills are essential for workers. Without sufficient skills potential and existing employees may experience challenges with day-to-day workplace tasks. Highly skilled employees are happier, safer, and more productive members of the workforce and their communities. Ensuring that employees have the literacy and essential skills they need to succeed in the workplace, and in life, is a smart investment for every business.

The effects of low workplace literacy. Workers with low literacy and essential skills can negatively affect workplace productivity and safety. Workers who lack needed skills may be unable to learn new tasks or switch between jobs. They may struggle with new technology and equipment. Tragically, if health and safety information are not understood by workers, lives can even be lost.

THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

According to the Conference Board of Canada, the benefits of increasing workers' literacy and essential skills include:

- An improved ability to successfully complete and benefit from workplace training
- Better labour relations
- Better team performance
- An increased quality of work
- Increased product or service output
- Better health and safety record
- Increased employee retention
- Increased productivity

The C.D. Howe Institute concluded:

A country's literacy scores rising by one per cent relative to the international average is associated with an eventual 2.5 per cent relative rise in labour productivity and a 1.5 per cent rise in GDP per head. These effects are three times as great as for investing in physical capital. Moreover, the results indicate that raising literacy and numeracy for people at the bottom of the skills distribution is more important to economic growth than producing more highly skilled graduates.

This statement from a respected Canadian "think tank" clearly demonstrates both the importance of literacy and that it is far more than a social issue. Indeed it is arguably more about the future economic prosperity of communities, businesses and residents all across BC.



Development of a BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan

As a catalyst to the development of the *Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan*, Decoda hosted a Forum in March 2013. A wide array of stakeholders attended and discussed the challenges and opportunities around workplace literacy. A resounding conclusion flowing from the Forum was that the time for a comprehensive plan was now.

BUSINESS SOUNDING BOARD

Given the essential importance of developing a strategy that the business community could enthusiastically endorse, Decoda invited CEO's or other senior staff of BC's top business associations – the BC Chamber of Commerce, the Business Council of BC, and the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Association of BC – to act as a “Sounding Board” to advise on ways to engage the employer community and industry.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

Decoda undertook a comprehensive engagement and consultation process seeking input from government, the post-secondary and K-12 sector, labour unions, the health and justice system, researchers, literacy and essential skill practitioners and, of course, the business community.

In addition, literacy plans from jurisdictions around the world, research reports about literacy, and workforce plans from regions and industry sectors were reviewed.

Helping Adults Get Their Diplomas

Street School operates out of the annex of St George's Anglican Church on the North Shore in Kamloops. This program specifically addresses the needs of marginalized adults who are unlikely to succeed in a traditional academic setting. The age range of students is 18-65 with a balanced mix of females and males. Approximately 30 per cent of students self-identify as having Aboriginal ancestry. The main goal of the program is to provide instruction and academic assistance to the required levels for an Adult Dogwood Diploma or pre-requisites for post-secondary entry.

The Literacy Outreach Worker (LOW) is the key to the success of the program. The LOW promotes Street School, connects participants with social service agencies, develops meaningful relationships with them; and makes every effort to assist them in meeting their psychosocial and learning needs. Participants work at their own pace and decide with their instructor about the best ways to structure their learning.

Street School is linked to the school program at the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre (KRCC). Inmates can start school at KRCC and continue at Street School upon their release using the same curriculum. With the LOW visiting 'soon to be released' adults at KRCC and the head instructor teaching at both locations, the stress of transition between the two learning environments is reduced.

Street School provided literacy services for over 400 adults in 2013-14. Of these about 40 participants achieved an Adult Dogwood Diploma and a significant number improved their literacy skills within the provincial adult literacy benchmark system.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The development of the *BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan* has been guided by the following principles. Implementation of this plan will also follow these principles:

- **Collaboration**
All stakeholder groups including business, industry, communities, schools, post-secondary institutions, and literacy and essential skills providers share the responsibility and accountability for ensuring that people who can participate in the labour force have the literacy and essential skills required to be successful there. No single organization can address the issue alone.
- **Learner-centred**
People who require support to gain literacy and essential skills must be at the centre of any plan or program to support the development of their skills. Initiatives designed to create a more literate workforce must first of all address the specific needs of the learning population.
- **Workforce-oriented**
In order to be successful in Canadian society, adults must work to support themselves and their families. The most common goal of working-age people who enter literacy and essential skills programs is to be able to gain or keep employment. Literacy and essential skills initiatives can support this goal by focusing on the specific requirements of businesses and industries.
- **Evidence-based solutions and practices**
The need to develop a workforce with the skills required by growing businesses and industries is pressing and resources are limited. Solutions and practices need to be able to measure and track results.
- **Sustainability**
Ensuring a skilled workforce over time will take time. Successful efforts will need to be sustained and duplicated.

Families Find Success in the Comox Valley

The Comox Valley Family Literacy Outreach Program (FLO) is a six-week program that addresses three areas: food/health literacy, support for early years learning, and adult literacy and essential skills. Three of the objectives of this program are to:

- Connect adults and families to community social and literacy supports, services and resources
- Connect adults to formal and non-formal literacy practitioners and their respective learning organizations
- Increase learner confidence to pursue further learning and education by creating a positive learning experience

The FLO program supports hard-to-reach families living in identified socially and economically vulnerable or isolated neighbourhoods as identified by the HELP-Early Development Instrument. One of the program's goals is to reduce barriers to participate. Thus, the program is offered in the neighbourhood where participants live, there is no cost to attend, and there is childcare so that parents can participate in learning circles. The provision of a meal is an additional incentive to attend. One of the keys to success is the multiple program partners who contribute human and material resources to the program.

One parent of this program is a Sri Lankan immigrant mother with two children. Although well-educated she struggles with her English. During the program she worked on her writing and grammar. She then connected with the employment readiness facilitator who connected her to an entrepreneurial program. This mother has now started her own catering business and sells Sri Lankan cuisine at the local farmers market. She continues in the program with a computer literacy tutor to learn Microsoft publisher in order to better market her catering business.



British Columbia Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan

VISION Adults in British Columbia have the literacy and essential skills required to participate in the workforce				MISSION Build capacity within communities and businesses to increase local talent by increasing literacy and essential skills			
Increase access to employment through local literacy and essential skills initiatives			Create stronger alignment of literacy and essential skills providers and employers		Establish a clear, sustained network with leadership that provides coordination to effectively implement a comprehensive <i>Workforce Literacy & Essential Skills Plan</i>		
Increase literacy & essential skills program capacity	Enhance literacy & essential skills program quality	Reduce the need for adult workforce literacy and essential skills programming	Increase business capacity to support literacy and essential skills development	Enhance engagement and understanding among stakeholders	Describe the workforce literacy and essential skills system	Develop a policy framework for workforce literacy and essential skills	Provide coordination and leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Build on existing best practices and leverage resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Foster stakeholder collaboration ✓ Communicate broadly about literacy and essential skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure accountability 							



British Columbia Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan

1.0 Strategy – Increase literacy and essential skills (LES) program capacity.

1.1 Action

Increase and sustain funding for LES programs.

Rationale

As literacy is an entry point into further opportunity for learning and work, greater access to literacy learning ensures that more people have access to work and overall success in Canadian society. Currently, neither LES programming nor employers have the financial capacity to create a pathway for everyone who needs assistance.

Desired Outcomes

Literacy and essential skills programs/initiatives have enough funding to support the development of skilled local talent to meet labour force demands.

Supporting Actions

- Illustrate the economic and social Return on Investment for workforce LES in ways that can be easily and clearly communicated.
- Link LES more explicitly to government priorities such as the BC Jobs Plan and Skills Training Plan.
- Secure industry/other partnerships.
- Develop a consistent and substantial fundraising model.
- Diversify funding sources.
- Align program expansion to fit identified needs for programs and types of curriculums.

Implementation Considerations

Short and long term solutions for ensuring strong literacy and essential skills are required. Both of these need to be considered.



1.0 Strategy – Increase literacy and essential skills (LES) program capacity.

1.2 Action

Increase participation in LES programs.

Rationale

There are many people without the levels of LES required to work successfully. Access to employment, employment advancement and further education includes clear information about LES programs, flexible and various delivery models and reduction of barriers to participation.

Funding streams for literacy and essential skills programs have different eligibility criteria which can make delivery difficult, particularly in rural communities where populations are smaller, and may screen out people who require assistance.

Adults encounter a variety of barriers to participation in LES training. Childcare, transportation, lack of confidence, work schedules, poverty and fear can all contribute to lack of participation or retention in learning programs.

Desired Outcomes

An increased number of people who require assistance participate in short and longer term LES programs.

Supporting Actions

- Raise awareness of program availability.
- Adopt an open access policy for programs – allow broad program entry criteria to reduce silos.
- Provide enhanced program supports such as transportation and childcare.
- Ensure training is tailored to learner needs – consider single parents, work schedules, older workers, readiness for and engagement in learning.
- Identify inequities affecting vulnerable sub-populations that would benefit from concerted action and that may require more time to gain LES.
- Decrease stigma about LES and about trades occupations and build societal value for these.

Implementation Considerations

There are many factors that contribute to poor literacy and essential skills. Sometimes the life circumstances of vulnerable adults contribute to extending the time that it takes to gain literacy skills and move on to other training.



2.0 Strategy – Increase literacy and essential skills (LES) program quality.

2.1 Action Increase the expertise of LES practitioners.
Rationale Though there are many experienced and excellent LES practitioners; more are required to fill the need. They will require training related to supporting learners, teaching/learning strategies, and program effectiveness. Additionally, current providers would be assisted by further resources and training in all of the literacy and essential skills and methods of delivery. Research shows that the expertise of the teacher is a critical factor in any learner's success.
Desired Outcomes All LES providers have the skills required to ensure that learners gain competencies.
Supporting Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a practitioner credential.• Provide mentoring programs.• Provide professional development.• Provide appropriate wages for LES practitioners.
Implementation Considerations The profile of program providers and types of programs varies from region to region depending upon the history of delivery and the labour market requirements.



2.0 Strategy – Increase literacy and essential skills (LES) program quality.

2.2 Action

Improve LES program delivery.

Rationale

LES initiatives add value to employment and industry training. Interventions need to include but be broader than “just in time” training. LES delivery that is in the community, in workplaces, and integrated into vocational or trades training all need to be considered. Employers and employment service agencies need to be involved and learn more about how to recognize when LES training would be beneficial and/or could be integrated into the training strategies of businesses.

There is an important opportunity for LES programs to use real life examples as part of curriculums that are specific to community and regional employment gaps.

Employers need to be able to increase the skills of current employees. Models of program delivery that embed LES in workplace contexts can support people who are already working and assist employers to understand the LES aspects of business problems. Delivery models such as embedding literacy thinking into business practices and as a way to address business problems need to be more widely understood.

Desired Outcomes

People who participate in LES initiatives gain skills quickly and effectively.

Various models of LES delivery related to business requirements are developed.

Supporting Actions

- Identify the elements of quality program delivery.
- Develop a program quality management approach that focuses on delivery of competencies and has mechanisms for evaluating program quality.
- Develop a learner credential, particularly for nonformal/informal program delivery.
- Sustain pilot projects that are successful and promote best practices.

Implementation Considerations

Focus on competencies in applied contexts – relevant, concrete learning.

Focus on learning to learn.

Maintain attention on all LES skills, including math, writing, oral communication and thinking skills.



3.0 Strategy – Reduce the need for adult workforce literacy and essential skills (LES) programming.

3.1 Action

Increase participation and retention in the formal education systems - K -12 and post-secondary.

Rationale

BC does not have enough people to fill the projected job openings in the coming years. Therefore, as many young people as possible need to be able to join the workforce. High school graduation rates average about 80% for the province. The 20% of people who are not graduating in the expected time need to be supported to do so. High school graduation rates in the north, where considerable resource industry job growth is expected, are lower than the rest of the province.

There are fewer jobs for people with only a high school education. Current projections suggest that 77% of job openings over the next decade will require a college diploma, trade certificate, university degree, or higher. Many of these new jobs will require advanced skills, including increased science and technology skills.

Desired Outcomes

More people complete high school with appropriate competencies.

More people enter post-secondary education and complete certifications.

Supporting Actions

- Embed LES into K-12 and post-secondary curriculums.
- Provide community programs and encourage family LES support for school aged children.
- Incorporate relevant, real-life learning opportunities into formal systems of education.
- Develop better integration between communities and schools. Build relationships between K-12, colleges, community programs, employment agencies, and employers.

Implementation Considerations

Changes to the current education system will require different delivery methods, changes in thinking about what teachers do, a new way of training teachers.



4.0 Strategy – Increase business capacity to support literacy and essential skills (LES) development.

4.1 Action

Use labour market and industry data, local knowledge and demographic profiles to identify priority areas.

Rationale

Understanding learning requirements at provincial, regional and community levels for small business as well as large industry would assist in the development of appropriate LES programming.

The majority of businesses in BC are small to medium sized operations. They do not usually have the capacity to provide much training and usually have to draw employees from the population already living in the community.

Desired Outcomes

LES training opportunities are provided for the community, industry and business circumstances of any given community or region.

Supporting Actions

- Gather labour market and industry data and analyze to highlight gaps.
- Identify key mismatches in supply and demand.
- Consider and assess immediate and long-term requirements.
- Support local community planning to identify local LES requirements.

Implementation Considerations

Labour market data changes over time. Periodic assessment of employer requirements will be helpful.



4.0 Strategy – Increase business capacity to support literacy and essential skills (LES) development.

4.2 Action

Ensure training is relevant to provincial, regional and community needs.

Rationale

LES training requirements vary from place to place. Individual communities are disrupted by significant swings in both job growth and increased unemployment. For example, communities across the province can be greatly affected by major job growth in the north, as people leave other communities for periods of time to work there.

The creation of healthy, strong communities supports business development and vice versa. The requirements of small business needs to be considered as much as the requirements of major industry.

More access to and equity in LES training is required across the province. For example, there are regions where individual communities are too small to provide LES support in classroom models. In addition, communities have to be able to support the raising of families so that workers can stay; conversely, there is no alliance to the community if work is not there. Lifestyle in the context of the community is important or there is no sustained participation in work. The growth of individual community member skills will support the growth of the community. Start with community – this should be the first priority.

Desired Outcomes

Individual communities and regions have the capacity to identify and implement solutions to support LES for all community members.

Supporting Actions

- Support communities to develop information about the local workforce demand and the needs of employers.
- Increase community and regional capacity to determine solutions.
- Involve career development and employment agencies.
- Use existing industry and social sector processes for identifying demand and supply issues.
- Build relationships with industries that have identified a social responsibility to hire locally.
- Engage with small and medium sized businesses to determine overall LES support requirements.
- Embed LES in on-the-job training and work-related training programs.
- Develop projects or provide tools about how to recognize the literacy aspects of business problems.

Implementation Considerations

There is currently a network of community literacy task groups that identify literacy and essential skills requirements and solutions across the province. The capacity of this network can be built upon to ensure strong LES support in communities and regions.



5.0 Strategy – Enhance engagement and understanding between literacy and essential skills (LES) providers and with employers.

<p>5.1 Action Clearly define LES</p>
<p>Rationale Success requires a more transparent and widely known approach. The definition or understanding of literacy and essential skills varies between providers and delivery models. This creates confusion for the general public, funders, employers, providers and communities.</p>
<p>Desired Outcomes Literacy and Essential Skills is widely understood – by providers, employers and the general public</p>
<p>Supporting Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly define literacy and essential skills • Create case studies about successful interventions.
<p>5.2 Action Assist LES providers and employers to engage with and support each other.</p>
<p>Rationale The language and cultures of various providers and employers are quite different. Understanding about what everyone does needs to be fostered – both on the supply and demand sides. For various reasons, literacy programs and essential skills programs are often delivered as distinctly different in terms of programming and needs. This creates competition among various types of service providers and confusion among employers and the general public.</p>
<p>Supporting Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an employer ambassador program. • Engage with employment services agencies. • Assist community literacy task groups to find ways to engage employers. • Create tools to help service providers’ work with employers. • Provide regular information exchanges through newsletters, conferences, and forums. • Provide training and information about how to recognize employees who need workforce LES. • Expand and develop current local collaborations between community LES providers and industry/business. • Look at successful pilot projects that have taken place and replicate these.
<p>Implementation Considerations It will take some time to understand the various cultures and models of delivery. Consider industry associations as part of the supply and demand connection.</p>



6.0 Strategy – Clearly describe the workforce literacy and essential skills (LES) system.

<p>6.1 Action</p> <p>Develop a system map of learner pathways that includes formal, non-formal and informal delivery.</p>
<p>Rationale</p> <p>In order to address LES issues in a collaborative and effective way, it will be important to build on a network of practice that involves a variety of interest groups. Solutions are not singular; there is strength in working more closely together.</p> <p>There are many LES actors, programs, services and initiatives with little provincial or regional coordination and cohesion. It is a complex landscape. There is not a clear pathway for learners, employers and service providers participating in or hoping to participate in LES. Information about LES issues and solutions exists, but it is not accessed fully and is not coordinated; there are many separate entities operating without linkages.</p> <p>A supportive system needs to include both informal and formal systems of learning. The current informal community literacy network adds value to current formal training programs and to the employment sector by working with people who are disinclined to participate in formal education initially and who require supports for learning that are unique to their situations.</p>
<p>Desired Outcomes</p> <p>People in communities know about and understand the available pathways to learning and gaining LES.</p>
<p>Supporting Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a map of the present situation – learner pathways, programs and delivery models. • Make transition points clear. • Outline the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholder groups. • Provide profile data about clients; for example how many people have no high school; description of the people with LES needs.
<p>Implementation Considerations</p> <p>Consider the expectations of people in the labour force – What are they looking for? What do they want to do? How are literacy and essential skills part of that?</p>



6.0 Strategy – Clearly describe the workforce literacy and essential skills (LES) system.

<p>6.2 Action</p> <p>Enhance understanding and awareness of the LES system.</p>
<p>Rationale</p> <p>Employers, LES practitioners, employment centres and others will need to work together to ensure access to training and to jobs. They will need to understand each other’s work and how it is complementary. Communities and employers will need to work together locally and regionally.</p> <p>Context makes a difference. Communities in a region could learn from each other and share resources.</p>
<p>Desired Outcomes</p> <p>The general public, employers, employment centres, and LES providers have a better understanding about LES and how it supports employment.</p>
<p>Supporting Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a data warehouse of relevant research, surveys, assessments and other statistical information. • Develop a communication plan.

7.0 Strategy – Develop a policy framework for Workforce LES.

<p>Rationale</p> <p>A policy framework would help to break down silos and promote a more coordinated and complementary approach. It would support more flexible, appropriate interventions and allow for connections with people on the ground.</p> <p>Policies can tie everything together, identify commonalities and show how complexity can be reduced.</p>
<p>Desired Outcomes</p> <p>There are clear policies both in government and within the LES system to guide delivery and to make access to gaining LES easier.</p>
<p>Supporting Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current policies that support or allow people to attend LES programs.
<p>Implementation Considerations</p> <p>Consider who the policies are for and who will provide them. Policies could be for government and they could also be for the LES system.</p> <p>People who have not been successful in formal education systems require support during preparation stages of returning to learning/training programs.</p>



8.0 Strategy – Provide strong coordination and leadership.

8.1 Action

Ensure accountability to stakeholders and to adult learners.

Rationale

Leadership can maintain the conversation, as well as accountability and iterative planning. The *BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan* requires facilitation and coordination in order for it to remain cohesive.

Desired Outcomes

There is coordination across silos of LES delivery with better returns on investment.

Supporting Actions

- Develop clear roles and responsibilities related to coordination and leadership.
- Determine measurable outcomes.
- Monitor and report on progress against the Plan.
- Establish regular communication methods.
- Recognize achievements.
- Integrate data collection and reporting.
- Regularly convene key stakeholders.

8.2 Action

Develop a strategy for iterative planning.

Rationale

The labour market is constantly evolving and the world is constantly changing. As solutions are developed, they need to be shared and built upon.

Desired Outcomes

Consistent and innovative thinking creates workable ongoing solutions.

Supporting Actions

- Set dates for Plan review and updates.
- Develop branding support for the Plan.
- Increase the circle of thinkers to support thought leadership so that LES programming continues to evolve.
- Use the community network to bring forward ideas.



Immediate Action Checklist...

	PROVINCE WIDE ACTIONS	COMMUNITY ACTIONS
Increase program and business capacity to support literacy and essential skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrate the economic and social Return on Investment for workforce literacy and essential skills (LES) in ways that can be easily and clearly communicated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gather LES and labour market data and analyze it to highlight gaps. – Provide profile data about people who require LES assistance; for example how many people have no high school; description of who people are with LES needs. – Use existing industry and social sector processes for identifying demand and supply issues. • Create a map of learner pathways and service delivery. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Map current LES programs and delivery models. – Clarify transition points. – Outline the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholder groups. • Increase capacity to support LES solutions in communities and regions. • Build relationships with industries that have identified a social responsibility to hire locally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a community level analysis of the match between employer labour force needs and labour supply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Involve career development and employment agencies. – Engage with small and medium sized businesses to determine overall LES support requirements. • Increase local capacity to support LES solutions.
Enhance program quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the elements of quality LES program delivery. • Provide mentoring and professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of LES program availability. • Identify vulnerable sub-populations. • Identify ways to specifically support those sub-populations.



Immediate Action Checklist *continued*

	PROVINCE WIDE ACTIONS	COMMUNITY ACTIONS
Reduce the need for adult workforce literacy and essential skills programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop and improve integration among informal, non-formal programs and formal systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide community-based support programs to students enrolled in the formal education sector to reduce dropouts. Encourage community and family LES support for school aged children.
Communicate broadly about literacy and essential skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a communication plan that includes provisions for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular information exchanges through newsletters, conferences, and forums. A toolkit of information for all partners, including Return on Investment. A clear definition of literacy and essential skills. Case studies about successful interventions. Brand support for the Plan. Awareness raising of Workforce LES issues and opportunities among key audiences. Create a data warehouse of relevant research, surveys, assessments and other statistical information. 	
Ensure Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine measurable outcomes. 	



About Decoda

The development of the *BC Workforce Literacy and Essential Skills Plan* was led by Decoda, BC's leading organization for addressing adult literacy priorities. Decoda supports literacy programs and practitioners as well as a coordinated network of literacy and essential skills stakeholders in communities across the province. Decoda's mandate is all about literacy and essential skills leadership, coordination, advocacy, supporting communities and practitioners, and taking action – literacy and essential skills solutions.

Across BC, Decoda supports 102 community literacy task groups representing more than 400 communities. These task groups are made up of over 2,000 representatives from a variety of agencies, post-secondary institutions, school districts, the health and justice system and the employment sector. With the assistance of a paid coordinator, they make yearly plans about how to address literacy shortages in their communities – from the early years to the senior years. Increasingly, the emphasis in communities is on adult literacy. Decoda provides training and resources for community based adult literacy programs in BC, which teach literacy and essential skills. In 2012/13, more than 18,000 adults attended those programs.

Decoda has worked with legal services, corrections, health providers, Aboriginal services and immigrant services to develop literacy supports that are embedded directly into work environments. In addition, Decoda staff have considerable experience developing and facilitating workplace-based skills programs.

An increasing focus of Decoda's partnership efforts is on BC businesses that have a direct interest in the many aspects of literacy. Whether it is the productivity and safety of their employees, or the ability of their customers to access services and technologies, companies across BC have the potential to realize the benefits of investing in literacy.



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