Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills

Final Project Report: Pilot Phase

DECEMBER 2023

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INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has conducted over 450 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations. SRDC has offices located in Ottawa and Vancouver, and satellite offices in Calgary, Hamilton, Montreal, Regina, St. John's, Toronto, and Winnipeg.

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INTRODUCTION

The Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills (DWLES) project was managed by Decoda Literacy Solutions (Decoda) and supported by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC). The overall goal of the project was to enhance knowledge and raise awareness of promising literacy and essential skills[1] (LES) interventions for displaced workers in Canada to improve their employability. More specifically, the project aimed to better understand how literacy organizations can support hard-to-reach remote and rural communities by integrating LES and employment services for a range of displaced workers, with a particular focus on equity-deserving groups such as women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and others.

The first phase of the project began in June 2019 and finished in June 2022. It included two components: background data collection and analysis and beta-test projects. Detailed implementation and outcomes findings of this phase of the project can be found in the *Second Annual Report* and the *Final Project Report*, respectively.

The project received an extension to December 2023 to implement a second phase focused on pilot projects, the results of which are covered in this report. The purpose of this phase of the research was to expand select organizations' beta-test projects into scalable and transferable pilot projects. Upon completion of the beta-test project phase of DWLES and receiving funding for a pilot phase, five literacy organizations were selected to continue for the pilot phase of the project. The organizations were selected based on their successes and lessons learned from the beta-test phase.

The following report details the main findings of the pilot phase of the DWLES project. Section one of the report provides a summary of the beta-test projects to situate the pilot phase within the overall DWLES project. Section two provides an overview of the pilot projects, including a description of project partners, the pilot projects, and the evaluation approach and methods. Section three outlines key findings related to learners across all the pilot projects. Section four includes case studies for each of the five pilot projects. Finally, section five provides a summary of key findings from the DWLES pilot phase.

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[1] The DWLES project was conceived prior to the launch of the new Skills for Success framework. Given this, literacy and essential skills (LES) terminology is used in this report to reflect how the project was initially conceived. However, all of the projects incorporated the new Skills for Success framework in their programming.

SUMMARY OF DWLES PHASE 1: BETA-TEST PROJECTS

The following section provides a brief summary of the first phase of the DWLES project, particularly the beta-test projects, in order to situate the research findings of the pilot projects.

BACKGROUND

The overall goal of the beta-test phase of the project was to uncover and disseminate evidence-based LES support, training models, and promising practices that can inform the development of programs and models to improve the employability of displaced workers across Canada. The beta-test projects can be viewed as trial or experimental interventions or projects, which may be refined or scaled up pending the level of success and lessons learned through the evaluation. Thus, the beta-test initiatives were intended to be small in terms of the numbers of target learners, with the potential to be scaled up to a full pilot study if deemed successful.

A total of eleven literacy organizations were selected by Decoda through a competitive process to receive funding to conduct a beta test of an innovative LES project for displaced workers in their communities. These sites were located across Canada as follows (see Figure 1):

BC (7 sites)

- Fort Nelson: Fort Nelson Community Literacy Society

- Fraser Lake: Autumn Services Society

- Líl̓wat First Nation/Statimc Territory (near Pemberton): Capilano University

- Gold River: Campbell River Literacy Association

- Kootenays: Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy

- Quesnel: Literacy Quesnel Society

- North Vancouver Island: Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society

AB (1 site)

- Lethbridge: Lethbridge Public Library/Read On Adult Literacy and Learning Program (LPL/RO)

SK (1 site)

- Coronach: Palliser Regional Library

ON (2 sites)

- Bay of Quinte Region of Hastings County: Community Learning Alternatives

- Chatham: Adult Language and Learning

Figure 1   Beta-test site locations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following are the key findings from the research on the best-test projects.

Community-level

- The beta-test projects provided an opportunity for local organizations to further understand and address the lack of access to, and availability of, LES programming in their communities in a variety of ways, whether through filling gaps in local programs and services, providing computer and internet access through the development of a community IT hub, or enhancing access to online programming.

- The project development and implementation process led to new or strengthened partnerships between different organizations in the community, particularly between the literacy organizations and employment and training organizations. While some beta-test organizations were able to partner with individual employers, this was very preliminary and as such represents one key area which could benefit from further attention in future piloting.

Organization and project-level

- The model of the project – small scale beta-test projects – was valuable for the beta-test organizations as it enabled them to try new and innovative programming without significant risk. This allowed them to focus more attention on developing and refining their programs rather than recruiting large numbers of learners. This was especially important given the impact of the pandemic on the organizations' ability to recruit program participants. It should be noted, however, that the opportunity to innovate posed challenges for the beta-test organizations related to their limited resources, time, and capacity.

- There was value for the beta-test organizations in being part of a larger project that had common objectives and outcomes, but where they still had the autonomy to develop, design, and deliver a program that fit with the needs of their communities and the learners who participated in their programs. The project was an opportunity to validate their organizational experiences with evidence from the evaluation and use the project outputs and learnings to enhance their programming.

- The beta-test projects resulted in an increased capacity of beta-test organizations to connect with new learners who had not previously accessed their services or attended their programming, and who they will hopefully continue to support beyond the project.

- The opportunities for beta-test organizations to learn and network with other organizations provincially and nationally helped to support them throughout the project, sharing successes, as well as challenges. The beta-test organizations shared that they seldom have the opportunity to come together to share different ideas and approaches. This project provided an opportunity to do so (as highlighted throughout by the promising practices), and the beta site leads shared that they hoped that this network would continue in the future.

- The project's approach to research and evaluation – having an evaluation partner embedded within the project design – increased the research and evaluation capacity of the beta-test organizations. Using individualized and contextualized evaluation approaches to capture the findings across the project sites allowed for a better understanding of the outcomes of each individual beta-test project, but also an opportunity to pool data across the beta-test projects in order to share out some key metrics. The theories of change allowed SRDC to work with programs where they were at by understanding their strengths, resources, and capacity.

Learner-level

- Participation rates were lower than expected, primarily due to the complex challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the beta-test organizations showed tremendous resilience by adapting and finding solutions to carry on with the beta-test projects through a very challenging time.

- Learners across the beta-test sites were diverse. Equity-deserving groups were well represented in the beta-test projects, such as women, Indigenous peoples, English as second language, and newcomers, particularly due to the fact that several beta-test organizations specifically focused on engaging representatives from these groups in their communities.

- By utilizing a learner-centred approach (addressing learning needs and broader well-being needs, and tailoring supports to meet these), the beta-test leads and facilitators were able to engage learners in the training programs and help them achieve learning outcomes. The evaluation demonstrated that overall, learners were well-supported and highly engaged across all of the programs. Outcomes included:

  o Most learners experienced gains in skills after completing their training;

  o Learners made substantial gains in IT skills, as well as confidence in using their skills;

- o Learners demonstrated increased participation (primarily setting goals, organize, reflection, and engagement components) and communication skills both directly (e.g., such as their ability to give presentations) and indirectly (e.g., their increased engagement in group discussions).

- Social supports, through relationships with other learners and the facilitators, was critical in many instances for building learners' self confidence, fostering their sense of belonging, and contributing to other aspects of their well-being, including hope for the future, self-esteem, sense of connection to their community, and satisfaction with life in general.

- The outcomes evaluation showed preliminary indications that the best test programs contributed to learners enhancing their labour market resiliency and potential for success by increasing their career planning and job search and preparation skills, as well becoming more aware of, and confident in using resources and services in their communities that focus on skills development and employment.

DWLES PHASE 2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT PARTNERS

The roles of the partners remained the same from beta-test to pilot. The following briefly describes the roles/responsibilities of each project partner involved in designing and delivering the pilot phase of the DWLES project.

- **Decoda Literacy Solutions (Decoda)** was the lead for the project and provided project management, support, and oversight. As part of this role, Decoda administered the Request for Proposal (RfP) processes and managed funding agreements with the successful literacy organizations. Decoda also selected the five literacy organizations to continue on from the beta-test phase to the pilot project phase.

- **SRDC** was the research partner on the DWLES project. Building off the work from the beta-test projects, SRDC was responsible for leading the research and evaluation activities related to the pilot projects.

- **Pilot Project Lead Organizations (pilot sites)** were the five program delivery organizations. Based on the learnings from their respective beta-test projects, the pilot sites were responsible for developing and delivering the pilot projects. The lead organizations are identified and described in more detail below.

PILOT PROJECTS

Five literacy organizations of the original 11 that participated in the first phase of DWLES were selected to participate in the pilot phase of the project. The organizations were selected based on their successes and lessons learned from the beta-test phase. The purpose of the pilot project phase was to expand these organizations' beta-test projects into scalable and transferable pilot projects. In collaboration with Decoda and the five pilot sites, SRDC conducted an evaluation of the pilots individually and collectively across the DWLES project.

The pilot sites were located across Canada as follows:

British Columbia (3 sites)

- Squamish Nation: Capilano University (<u>Gathering Together</u>)

- Quesnel: Literacy Quesnel Society (<u>Skills Discovery</u>)

- North Vancouver Island: Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society (MWFLS) (<u>Connect4Work: Introduction to Computers for Job Seekers</u>)

Alberta (1 site)

- Lethbridge: Lethbridge Public Library/Read On Adult Literacy and Learning Program (LPL/RO) and Saamis Employment and Training Association (SETA) (<u>Moving Forward</u>)

Ontario (1 site)

- Bay of Quinte Region of Hastings County: Community Learning Alternatives (CLA) (<u>Next Steps</u>)

Table 1 provides an overview of the pilot projects, including the community, lead organization, program name, program objectives, target population, delivery format, and program structure. More detailed information on the pilot projects and how each of the sites shifted from the beta test to the pilot project can be found in their respective Pilot Profile section of this report.

Table 1   Overview of pilot projects

Location	Lead organization	Program name	Objective(s)	Population	Delivery format	Program structure	Hours of training
Lower mainland, BC	Capilano University	Gathering Together	To support participants in gaining skills to start small businesses or ladder into high-level entrepreneurship or small business programs.	Indigenous	In-person	8 weeks 4 hours 1 day/week	32 hours
Quesnel, BC	Literacy Quesnel Society	Skills Discovery	To help participants discover their transferable skills and build their communication, adaptability, problem solving, and collaboration skills.	General	In-person	3 weeks 4 hours 5 days/week	60 hours
North Vancouver Island, BC	MWFLS	Connect4Work: Introduction to Computers for Job Seekers	To introduce workers to using technology to look for and apply for work, access online services, pursue continuing education, and connect to family and community.	General	In-person	6 weeks 3 hours 2 days/week	36 hours
Lethbridge, AB	LPL/RO & SETA	Moving Forward	To support students enrolled in Saamis Employment's Office Administration Program in increasing their understanding of workplace expectations through a Blackfoot lens.	Indigenous	In-person	12 weeks 1 hour 5 days/week	12 hours
Bay of Quinte Region of Hastings County, ON	CLA	Next Steps	To help displaced workers understand their current skills and how these skills make them good candidates for other employment opportunities.	General	Virtual	4 weeks 2 hours 5 days/week	40 hours

EVALUATION APPROACH

As the pilot projects were mostly a continuation of the beta-test projects, the evaluation of the pilot phase relied on the same overall evaluation approach as used for the beta-test phase.[2]

Evaluation questions

Similar to the beta-test projects, the evaluation of the pilot projects aimed to answer the below key questions related to program implementation, program outcomes, and overarching or cross-cutting themes. However, one additional question was added for the pilot projects to capture the transition from beta test to pilot:

- How and why did the participating organizations transition from beta-test projects to pilot project?

    o What changes were made to the projects?

    o Why were these changes made and how were these changes linked to research findings from the best tests?

The other evaluation questions include:

- Were the beta-test/pilot projects implemented as intended? Key themes investigated in the implementation research included assessing approaches and levels of success related to:

    o Recruitment, participation, and engagement;

    o Program design and delivery;

    o Establishment of community partnerships and capacity development; and

    o Support provided to beta-test/pilot organizations.

- To what extent have the immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes been achieved?

    o Immediate outcomes focused on increases in skill level, knowledge and awareness, and connection to community services/resources;

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[2] See the Appendix A for detailed implementation and outcome questions, and corresponding indicators and data sources.

- o Intermediate outcomes focused on improvements in confidence and actions toward improving employability (e.g., seeking work, enrolling in training); and

- o Long-term outcomes focused on improved labour market resilience and success (e.g., improved employment status).

- Were there any unintended or unexpected outcomes?

- What were the main factors influencing achievement and non-achievement of outcomes?

- What are the lessons learned, promising practices, and recommendations related to the achievement of outcomes for the DWLES project?

Logic model

Similar to the evaluation questions, the logic model from the beta-test phase of the DWLES project was also used for the pilot phase (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 2   Beta-test and pilot phase logic model

ACTIVITIES

DECODA LITERACY SOLUTIONS
- Administer RFP process and funding agreements
- Project management, support and oversight activities

SRDC
Research activities
- Background research
- Literature review
- Evaluation planning
- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Data analysis
- Reporting

LEARNING METRIX
- Data collection (surveys)
- Database management

BETA TEST ORGANIZATIONS
- Program design, planning, and recruitment
- Developing community partnerships
- Conducting needs assessments
- Delivering programs
- Tracking program metrics
- Reporting

OUTPUTS
- Approved funding agreements
- Programs developed tailored to learner needs
- Program/training sessions delivered
- Research and progress reports completed

OUTCOMES

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES
- Improved essential skills
- Improved skills and confidence using digital technology
- Improved skills and confidence in job preparation, career planning, job search and/or self-employment skills
- Improved awareness and connection to community services, resources and networks
- Improved knowledge and skills related to social and emotional health
- Increased knowledge and awareness of displaced workers' needs amongst beta test organizations

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES
- Greater confidence and motivation in taking steps to improve labour market resilience/success
- Improved well-being
- Increased use of community services, resources and networks
- Improved community capacity to deliver LES programming

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
- Greater labour market resilience and success amongst displaced workers

Context:
- Programs are delivered to underserved populations with low LES who face a range of barriers to employment.
- Programs are largely based in areas facing economic challenges (e.g., sector/economic collapse).

Assumptions
- Learners are engaged and their personal lives are stable enough to complete the training.
- Programs are tailored to learners' needs.
- Organizations have the capacity to deliver LES training.
- Community organizations are receptive to partnerships.

Risks:
- COVID-19: imposes barriers to program delivery; changes nature of labour market, impacting labour market success of learners.
- Regional economic situation is too difficult to overcome via LES training.
- Program *Assumptions* do not hold.

Evaluation data collection approach

There were six data collection methods included in the evaluation framework:

1. **Demographic and implementation-related data inputted in the learner database[3]**

   Each pilot organization was required to collect and input basic data into a database that was specifically designed for this project. Examples of this type of data include learner background information, pre- and post-training employment, and post-training education/training status, as well as program information such as program completion.

   Data analysis considerations

   ▪ The learner database was deemed most valid to calculate the total number of learners, as this file captured all learners who had completed the program. A total of 79 learners were included in the learner database.

2. **Assessment of Essential Skills**

   Each beta-test organization was responsible for conducting a qualitative pre- and post-assessment of each learner's Essential Skills to support learner skills identification and improvement. A quantitative assessment of learners' skills improvement was then conducted at post-training based on three categories: little improvement, moderate improvement, and significant improvement. These assessments were recorded in the learner database.

3. **Post-training survey[4]**

   Each learner was asked to complete a survey at the end of their participation in the pilot project. The survey could either be completed online or by paper. The pilot organizations were encouraged to support each learner while they completed the survey to ensure that they could understand each question. The purpose of the survey was to collect individual responses related to program outcomes, as well as areas for program improvement. The survey was designed to be as consistent as possible across all the five pilot projects, while including additional questions that were relevant to each site's particular intended outcomes as identified in their theory of change.

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[3]   See Appendix B for a list of the variables collected in the database.

[4]   See Appendix C for the post-training survey.

<u>Data analysis considerations</u>

- In collaboration with the pilot project leads, a decision was made to not survey learners involved in the pilot project for LPL/RO & SETA. This was due to a concern the survey would gather opinions on the whole Office Administration Program rather than the pilot project's specific part of that program.

- A total of 33 post-training surveys were completed, ranging from five to 14 completions per beta test with an average of approximately eight per site (see Table 2).

Table 2   Number of post-training surveys by pilot project

Pilot site	Number	Percentage
Community Learning Alternatives	5	15%
Capilano University	9	27%
Literacy Quesnel Society	14	42%
Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society	5	15%
Total	**33**	**100%**

- Sub-group analysis was not conducted for the post-training survey due to the small sample size.

- Given the small number of participants in the trainings, and thus low survey completions, in most cases it was not possible to show the exact percentages of the quantitative results. Exact percentages are identified where possible; otherwise, the findings are presented qualitatively with approximate percentages shown.

4. **Post-training learner focus group[5]**

Focus groups were conducted at the end of each cohort of learners. All focus groups were virtual except for the one with SETA's learners, which was conducted in-person. Similar to the survey, the purpose of the focus groups was to collect data on program outcomes and areas for improvement. The focus groups placed greater emphasis on the specific program context and activities of each respective pilot project, while still including general themes that were consistent across all the beta-test projects.

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[5]   See Appendix D for the post-training learner focus group protocol.

<u>Data analysis considerations</u>

- A total of 13 focus groups were conducted across 13 cohorts.

- It should be noted that some virtual focus groups were more successful than others in engaging learners depending on the format for how they were conducted online. The focus groups were much more successful when the learners connected through individual computers, compared to when learners were in a classroom setting sharing one computer as it was more challenging to have an engaging conversation.

5. **Follow-up interviews with learners[6]**

Follow-up interviews were completed with learners approximately three-months after their training. SRDC was responsible for developing the invitation and reminder emails and contacting learners. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to measure post-training activities and changes in employment status, and to capture longer-term outcomes of the pilot projects.

<u>Data analysis considerations</u>

- A total of 6 follow-up interviews were completed, as well as an additional two email updates from learners. Most of these interviews were conducted with learners who participated in Literacy Quesnel's pilot.

- The analysis of the follow-up interviews was incorporated into the individual pilot case studies.

- There are several possible reasons for the low number of interviews. Some learners who responded that they were interested in participating indicated that they were unavailable during the interview period. Additionally, learners selected in the post-training survey whether they wanted to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Thus, only learners who completed the survey and selected "yes" to this question were contacted. Further, learners may also not have recognized SRDC's email and therefore, chose not to respond to the interview invitation.

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[6] See Appendix E for the follow-up interview protocol.

6. **Interviews with pilot project staff**[7]

Interviews with pilot project staff were conducted upon completion of the pilot projects (e.g., facilitators, program managers, executive directors). The purpose of these interviews was to better understand the pilot project, the context of development and implementation, and what was learned through the delivery of the project.

Data analysis considerations

- 5 interviews were completed with a total of 9 staff.

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[7] See Appendix F for the staff interview protocol.

KEY FINDINGS ACROSS PILOT PROJECTS

The following section outlines the key findings across all of the pilot projects. It was only possible to show these results at the aggregate level, rather than for each individual pilot project, as the number of learners at the individual pilot project level is too small.

LEARNER PARTICIPATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

As shown in Table 3 below, the number of cohorts for each pilot project ranged from one cohort to four cohorts, for a total of 13 cohorts overall and an average of approximately six learners per cohort.

Table 3   **Number of cohorts and learners per pilot project**

Pilot project	Cohorts (C)	Total learners
Community Learning Alternatives – Next Steps Pilot Project	C1: 1 C2: 5 C3: 3 C4: 3	12
Lethbridge Public Library/Read On Adult Literacy and Learning Program & Saamis Employment and Training Association – Moving Forward Pilot Project	C1: 13	13
Capilano University – Gathering Together Pilot Project	C1: 9 C2: 10	19
Literacy Quesnel Society – Skills Discovery Pilot Project	C1: 7 C2: 5 C3: 5 C4: 5	22
Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society – Connect4Work Pilot Project	C1: 7 C2: 6	13
Total	**13 cohorts**	**79**

Source: Learner Database; n=79.

Note: Cohort and participant numbers reflect the cohorts that were completed up until October 31st, 2023. One pilot site delivered programming that finished after this date; however, due to data collection timelines, this cohort was unable to be included in the research.

A total of 79 learners signed up for the pilot projects, of which 65 completed the training and nine either completed some of the classes or left the program early (see Table 4). It is not known if five of the learners completed the training.

Table 4   Number of learners who completed training

Completion status	Number	Percentage
Fully completed	65	82%
Completed some of the classes or left the training early	9	11%
Unknown	5	6%
Total	**79**	**100%**

Source: Learner Database; n=79.

A quarter of the learners were men (25%), and three-quarters were women (75%). Most of the courses were taught in BC (3 courses and 70% of learners), with one course in AB (17% of learners) and one in ON (13% of learners).

The majority of learners (58%) were between the ages of 19-39, less than a quarter (22%) were between 40-59, and a fifth (20%) were over 60 (see Table 5). Further, the majority of participants had either less than high school completion (14%) or high school completion (43%), a quarter (26%) had some post-secondary education or training, while 17 per cent had a post-secondary diploma or certificate (see 0)

Table 5   Learner age

Age category (years)	Number	Percentage
19-39	44	58%
40-59	17	22%
60+	15	20%
Total	**76**	**100%**

Source: Learner Database; n=76.

Table 6 **Learner education level**

Education level	Number	Percentage
Less than high school completion	10	14%
High school completion	31	43%
Some post-secondary education or training	19	26%
Post-secondary diploma/certificate	12	17%
Total	**76**	**100%**

Source: Learner Database; n=76.

Of the 77 learners, most (92%) identified as being part of an underrepresented group. A majority of participants identified as being Indigenous (59%), a quarter as a visible minority (24%), and slightly less than a fifth as having a disability (18%). A small number indicated that they are an immigrant (5%) or ESL (5%). Of those who identified as having a disability, 42 per cent reported that their disability is a barrier to work.

Table 7 **Number of learners that self-identified as being part of an underrepresented group***

Group category	Number	Percentage
Indigenous	45	59%
Visible minority	18	24%
Disability	14	18%
Immigrant	4	5%
ESL	4	5%

Source: Learner Database; n=76.

Note: * Participants could belong to more than one group.

Finally, learners reported that they had not worked for an average of 20 months over the last five years, with a low of zero months and a high of 60 months (n=26; **Source**: Post-training Survey).

LEARNER SUPPORT, ENGAGEMENT, AND SATISFACTION

Learners reported that they found out about the pilot projects through an internal referral from the organization that delivered the training (32%); word of mouth (26%); an advertisement such as social media, newspaper, or poster (23%); or an external referral from another organization (19%) (see Table 8).

Table 8   How learners found out about the pilot projects

Referral source	Number	Percentage
Internal referral	10	32%
Word of mouth	8	26%
Advertisement	7	23%
External referral	6	19%
Total	**31**	**100%**

Source: Post-training Survey; n=31.

In terms of extra support provided by the pilot projects, over two-thirds of learners (68%) reported receiving support including access to a computer, laptop, or tablet (42%); transportation (13%); and other support (19%), such as having an extra instructor for help, financial, general encouragement and reassurance, working with the learners' schedules, and snacks and coffee (see 0).

Table 9   Support learners received from the pilot projects

Type of support	Number	Percentage
Access to a computer/Laptop/Tablet	13	42%
Transportation	4	13%
Other	6	19%
None	10	32%
Total	**31**	**100%**

Source: Post-training Survey; n=31.

Further, learners reported that when they asked for help from program staff, they received it (see Figure 3). Most of learners reported asking for support from program staff (>80%) and the same number reported receiving support (>80%). Some learners mentioned additional support that would have been helpful to receive, such as how to get a business number, mock interviews, more guest speakers, and bus tickets. Sixteen per cent of participants received a certificate as part of their training (not shown in chart). Examples of certificates included First aid, WHMIS, and H2S Alive.

Figure 3   **Learners' agreement that they asked for and received support**

I asked for support from program staff when I needed help.   >80%

I received support from program staff when I needed help.   >80%

Source: Post-training Survey; n=32.
Note: Agree and strongly agree combined.

According to the survey results, learners reported that they either agree or strongly agree that they were very interested in the training (>85%) and actively participated in training activities (>85%) (see Figure 4). However, learners were more likely to have reported that they *strongly agree* that they actively participated in program activities (>55%) compared to being very interested in the program (>40%). Findings from the focus groups suggest that this may be because for some learners, the programs were a refresher and they were not learning something new, so it may perhaps be less interesting compared to if it were new topics.

Figure 4 **Learners' agreement that they were interested in the program and actively participated in program activities**
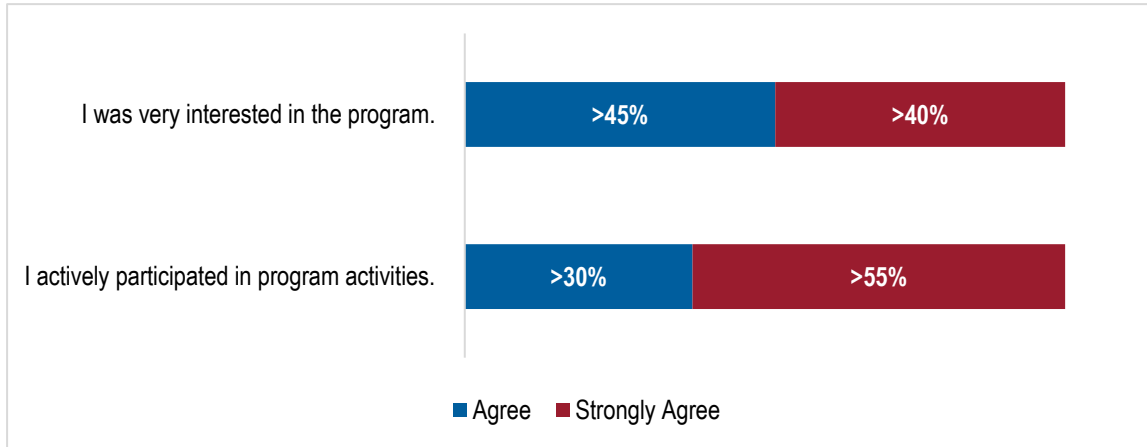
Source: Post-training Survey; n=32.

Learners also reported that the program either very much or completely met their needs (>90%) and that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the program (>70%) (see Figure 5). The main suggestions for improving the training reported by learners included longer training and more training levels (i.e., introduction, intermediate, advanced). They also suggested more speakers and better communication about program logistics and scope. Suggestions specific to each pilot project are described in their respective pilot case studies.

Figure 5 **Extent program met learners' needs (very much or completely) and level of learner satisfaction (somewhat or very satisfied)**
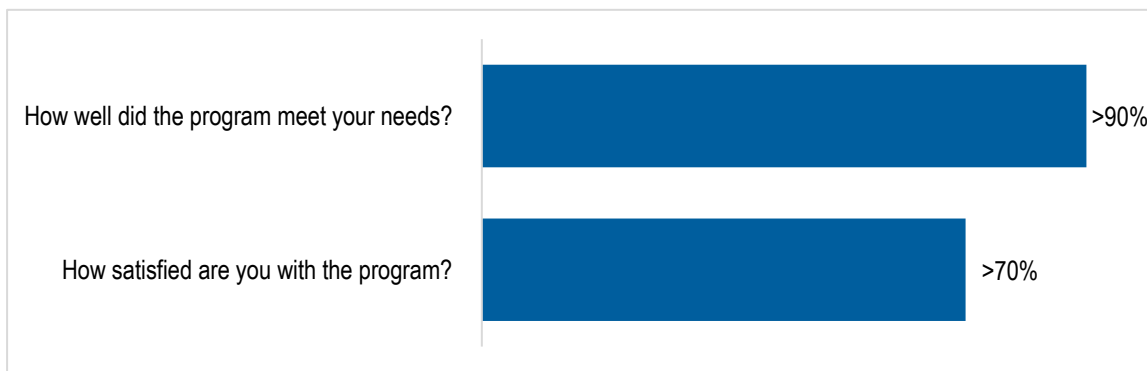
Source: Post-training Survey; n=32.

Note: Very much and completely combined; somewhat satisfied and very satisfied combined).

SKILLS IMPROVEMENT

Improvements in learners Essential Skills were reported by the facilitators at the end of training. As shown in Figure 6, all learners demonstrated some skills improvement, with 38 per cent demonstrating significant improvement, 52 per cent demonstrating moderate improvement, and 10 per cent demonstrating limited improvement. It should be noted that some learners came into the training with substantial amounts of knowledge and skills. For these learners, a lower level of skills improvement would be expected.

Figure 6   Skills improvement reported by instructor at the end of training
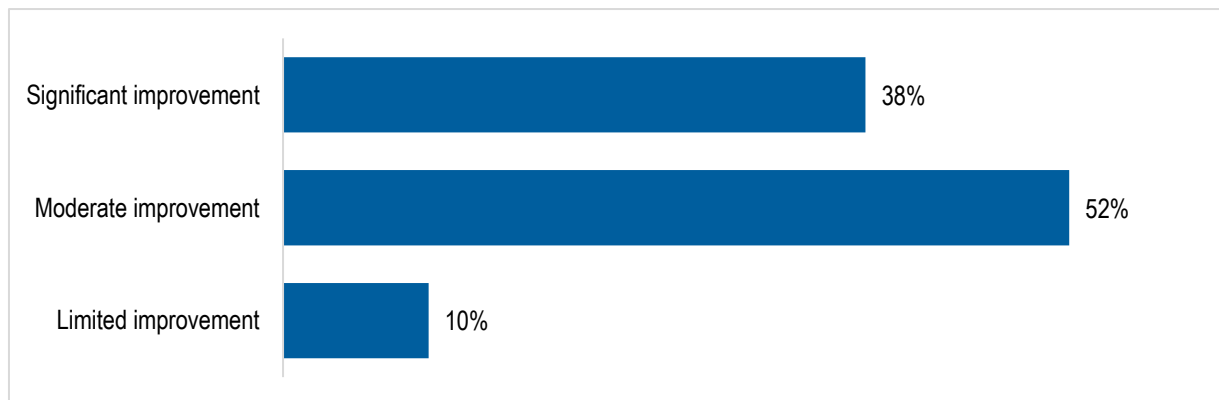
Source: Learner Database; n=52.

Learners also self-reported their improvement in a number of areas related to the trainings. As shown in 0, most learners reported that they either agree or strongly agree that the problem helped them in areas related to career planning, finding information on education and training programs, searching for jobs and preparing to apply for jobs, recognizing and communicating their skills, and using personal networks and adapting to new situations (>75% to >90%).

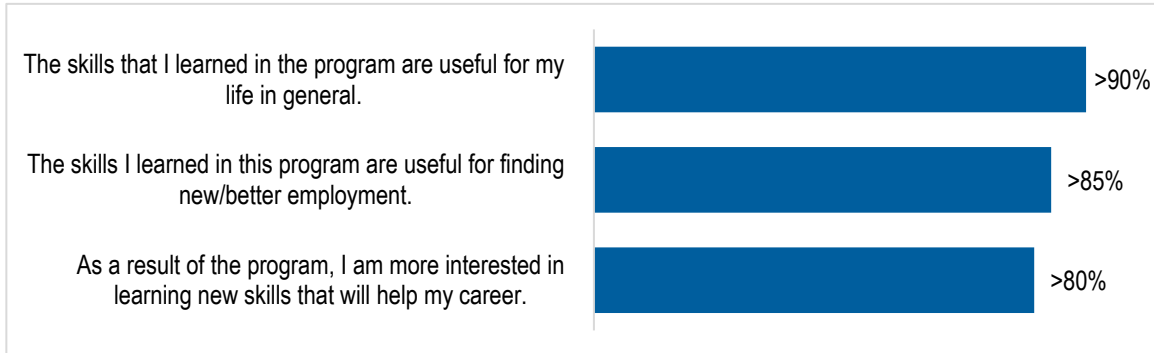**Figure 7   Learners' agreement that the training helped them…**
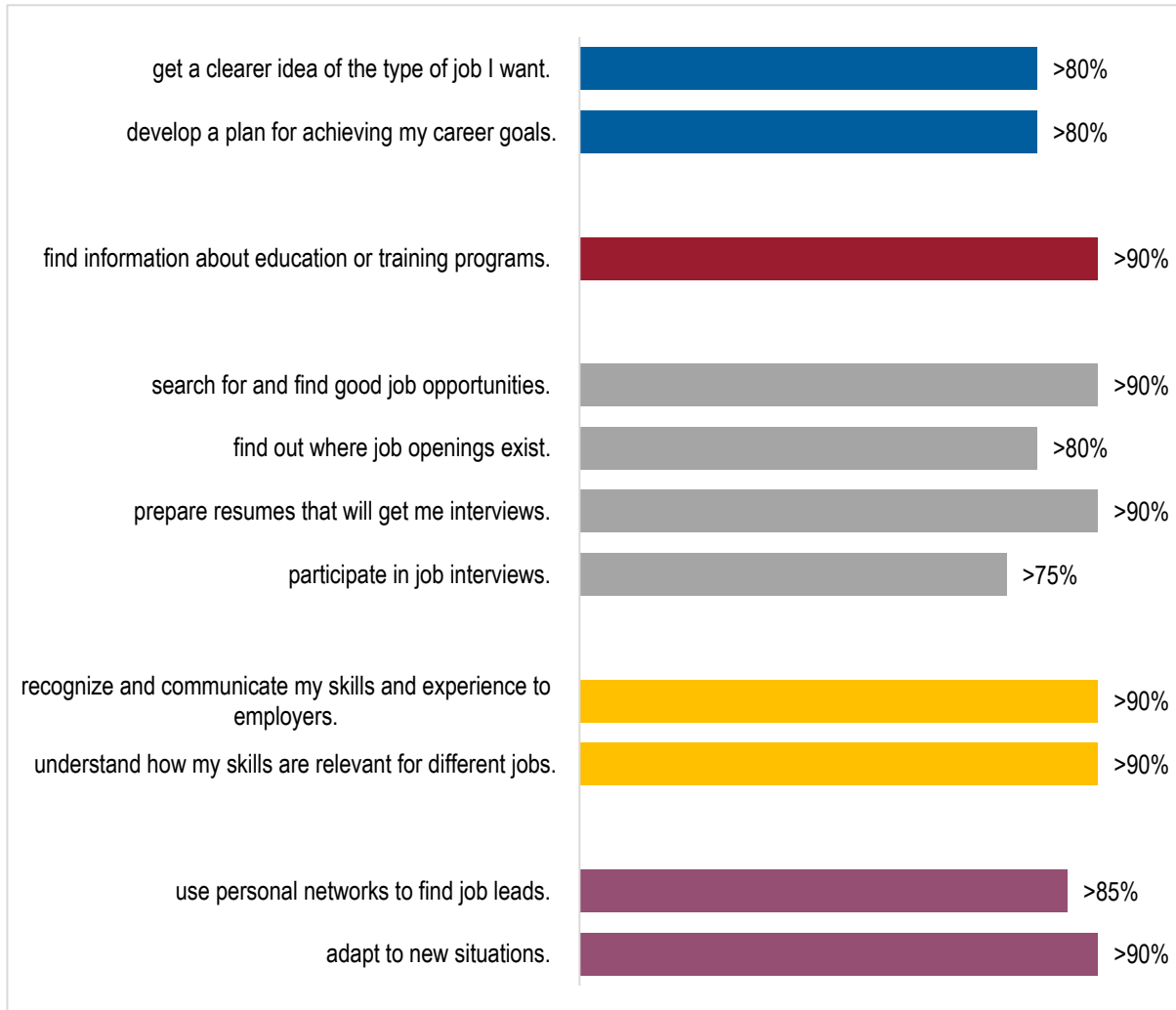
Source: Post-training Survey; n=17-18.

Note: Agree and strongly agree combined.

Most learners also reported that they either agree or strongly agree that the skills that they learned are useful for their life in general (>90%), for finding new/better employment (>85%), and that as a result of the training they are more interested in learning new skills that will help with their career (>80%) (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 **Learners' agreement with usefulness of skills development and interest in learning new skills**

Source: Post-training Survey; n=31-32.

Note: Agree and strongly agree combined.

KNOWLEDGE OF AND CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

An important part of all the pilot projects was developing learners' knowledge of and connection to community resources and services (see Figure 9). Most learners reported that they either agree or strongly agree that the pilot projects were successful in this respect (>85% to >90%).

Figure 9 **Learners' agreement with connections to social and professional resources and networks**

Source: Post-training Survey; n=30-32.

Note: Agree and strongly agree combined.

LEARNER EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION STATUS

Learners were asked about their employment and education status before the training and immediately after their training and were also asked in the survey what their plans are for after the training. As shown in Figure 10, 16 per cent of learners reported being employed before the training compared to 31 per cent after the training. Similarly, 68 per cent reported being unemployed but looking for work/underemployed before the training compared to 52 per cent after the training. Sixteen per cent of participants reported being unemployed but not looking for work or retired before the training compared to 17 per cent after the training.

Figure 10   Learner pre and post training employment status
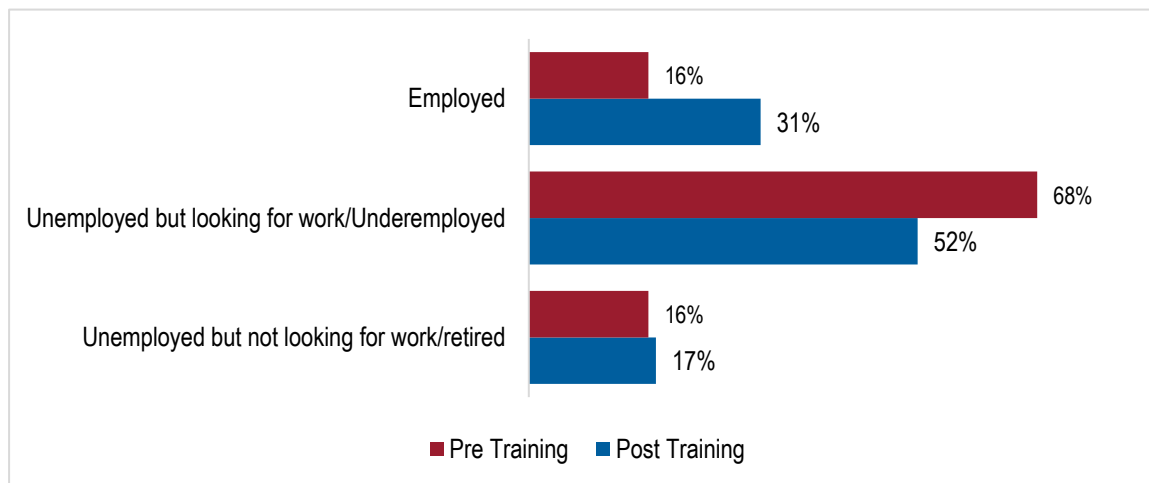
Source: Learner Database; n=52 for post training; n=75 for pre training.

Learners were also asked about their training status immediately after the pilot program (see Figure 11). Almost a quarter of learners reported they were taking further training with the same organization (23%), one-fifth were taking schooling or training with a different organization (20%), and slightly more than one-third were not taking any training or education (36%).

Figure 11   Learner education/training status immediately after program
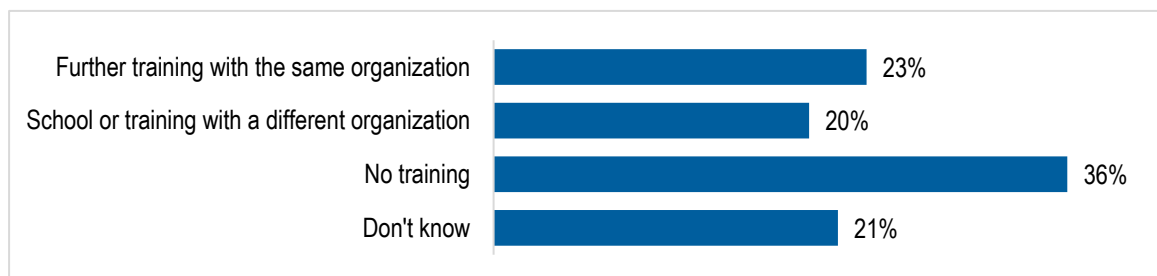
Source: Learner Database; n=56.

In terms of learners' future plans for after the training, over one-third of learners reported that they were looking for work (38%), half of learners reported that they were participating in further training with the same organization (31%) or with a different organization (25%), just over a fifth were staying in their current employment or had found employment (22%), and finally, 16 percent where either retired or did not know their plans for after the training (see Figure 12).

Figure 12   Learners' future employment and training plans
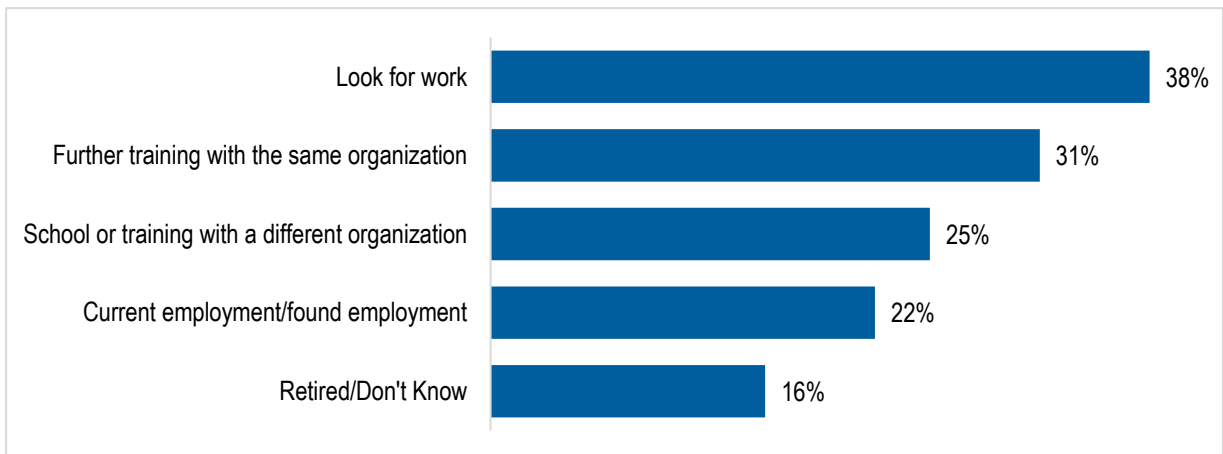
Source: Post-training Survey; n=32.

Finally, most learners reported that they either agree or strongly agree that the training improved their confidence (>90%), hope for the future (>85%), or self-esteem (>80%) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13   Learners' agreement that the training improved their confidence, hope for the future and self-esteem

Source: Post-training Survey; n=32.
Note: Agree and strongly agree combined.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ACROSS PILOT PROJECTS

The following are the key conclusions from the findings across all of the pilot projects.

- Overall, the training was a very positive experience for learners:

    o Learners reported being very interested in the training, that they actively participated, and that they requested and received support from program staff when needed;

    o Learners also reported that they felt that the training met their needs and that they were satisfied with the training.

- Facilitators reported that most learners made either moderate or significant skills improvement.

- Learners reported that they learned a broad range of employment skills and that these skills will be useful for their life in general, for finding new/better employment, and that as a result of the training they are more interested in learning new skills that will help with their career.

- Most learners reported that they increased their knowledge of and connection to community resources and services.

- Two-thirds of learners reported that they will continue to take training/education after participating in the pilot projects.

- Finally, most learners reported that the training improved their confidence, hope for the future, and self-esteem.

PILOT PROJECT CASE STUDIES

The following section provides profiles of each pilot project. Each profile includes an overview of the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.

CAPILANO UNIVERSITY: GATHERING TOGETHER

Capilano University's pilot project involved expanding the reach of Gathering Together to a new community in Lower Mainland, BC. The following profile provides an overview of this pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.

For the original beta-test phase of the DWLES project, Capilano University designed and delivered Gathering Together: Introduction to Small Business Startup with Indigenous Communities, which is a community-based entrepreneurship training program for Indigenous learners. It was developed and implemented in partnership with the Ts'zil Learning Centre, which is owned and operated by the Lílʼwat First Nation. It was delivered in two First Nations communities: Lílʼwat and N'Quatqua First Nations. It supported learners' goals for self employment by working within the communities, building capacity within the Nations, having flexible schedules to balance multi-generational family obligations, and supporting employment that grows and gives back to the community.

The pilot project aimed to engage additional First Nations communities with the goal of expanding the reach of Gathering Together to Indigenous entrepreneurs in other communities. To do this, the pilot project lead worked with the Eslha7an Learning Centre, which is owned and operated by the Squamish Nation and is located on the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw traditional territory in the Lower Mainland region of BC. The Eslha7an Learning Centre provided support with marketing, participant recruitment and registration, and space for the program.

Program implementation

Similar to the beta-test phase, the Gathering Together pilot project was delivered in-person over eight weeks of class instruction for four hours each week. There were two cohorts of learners open to Squamish Nation Members, as well as any First Nation Status, Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit living on the North Shore and Greater Vancouver area.

The Gathering Together curriculum was quite similar from beta-test to pilot project, while placing a greater emphasis on a holistic approach to entrepreneurship. While focusing on entrepreneurial training overall, the curriculum also included strategies to help learners manage their stress and anxiety and career readiness by developing their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. Half of each class was dedicated to instruction on entrepreneurial concepts with the remaining half dedicated to practical learning related to business development. Based on feedback from learners in the beta test, the curriculum was slightly shortened and simplified to make it more relevant and accessible for learners. Interestingly, the pilot project lead, who also facilitated the program, noted that the original curriculum from the beta test would have been a better fit for the learners in the second cohort of the pilot. They described how learners in this cohort were further along with their business development, so may have benefitted from a less simplified curriculum like the one in the beta test. Given the learner-centred nature of the program, the curriculum was adapted and responsive to learners' needs, so that more detailed content was brought back into cohort two.

Key findings

In total, 19 learners participated in Gathering Together, with almost all learners fully completing the program. A couple of learners left the program because they either were too advanced for the program or faced barriers to participation that were not able to be addressed through program supports. Learners ranged in age from 19-60+ years old. Given the program focus, all learners self-identified as Indigenous. While the pilot project lead expected learners to be from neighbourhoods close to the Eslha7an Learning Centre, learners travelled from areas across the Lower Mainland to participate in the program.

Findings from the surveys and focus groups with learners further validated and strengthened the findings from the Gathering Together beta-test. The findings indicated that a holistic approach to programming grounded in respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity created an accessible and welcoming learning environment for Indigenous learners. Additionally, learners continued to highlight how Gathering Together helped them identify their entrepreneurial goals and direction. Interestingly, learners in the pilot project particularly highlighted how Gathering Together helped them become more motivated and confident in moving forward with their entrepreneurship journey. They also described how their participation in the program increased their connections with other Indigenous peoples who shared entrepreneurship goals.

Motivated and confident

Many learners reported feeling more motivated to take the next steps in their entrepreneurship journey as a result of participating in Gathering Together. Some learners described how in the past they struggled to move forward with their business goals, but that the program helped them

to identify the next steps and create a plan. For example, when learners were asked about the most impactful part of the program, one learner shared:

> *"[The program] helped with getting your idea on paper. You know you what you want to do up here [in head], but it's hard getting it from here to here [head to paper]."*

Another learner described how the program helped motivate them to take tangible next steps to move forward with their business development:

> *"I'm feeling more motivated. I do have an appointment this week to start the Mentorship Program with Employ to Empower. This will be good to motivate me more and figure out the business talk and paperwork."*

In fact, at the end of the second cohort almost half of learners were planning, or had already enrolled, with Employ to Empower's entrepreneurship programming. Employ to Empower is a grassroots charity in Vancouver that empowers people with work and social barriers through entrepreneurial resources, training, and tailored one-on-one mentorship. The facilitator invited a guest speaker from Employ to Empower to inform learners about their resources and to connect them with their services.

For other learners, the program helped to increase their confidence in taking the next steps to entrepreneurship. This was particularly the case for learners who had previously struggled with working towards their entrepreneurship goals. One learner noted that they had struggled with entrepreneurship in the past:

> *"I've always wanted to do it [become an entrepreneur] since I was 19 and I've fallen many times. [After this program] I'm finally in the right place."*

Another learner described how the learnings from Gathering Together shifted their perspective on entrepreneurship, which helped them to feel more confident in opening their business:

> *"[The biggest takeaway for me was] that [my business] doesn't have to be perfect right away. Coming out of other [business-focused] courses, I was trying to make it perfect, and I didn't even know what perfect was [with my business]. But now I know I can do a soft opening, I can do this or that, and I have more avenues until I get it right."*

For the following learner, Gathering Together helped them to feel more motivated because it affirmed their entrepreneurship goals:

> *"I've helped a lot of people with their business, but now it's time for me to do it myself... [participating in Gathering Together] affirmed that I need to do this for myself. I know I can do that because I've been doing this for other people, so it affirmed I can do this for myself."*

Connected to others

Many learners in Gathering Together indicated that they became more connected to other Indigenous entrepreneurs through the program. Some mentioned how they particularly appreciated that the program was for Indigenous peoples. They felt that it was important for Indigenous entrepreneurs to come together to share ideas and learn from each other. One learner described how they had few opportunities to do this prior to participating in Gathering Together:

> *"It is nice to be back on reserve and connect with other [Indigenous people], as I want to help Indigenous businesses. In my [other business programs] I don't see many [Indigenous people]."*

When asked about the value and importance of having an entrepreneurship program specifically for Indigenous peoples, learners in both cohorts all agreed that it was very important. As one learner explained:

> *"We're each other's cheerleaders. We support each other's ups and downs and helping each other do the work. Definitely the group is good."*

This was something not only shared among the learners, but also observed by the facilitator:

> *"The learners really support each other a lot and encourage each other to take the next steps. We have the teach time and then we have the coach time, where they all coach and encourage each other... what I have noticed is they do a lot of talking with each other. There's a lot of discussion happening and a lot of learning. They're learning from each other."*

Some learners who were more connected in the community shared their contacts with other learners in the program and also shared information about available resources. Many learners indicated that they had exchanged phone numbers to continue connecting after the program.

Additionally, having a program specifically for Indigenous entrepreneurs meant that the facilitator could invite guest speakers who provided supports specific to their needs. For example, Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation (TACC) delivers funding programs to Indigenous entrepreneurs within traditional Coast Salish territory, as well as Campbell River,

Comox, and Líl̓wat. The facilitator invited a representative from TACC to speak to both cohorts, which learners reported finding very useful.

Program suggestions

Learners provided some suggestions for future iterations of Gathering Together, including a slightly longer program, as well as additional topics and guest speakers.

Learners appreciated that the program was a relatively short commitment during the week; however, many learners suggested that additional time would be helpful for further developing their business ideas. They suggested having either a longer program where they could cover more topics or having two separate programs: one that was a short introduction and then a second one that went into more detail for those who were further along in their entrepreneurship journey.

Learners also suggested additional topics and guest speakers for the program. Learners who suggested additional topics felt that they would benefit from learning more about business terminology, administrative support with opening a business, human resources, and business taxes. Learners identified that they could also benefit from additional guest speakers, especially from those who have lived experience as an Indigenous entrepreneur. Some learners suggested inviting Gathering Together alumni into the program to share about their entrepreneurship journeys.

Promising practices from the pilot project

In addition to the promising practices from the original beta-test outlined in the [beta-test report](#), two other promising practices emerged from the Gathering Together pilot project, which are described below.

1. **Providing opportunities for learners to take tangible next steps:** As part of Gathering Together programming, the facilitator provided many opportunities for learners to take specific and tangible next steps to advance their goals. The findings indicate that many learners from Gathering Together took advantage of these opportunities and had taken steps to move forward in their entrepreneurship journey. For example, the facilitator invited entrepreneurship-focused organizations (e.g., Employ to Empower, TACC) to present to the learners about their services and resources. This provided learners with options for direct support and further training upon completion of Gathering Together. Additionally, the facilitator informed learners of other entrepreneurship-focused training and supported them with their applications. One learner participated in a youth entrepreneurship summit that they found out about through Gathering Together.

2. **Offering entrepreneurship training specifically for Indigenous peoples:** Many learners expressed how valuable it was that Gathering Together was specifically for Indigenous peoples. They indicated that they had few, if any, previous opportunities for an entrepreneurship-focused program that was specifically tailored to Indigenous entrepreneurs. They appreciated that they were able to relate to and build relationships with other Indigenous people who had entrepreneurial goals. Furthermore, having this specific population for the program enabled the facilitator to identify resources that are available only to Indigenous entrepreneurs, such as those available through TACC and the Indigenous Youth Entrepreneur Forum.

LITERACY QUESNEL SOCIETY: SKILLS DISCOVERY PROGRAM

Literacy Quesnel's pilot project involved developing a new program – Skills Discovery – based on lessons learned from the original beta-test that led to expanding the reach of the programming to a new partner organization that supported curriculum development and participant recruitment. The following profile provides an overview of this new pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.

As part of the original beta-test phase of the DWLES project, Literacy Quesnel Society designed and delivered the [Driver Education Preparation Project](#) (DEPP). Quesnel has historically been a forest industry town; however, mill closures, and industry slowdowns have led to a diversifying economy that has expanded to include education, healthcare, agriculture, mining, and tourism. Many adults who are not working, or who have been displaced from industry-based jobs, are interested in earning different levels of driving licenses as this can provide new job opportunities. However, their ability to successfully complete the driver's license knowledge (i.e., written) test can be hampered by their low literacy skills, comprehension skills, inexperience in writing tests, computer literacy, or a combination of these factors. Thus, DEPP was developed to help people learn the strategies and content to successfully complete their written driver's licence test.

The DEPP beta-test found that learners not only benefitted from learning how to pass their written driver's licence test, but that they also benefitted more broadly by developing their Skills for Success (e.g., reading, communication, collaboration, and problem solving). It was also found that there was further opportunity to build learners' Skills for Success to enhance their employability. Further, the beta-test lead recognized that access to short, simple, and low-barrier training (such as what was provided through DEPP) that focused on Skills for Success and other job readiness skills was limited in Quesnel. Therefore, Literacy Quesnel engaged with the WorkBC office in Quesnel to develop and deliver employment readiness training focusing on Skills for Success called the Skills Discovery program.

Program implementation

During the planning stage of the Skills Discovery program, the pilot project lead met with project partners, including WorkBC and the College of New Caledonia, to discuss program development, logistics, recruitment, and facilitation. The result was the development of a program that placed particular emphasis on identifying and communicating transferable skills, understanding personality characteristics and their alignment with different types of jobs, career planning, writing resumes and cover letters, and interviewing. The program also included guest speakers, such as the College of New Caledonia, to discuss the different services and programs accessible through the College.

The program was held at the WorkBC office in Quesnel, as they had sufficient space and technology to run the program and were more accessible by public transit than Literacy Quesnel's location. WorkBC also played a large role in recruitment, with many employment counsellors referring their clients to the program. Almost all participants reported that they found out about the program from their WorkBC employment counsellor.

The program was initially going to be six weeks long, but after further discussion and reflection on the learnings from DEPP, project partners felt that some displaced workers wanted access to training where they could build their skills in a short amount of time and then start looking for employment. Consequently, the Skills Discovery program was three weeks long and ran for four hours, five days per week.

Literacy Quesnel worked with a consultant to develop and deliver the Skills Discovery program. The consultant had substantial previous experience developing and delivering two- to three-day employment readiness workshops to WorkBC clients and had extensive knowledge and connections within the Quesnel community. The Skills Discovery program was an opportunity for the facilitator to connect with learners over a longer period than the one-off workshops, as well as to tailor the curriculum to learners' unique experiences and needs as each cohort progressed.

At the beginning of the program, learners were given the Communications and Math Employment Readiness Assessment (CAMERA) to understand their workplace communications and numeracy levels. The assessment tool was provided through the partnership with the College of New Caledonia. For learners that needed additional literacy support as identified through CAMERA, Literacy Quesnel was able to provide one-on-one support through their Community Adult Literacy Program coordinator. Notably, some learners shared that they accessed this one-on-one support provided by Literacy Quesnel.

Key findings

In total, 22 learners participated in the Skills Discovery program, with almost all learners fully completing the program. Learners ranged in age from 19-60+ years old, with most learners ranging in age from 30-39 years old. Eight learners self-identified as Indigenous and seven learners self-identified as having a disability.

Findings from the surveys, focus groups, and follow-up interviews indicate that the Skills Discovery program helped learners gain more clarity and confidence with their next steps to employment, take concrete steps towards employment, increase their social supports networks, and increase their understanding of their transferable skills.

Confidence in next steps

There were a number of reasons why learners had been out of the workforce, but most shared that it was due to being on medical leave, not finding a job after completing their education, or taking on the role of a stay-at-home parent. Some learners described that it was challenging to find the motivation and confidence to figure out their ideal career path or take the next steps toward finding employment. To support learners' next steps, Skills Discovery helped them create and clarify their career goals and identify their strengths that aligned with these goals. Some learners already had a career path in mind, but were overwhelmed with how to work towards it, as described by the learner below:

> *"Through this course, I've been able to take this big idea and make it smaller, more manageable and get to where I wanted."*

Other learners knew that they wanted a meaningful career but were unsure how to achieve it. As described by one learner, their participation in Skills Discovery helped them to identify a career path that aligns with their goals and strengths:

> *"[After Skills Discovery] I'm now clear on where I want to go with my future…I'm a single parent and I've just been on assistance for a while. I'm just ready to move on and find the next step in life…[Before Skills Discovery] I was looking for a career and not just another regular part-time job…I just needed to get clarity on where the next step was, what I needed to do and figure out what was going to be better for me and a better fit for me, as far as having a sustainable career for me and my kids and doing something that's also what I would like to do."*

Some learners described how having more clarity and understanding of their next steps increased their motivation and outlook on their futures. One learner noted:

> *"I personally have become more excited about the future as opposed to feeling like I wasn't going anywhere. It was mundane. I had to stay home and heal, but it's sometimes hard to stay home and think about things. So, it feels good to be clear on things. I changed in a way that I now know where I want to go and I'm excited about it."*

Other learners described feeling more positive and less overwhelmed because they now know *how* to move forward toward employment. One learner described that this was particularly important as they were trying to get back into the workforce:

> *"For somebody that's just getting back into the work field and everything, it's very overwhelming, so to have a program [like Skills Discovery] where it sets you up to better set yourself up for success, it takes away from the overwhelmingness of it, and it sets you up for success and helps you find your path and what you want to do with it."*

Taking next steps

At the start of the program, almost all learners were unemployed and looking for work and some were underemployed; however, as reported by program staff and in the follow-up interviews with learners, after completing Skills Discovery, many learners had taken next steps to obtain employment. A few learners found employment and were waiting for their jobs to start, and many had applied and/or interviewed for jobs and were waiting to hear from employers.

After the training, at least one-third of learners were enrolled in further training either with Literacy Quesnel, WorkBC, the College of New Caledonia, or another organization. For example, a few participants were registered for WorkBC's Pathways to Employment program, which provides participants with job search skills, training in computer skills, and post-secondary training for certificates in fields such as construction, customer service, early childhood education, and security. On-the-job training and work placements with wage subsidies are also included in the program. Other learners described how they had plans to enrol in a college program and either work part-time or volunteer during their schooling.

Increased social support

Learners also described how they developed an increased network of social supports through their participation in Skills Discovery. This support came from both the other learners and the program facilitator. Even though the program was only three weeks long, some learners developed strong friendships with other learners in the program and had plans to continue to connect after the end of the program. Some learners shared that they helped each other with transportation to the program and shared contacts and resources.

One learner spoke of how their strong connection with other learners in the group was a result of their shared experience with being unemployed and trying to get back into the workforce:

> *"The group was very trusting and uplifting. I could trust people – it's not always easy to be in a group like this, but we're all in a similar situation."*

Another learner described how the learners all supported each other:

> *"We walk alongside each other, and we build each other up. We have each other's backs. It's been a really empowering group."*

The learners also highlighted the strong support provided by the Skills Discovery facilitator. During the focus groups, almost all learners shared their appreciation for the facilitator and the support the facilitator provided them. They felt that the welcoming, open, and comfortable space created by the facilitator helped to foster the relationships within the group. The following is an example of how a learner described some of the ways the facilitator helped the learners feel supported and comfortable in the program:

> *"[The facilitator] was pretty great. It's easy learning with her. I never felt stupid. Everyone was accommodated and nothing was rushed. Everything went on our time."*

Learners also mentioned that the facilitator offered to provide reference letters for the learners who completed the program and encouraged them to reach out or ask for support even once the program had ended. During one of the follow-up interviews, one learner spoke of how they appreciated that the facilitator provided them with a reference letter that they used in a job application and also continued to keep in touch after the program and inform them of job openings.

Transferable skills

A primary focus of the Skills Discovery Program was helping learners to identify and describe their transferable skills. While some learners felt that the program was more of a refresher and appreciated the opportunity to review their skills, other learners described how they did not realize that they had transferable skills. The program helped them to identify these skills and communicate them in their job applications.

Some learners mentioned that Skills Discovery helped them to realize the value of their life experience. They were unaware that the skills that they developed through their life experiences were applicable to an employment situation and could be highlighted on job applications. One learner described how the program helped them to realize that they had many transferable skills:

> *"It helped me realize the skills that I already have. I just didn't realize they'd be skills that would help me in a job. When I looked at the examples [of transferable skills], I realized I had a bunch of the skills."*

Additionally, some learners noted that they had been out of work for many years and were a stay-at-home parent. The Skills Discovery program helped them to identify the skills they developed through their experience as a stay-at-home parent and how to communicate this in a job application.

For other learners, identifying their transferable skills opened up more employment opportunities that they did not think were possible. For one learner, identifying their transferable skills helped them to recognize the value in their past non-employment related experiences, which then led to further job possibilities that were not limited to past work experience:

> *"I learned that I can use my real life skills more towards what I want to do. You don't just have to work based off of what we've already done in life. I've done a lot of service industry work, but I want to go onto something bigger and better, still in the service industry, but just different. I've figured out that I can use my life skills and build a career out of that, rather than just past experience with jobs."*

Program suggestions

Learners provided several suggestions for future iterations of Skills Discovery, including a slightly longer program, as well as additional program activities.

Learners appreciated that the program was short at only three weeks; however, many learners suggested that an additional informal fourth week would be helpful to facilitate a warm handoff. They described that this fourth week could be a drop-in format where learners could work independently, while also receiving guidance and support from the facilitator as they focused on writing resumes and cover letters, preparing for interviews, and communicating with potential employers.

Learners also suggested additional activities to include in the program, such as field trips to education and training institutes in Quesnel and additional guest speakers. Learners who suggested field trips felt that going to local colleges or training centres as a group would help learners know where to go to apply, who to talk to, and make it feel less overwhelming to apply. Learners identified that they could also benefit from additional guest speakers, such as Community Futures and a financial advisor.

Promising practices from the pilot project

There were two main promising practices that emerged from Literacy Quesnel's pilot project, which are described below.

1. **Partnering with an employment services organization:** A significant shift from the beta-test to pilot phase for Literacy Quesnel was the addition of two partners – WorkBC and the College of New Caledonia. The partners were involved in the initial discussions during the pilot development and supported curriculum development, participant recruitment, and program facilitation. Partnering with a well-established organization focused on employment services (i.e., WorkBC) was shown to be of great benefit to Literacy Quesnel and the sustainability of Skills Discovery. In fact, at the completion of the pilot phase of DWLES, the Quesnel branch of WorkBC agreed to take over the Skills Discovery program and include it as part of their suite of program offerings.

2. **Offering a short program to learners:** Initially, Skills Discovery was going to be offered for six weeks. After initial discussions with program partners, it was decided to instead offer a short three-week program. This decision was made because there were other employment and skills-focused programs available in Quesnel that were a longer commitment. However, partners identified that these programs were not always a realistic option for some participants and thus, a shorter program may better suit learner needs. Based on discussions with learners, they appreciated the opportunity to participate in a short program for a variety of reasons:

   - A shorter program was much less overwhelming to commit to than a multiple months-long program;

   - It was less challenging to find childcare for only three weeks;

   - Some learners were in the process of applying for jobs and needed an opportunity to build up their confidence and motivation to take next steps and apply; and

   - Some learners had plans to enrol in a training program within the next few months but were unsure how to do this and were not confident in their ability to obtain employment while they waited for their program to start.

MOUNT WADDINGTON FAMILY LITERACY SOCIETY: CONNECT4WORK

Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society's (MWFLS) pilot project involved adapting program content and expanding the reach of Connect4Work: Introduction to Computers for Job Seekers.

The following profile provides an overview of this pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.

For the original beta-test phase of the DWLES project, the MWFLS designed and delivered [Connect4Work](#). It was implemented in Port Alice, Port McNeill, and Port Hardy on Vancouver Island, BC. The North Island region experienced a significant economic change when the 100-year-old Neucel pulp mill, which employed many residents from the region, closed in 2019. Due to the closure, more than 400 employees were out of work and many of them were without job-related transferrable skills. Further, many of the affected workers were over the age of 40 and had a significant digital literacy gap that hindered their ability to search and apply for work. To help address this gap, the MWFLS established the Connect4Work beta-test project to build learners' digital skills.

The aim of the pilot project was to expand the reach of the Connect4Work curriculum to other organizations and broaden its focus beyond North Island. Additionally, MWFLS wanted to further develop the Connect4Work curriculum to integrate more Skills for Success resources.

Program implementation

Similar to the beta-test phase, the Connect4Work pilot project was delivered in-person over six weeks of class instruction for six hours each week. There were three cohorts of learners: one in Port McNeill and two in Port Hardy. The third cohort was delivered in partnership with Sacred Wolf Friendship Centre in Port Hardy. This partnership was developed to engage more Indigenous learners in Connect4Work. Given project timelines, this cohort was not included as part of the evaluation.

The Connect4Work curriculum was quite similar from beta-test to pilot project. It was a basic introduction to digital literacy that included basic computer operation, computer vocabulary, Internet searches and safety, creating basic documents, using email, using online communication platforms (e.g., Zoom), and an introduction to a variety of online resources from government and health services to banking and library services. The curriculum in the pilot project also included an overview of online resources related to Skills for Success. The facilitator chose to include these so that learners knew where and how to access the many online Skills for Success resources in the future to further enhance their skills and increase their employability.

In addition to the regular Connect4Work curriculum, the facilitator created a secondary version of the curriculum that had a broader focus, so that other organizations could adapt it to their own local context. Using this version of the curriculum, the facilitator hosted four train-the-trainer sessions to help increase capacity of others to deliver the curriculum. Participants in these sessions included staff from other employment and training organizations from across BC.

Key findings

A total of 13 learners participated in Connect4Work over two cohorts. Almost all learners fully completed the program. A couple of learners left the program for personal reasons.

Learners ranged in age from 25-60+ years old. Interestingly, most learners were 60 years of age and older, which aligns with the original intent of the beta test to address the digital literacy gap among older residents on North Vancouver Island.

Findings from the surveys and focus groups with learners further validated and strengthened the findings from the Connect4Work beta-test. Learners continued to report that their participation in the program reduced their fear of using computers and increased their confidence, as described by the following learner:

> *"I had a lot of fear of computers. This course erased fears and showed me how to work my way through."*

Learners in the pilot project emphasized the need for a basic digital literacy program. One learner clearly articulated the impact of not having basic digital skills:

> *"For computers, not knowing how to use them is like not knowing how to read and write."*

Another learner highlighted the value of this type of program for learners with low digital literacy:

> *"I think [this program] helps a lot, especially for someone who has no skills. It will help them be more comfortable."*

Similarly, one learner described the generational digital literacy gap and highlighted that this program is particularly beneficial for addressing that:

> *"At our age [as an older learner], we feel a bit left behind because we didn't grow up with [computers]. We now know how to do things [after taking Connect4Work], such as going on government websites, and we know how to use them. Now we're much more comfortable."*

Learners also continued to report that they wanted to do further digital skills training after completing Connect4Work. Connect4Work provided them with an introduction that piqued their interest in pursuing further training. One learner spoke of their interest in continuing the training:

"Now I'd like to have a more advanced program and go into detail of Word and Excel. Now that we have the basics, it would be good to get more into the advanced skills. Many of those programs are required for office work."

The facilitator also shared that they were regularly approached by community members about offering a more advanced digital literacy program:

"I've had a lot of people approach me regarding having more advanced Excel done for training. Unfortunately, there was not room in this course to do it since there's already so much in there...even yesterday I had someone come up to me when I was working at the library and she asked, 'are you guys [MWFLS] going to do a course for people who learn the basics and want to go a little bit further in it?'"

The findings from both the beta test and pilot project suggest that a basic digital literacy program continues to be valuable to North Island residents and that there is also an interest in more advanced digital literacy training.

Promising practices from the pilot project

In addition to the promising practices from the original beta-test outlined in the beta-test report, one promising practice emerged from the Connect4Work pilot project, which is described below.

1. **Developing a curriculum that is relevant to a variety of learners**: There were many reasons that learners wanted to participate in Connect4Work and improve their digital skills, such as being able to use them in their current job, wanting to enrol in online training/education, or using them to grow their businesses online. Learners from a variety of backgrounds and with different goals found value in participating in Connect4Work. Additionally, the curriculum was able to be taught in a group setting as well as one-on-one. The facilitator shared that they had used content from the Connect4Work curriculum as a tutoring aide for a learner in a different program. By addressing basic digital skills, the curriculum was relevant and applicable to a variety of learners.

2. **Adapting the curriculum to have a broader focus beyond the local level**: The curriculum in the beta-test phase had a very localized focus on North Island and BC resources and supports. The pilot project curriculum maintained this focus since it continued to be delivered to North Island residents; however, there was a secondary version of the curriculum developed that had a broader focus. The intent was that this would enable organizations to use the curriculum and integrate their own local resources and supports. This helped to make the curriculum transferable to organizations and their learners outside of the North Island region.

LETHBRIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY & SAAMIS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ASSOCIATION: MOVING FORWARD

Lethbridge Public Library/Read On Adult Literacy and Learning Program's (LPL/RO) pilot project involved expanding the reach and transferability of its Moving Forward beta-test project to a new partner organization – Saamis Employment and Training Association (SETA). The following profile provides an overview of this new pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.

For the beta-test phase of the DWLES project, LPL/RO designed and delivered the Moving Forward program in Lethbridge, AB. The Moving Forward program was developed to help learners understand workplace expectations within a Canadian context and how to navigate workplace culture. The original Moving Forward curriculum included workplace expectations and culture, as well as job search, job application, and interviewing skills. It was developed primarily for newcomers.

Upon completion of the original Moving Forward beta-test, LPL/RO staff reached out to SETA to discuss integrating Moving Forward content into their programming. SETA is an employment and training organization that serves Indigenous peoples living in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and surrounding areas. SETA offers various career training opportunities, employment preparation workshops, leadership programs, and other employment and training services, including an Office Administration Program. SETA's Office Administration Program is delivered in partnership with Medicine Hat College and is a 24-week program that includes a 12-week in-class training component and a 12-week paid practicum. The program is available to Indigenous people living in Medicine Hat or Lethbridge. Program graduates obtain the technical, employability, and social emotional skills required to work in Office Administration. For the DWLES pilot phase, SETA integrated the Moving Forward curriculum into the Lethbridge-based Office Administration Program to complement the other skills development aspects of the program. This was unique to the Lethbridge pilot project, as it was the only DWLES pilot that was not a standalone program. SETA's Lethbridge location is situated on Treaty 7 territory, which is the traditional and ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Program implementation

As Moving Forward was originally designed for newcomers, a significant and important part of the pilot project was adapting the Moving Forward curriculum for the Indigenous population served by SETA. The curriculum was adapted through a Blackfoot lens specifically for the learners enrolled in the Office Administration program in Lethbridge. Staff from SETA adapted the curriculum to make it culturally relevant for learners in the program by integrating Blackfoot history, culture, values, language, and images into the program content and materials. For

example, the curriculum was renamed to "Stamikakomanistowaawaahkat" – Blackfoot for "just keep moving forward." SETA staff described "Stamikakomanistowaawaahkat" as common advice from Blackfoot Elders whenever an individual or group encounters difficulties, obstacles, setbacks, or losses. Additionally, in the first module learner introductions were originally framed as a brief elevator pitch, whereas in the adapted version, learner introductions were framed as a way to build relationships and included a PowerPoint slide with an image of a group preparing to share a meal together. Furthermore, some content from the original Moving Forward curriculum was covered in other parts of the Office Administration program (e.g., job search, job application, and interviewing), so this was removed from the adapted curriculum. Thus, the final adapted curriculum primarily focused on the workplace culture and expectations content.

The workplace culture and expectations content was included in the 12-week in-class training portion of SETA's Office Administration Program, which ran from the end of October 2022 until the end of January 2023. The instructor delivered the content for one hour, three to four days each week, typically at the end of the day after learners had gone through the technical training. The content was covered through PowerPoint slides, class discussions, and the Moving Forward workbook that was developed for the original beta-test.

Key findings

Thirteen learners participated in the pilot project with SETA. Learners ranged in age from 19-40 years old and all identified as Indigenous. When asked about their experience with the workplace culture and expectations content during the focus group, learners reported feeling more confident and prepared, and that they valued the adaptation of the curriculum through a Blackfoot lens.

Learners described how the workplace culture and expectations content helped them to feel more confident and prepared to enter/re-enter the workforce because they learned about what to expect in a new workplace. One learner described what they learned about entering a new workplace:

> *"The instructor told us that when we start a new job it's like a whole new language when you enter a new workplace. It helped me feel more confident and know what to expect now when I start a new job."*

Learners also felt that they were more confident in their ability to prevent or navigate conflict and difficult situations as an employee and more confident in their knowledge of employer expectations. For one learner, this was important not only at an individual level, but also as a Blackfoot community member:

"It's helpful to understand what to expect because I'm not just representing myself when I'm at my job, but I'm representing our people and what other people might expect of me and our people. I want to do that well."

Even the learners who were familiar with the topics covered in the curriculum felt that it reinforced their knowledge or was a good refresher.

Additionally, learners valued and appreciated that the workplace culture and expectations content reflected Blackfoot culture and ways of being and knowing. For some learners, it helped them learn how to navigate a predominantly white workplace as a Blackfoot person, as described below by one of the learners:

"It's hard to incorporate Blackfoot culture into a workplace, especially off reserve. It doesn't fit well in a mainly white workplace. I've never been at job where there's been any cultural side to it, especially off reserve, but on reserve too. This course helped us understand that a bit more. Really liked learning the words and seeing the pictures [that were integrated into the content]."

The learners also felt that workplace culture and expectations content was a valuable component of their overall Office Administration Program. They were keen to have the slides as a resource, which they described as very detailed and informative, so that they could refer to them in the future. Learners indicated that the content was a good complement to their learnings from the other program components, especially with their upcoming practicums. As one learner described,

"[The inclusion of the workplace expectations content into the broader program] worked really well. We learned the hands-on part [related to Office Administration], but then this was about what to expect when we get a job."

Program suggestions

During the focus group, learners provided suggestions for future iterations of the workplace culture and expectations content. They indicated that they would like either more depth and less breadth of content or more time in the program to go through the curriculum. They felt that because there was so much content to go through, it sometimes felt rushed, especially since it was delivered at the end of the day. As described by the learner below:

"I would have liked more time spent on this part of the program. It was the last two hours of each day of class, but sometimes that time would go towards homework and other times it was a workshop. I would have liked more time on the workshops to be able to get through all of them."

One learner shared that they felt some topics could be covered in more depth:

> *"I feel like we just touched the surface of many of the workshops, so it would*
> *have been good to go more in-depth on some of them."*

When asked about specific topics that they would like to be covered in more depth, learners responded that they would like to spend more time focusing on job application skills, such as interviewing. They also wanted to spend more time learning about how to practically understand the culture in a workplace, particularly when starting a new job and suggested including specific examples and scenarios. Learners were also interested in focusing more on how to navigate their rights related to harassment and racism in the workplace, particularly as an Indigenous person.

Alternatively, if more time for the content was not an option, they suggested giving learners an opportunity to select the specific topics to be delivered, so that they could go more in-depth on some and less so on others. One learner shared the following suggestion:

> *"It would be helpful to have an outline of the workshops from the beginning and*
> *then be able to choose as a class which ones we want to focus on if we aren't able*
> *to get through all 19."*

Promising practices from the pilot project

There were two key learnings that emerged from this pilot project, which are described below.

1. **Adapting and tailoring curriculum:** The pilot project demonstrated the importance of adapting program content and materials to reflect learners' culture and experiences. In the beta-test phase, the Moving Forward curriculum was developed for newcomers; however, a few Indigenous learners enrolled in the program and found the training very helpful as they (re)entered the workforce. LPL/RO recognized the potential value that the Moving Forward curriculum could have for Indigenous learners if it was adapted to their specific needs. Thus, LPL/RO staff approached SETA, an Indigenous employment and training organization, about adapting and delivering the curriculum. SETA staff were able to adapt the curriculum to better reflect the knowledge, values, experiences, and culture of the Blackfoot learners in the Office Administration program. The focus group findings illustrated that tailoring the curriculum was particularly valuable and important to the learners, as it made it more relatable and relevant.

2. **Integrating additional soft skills with technical training:** This pilot project was unique in that the workplace culture and expectations part of the Moving Forward curriculum was integrated into SETA's Office Administration Program, rather than being delivered as a standalone program. This provided learners with the opportunity to develop their technical

skills related to office administration, as well as the soft skills (i.e., those addressed through the workplace culture and expectations curriculum) that would support them in obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment. Learners in the focus group described how they felt that the workplace culture and expectations training enhanced their experience in the program by helping them to feel more confident in navigating the workplace as they ventured into a new career or new job.

COMMUNITY LEARNING ALTERNATIVES: NEXT STEPS

CLA's pilot project involved expanding the reach of their programming to new communities and increasing the capacity of other local literacy organizations to offer Next Steps. The following profile provides an overview of this pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.

For the original beta-test phase of the DWLES project, CLA designed and delivered the Next Steps program. It was offered in the Bay of Quinte Region of Hastings County in Ontario, which includes a cluster of small and medium-sized communities between Toronto and Ottawa, such as Belleville, Trenton, and Madoc – where CLA offices are located. The area has experienced many large manufacturing plant closures in the past few years, with more closures possible in the future. Although new plants have opened, the skills needed are not always a good match with the perceived skills of job seekers. Thus, Next Steps aimed to help learners identify their current skills and describe how they could be applied to other areas of employment.

The aim of the pilot project was to expand the reach of Next Steps by increasing the awareness and capacity of other local literacy organizations in Central Eastern Ontario to facilitate Next Steps within their own communities. To do this, CLA partnered with Connections Adult Learning in Sharbot Lake, Trent Valley Literacy Association in Peterborough, Prince Edward Learning Centre in Picton, and Peterborough Native Learning Program. Partners supported participant recruitment and program delivery of Next Steps. To increase partners' awareness of the curriculum and build their capacity to independently deliver it in the future, staff from the partner organizations could attend a Next Steps program delivered by CLA and support facilitation as appropriate. Partner organizations could then decide to take on Next Steps and deliver it in their community. Partners were not required to recruit learners for Next Steps but were encouraged to promote it within their networks and communities.

Program implementation

Like the beta-test phase, Next Steps was delivered virtually, which was particularly useful for the pilot since the program's reach had extended to communities beyond where CLA's offices are

located. However, if needed, learners had the option of participating in Next Steps virtually via one of CLA's offices in Belleville, Trenton, or Madoc where computers were available to learners. This was a change from the beta-test phase to the pilot, which enabled learners to participate in the program who did not have access to a computer or internet at home or who needed additional technical support to participate. In the beta-test phase, staff had to ensure that upon intake or in the first class that all learners could connect and navigate the virtual platform. A few learners noted that they would not have been able to participate in the pilot project if this option was not available.

The Next Steps curriculum was quite similar from beta-test to pilot project, with an emphasis on identifying and communicating transferable skills, developing a skills portfolio, career planning, resume- and cover letter-writing, and interviewing. Some content was pared down from the beta-test based on feedback from learners from the beta-test. Other content from the beta-test was rolled into group discussions or one-on-one coaching sessions to give learners an opportunity to focus specifically on the areas they were interested in or needed support. The curriculum was also constantly adjusted during and after each cohort to reflect feedback from participants during the pilot phase.

Similar to the original beta-test, one-on-one coaching was a significant part of the Next Steps program. In the beta-test, the coaching was spread out over the four weeks of online learning, whereas in the pilot phase coaching was spread over the first three weeks and the fourth week was solely focused on one-on-one coaching. Coaching could occur in-person or virtually, depending on learners' needs and availability. This gave learners the individual support they needed to help transition out of the program. During the coaching, learners could go through their resumes and cover letters in detail, do mock interviews, develop a tailored plan outlining their next steps toward employment, and/or be referred to other life-stabilizing programs and partners. The four partner organizations played an important role in the coaching sessions. Learners who were recruited by partner organizations would meet with their staff since they were more aware of local resources and employment opportunities and had stronger relationships with the learners compared to CLA coaches.

Key findings

Learners

In total, 12 learners participated in the Next Steps program, with all learners fully completing the program. Learners ranged in age from 19-59 years old.

Findings from the surveys, focus groups, and follow-up interviews with CLA learners further validated and strengthened the findings from the Next Steps beta-test. Ontario Works continued

to be a regular referral source for Next Steps, with most learners indicating that is how they found out about the program. Additionally, learners continued to highlight how Next Steps helped them to better understand and communicate their transferable skills. The program focused on learners identifying skills that they acquired in previous jobs and outside of the workplace and then developing a skills portfolio.

Furthermore, learners continued to highlight the value of the one-on-one coaching sessions provided by CLA and partner organization staff throughout the program. Learners described how the coaching sessions personalized their participation in the program since they could focus on their goals and needs. It allowed them to do more specific work, such as tailoring resumes or cover letters, preparing for an upcoming job interview, or having a coach help them make appointments with employment agencies.

An additional finding that emerged from the pilot project was learners' increased confidence in their communication skills. This included communication both within the program and with potential employers. Many learners described how at the start of the program they were very anxious about communicating with others in the program, especially in a virtual environment. As the program progressed, however, they described how they felt more comfortable and less nervous about speaking up. Some learners described specific activities within the program that helped increase their confidence in communicating, including the group discussions and an activity where they had to instruct a partner about how to draw a specific picture.

For communication with potential employers, many learners described how developing an elevator pitch increased their confidence in their ability to communicate their skills and experience to employers. For one learner, this helped to increase their confidence in interviewing:

> *"I had never been to an interview before based on [the jobs I was in before]…now I am not afraid to try and interview, before I was hesitant."*

Program facilitators also observed changes in learners' communication throughout the program. As one facilitator described, some learners started the program by only communicating through the virtual chat function, and at the end of the program, they were communicating verbally with their cameras and microphones turned on:

> *"[One cohort] started off with cameras off and nobody was talking, and it ended up with cameras on and everybody chatting. And when they were leaving the program, they're all exchanging email addresses so they could keep in touch because they had built such a relationship with each other. If you think about the growth of not wanting to exist on camera to now you have this community of people you created online, that's really cool."*

Program staff

The pilot project also led to changes in the capacity of CLA staff to connect across the three CLA centres and communicate with other community organizations.

During their interview, program staff shared how they have been meeting weekly since the beginning of the original beta-test Next Steps program. Since it was a new program, it was important for staff who were involved as facilitators and/or coaches to meet to discuss challenges, successes, and program changes. They described how the additional funding from the DWLES project allowed them to meet more often. Over time and as COVID-19 restrictions eased, these meetings helped staff become more connected and less siloed across the multiple centres, as they would meet in-person and rotate throughout the three CLA centres, instead of just working out of one centre. Staff indicated that this has made them feel like a more unified team that has a shared vision and understanding of the Next Steps program and its value to learners. Staff noted how this helped them better communicate the value of their programming to the broader community, particularly during the pilot phase.

With the expansion of Next Steps during the pilot phase, CLA staff had to enhance the promotion of the program to community organizations in order to bring them on as potential delivery partners or as a referral source. CLA staff felt that collectively, with their shared understanding of the program and its value, they were not only able to communicate to community partners about the content and logistics of the program, but also how Next Steps could align with the needs of different communities and partners' clients (e.g., clients at employment agencies and other literacy organizations). As one staff member described:

> *"It came to the forefront [throughout Next Steps] of the importance of us communicating to our community partners not only about our programs specifically, but also how we fit with them and how we can help them to help their clients. That's been something we've really been working on over the last year and to really cement that within our regional and provincial networks."*

CLA staff indicated that through this work, they have noticed certain organizations referring clients to CLA that previously expressed a lack of understanding of the value of literacy organizations. Additionally, by communicating the value of Next Steps to community partners, and building their capacity to deliver the program, there are now four additional organizations (i.e., the pilot project partners) that can deliver Next Steps in the region. CLA staff indicated that beyond the pilot project they will continue to deliver Next Steps, but maybe more importantly, they will also continue to promote the program to community partners to engage them in program delivery.

Promising practices from the pilot project

In addition to the promising practices from the original beta-test outlined in the beta-test report, two main promising practices emerged from CLA's pilot project, which are described below.

1. **Promoting Next Steps throughout regional and provincial networks:** CLA is part of regional and provincial literacy networks that bring together literacy practitioners. They also participate at employment conferences, such as the Eastern Ontario Employment Services Conference. During these meetings and conferences over the pilot phase, CLA staff made sure to discuss Next Steps and its value to potential partners and the clients they serve. This promotion helped to increase awareness and interest in Next Steps and encouraged other organizations to refer clients to the program. In some cases, it helped to strengthen existing relationships between CLA and other literacy organizations who then partnered with them for the pilot project to deliver Next Steps.

2. **Focusing on building capacity of partner organizations:** CLA staff focused on a slow expansion of the program due to the recognition that partner organizations do not have the same resources as CLA (e.g., no full-time staff). This allowed partners to build their capacity to deliver the program in the future rather than immediately delivering it independently. CLA staff met weekly with partners to go through each component of the curriculum. Partners were also encouraged to audit different classes and then co-facilitate with CLA staff if they were interested. CLA found that once partners audited one class, they were very engaged in the program and typically would co-facilitate with the CLA instructors in subsequent classes. By building capacity of partner organizations, four other organizations outside of CLA are now able to deliver Next Steps.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE DWLES PILOT PHASE

The following section brings together the individual and cross-project findings to highlight the key takeaways from the pilot phase of the DWLES project. These findings validate the key learnings from the beta-test phase and illustrate additional findings that emerged through the pilot phase.

VALIDATED FINDINGS

As described below, the pilot phase validated the findings from the beta-test phase:

▪ Similar to the beta test projects, **learners who engaged in the project were diverse**. Equity-deserving groups were well represented in the pilot projects, particularly learners who identified as Indigenous. This is unsurprising since two pilot projects (i.e., SETA and Capilano University) focused on engaging Indigenous learners and one pilot project (i.e., CLA) partnered with an Indigenous organization. This suggests that developing programs that are relevant to specific groups of learners and partnering with organizations that directly serve them can enhance the reach and relevance of LES programming for learners from equity-deserving groups. The other pilot projects were not developed specifically for certain groups but had learners from various equity-deserving groups.

▪ The findings from the pilot projects continued to emphasize that **social supports and relationships with learners and facilitators were critical** for building learners' self-confidence, fostering their sense of belonging, and contributing to other aspects of their well-being including hope for the future and self-esteem. Learners indicated that having shared experiences with other learners was important for helping them to develop these relationships and feel connected to and supported by others in the program. The shared experiences among learners were diverse and included factors such as cultural identity (e.g., Indigenous), past experiences (e.g., relationship challenges), unemployment circumstances (e.g., stay-at-home parenting), and specific skill gaps (e.g., digital skills). This suggests that creating opportunities for learners to come together who have similar backgrounds and experiences can help learners develop relationships, feel supported, and grow. It also highlights the importance of facilitators building a learning environment where learners feel included and comfortable to share with others.

- Learners from the pilot projects **were positive about their experiences and the support that they received**. Similar to the beta-test phase, learners reported high levels of satisfaction and engagement with the programs. They also indicated that the pilot projects met their needs and that they received support when needed. This suggests that, despite the differences in focus, content, and format, the practices used by the LES organizations involved in the DWLES project are effective in supporting learners' needs. These practices included one-on-one coaching sessions, culturally relevant programming, tailored and flexible curriculums, detailed program resources and materials, and supportive and engaging facilitators.

- Similar to the beta-test phase, pilot sites **developed new or strengthened partnerships with organizations in their communities**. This was a primary focus for several of the pilot projects as they aimed to scale their programs. Partnerships were formed in a variety of ways and served different purposes. For example, some programs were transferred to partners for adaptation and delivery, such as SETA adapting the Moving Forward program from LPL/RO. Others worked with partners to engage new learners, such as CLA and its engagement with literacy organizations in the broader region, as well as Literacy Quesnel and its partnership with WorkBC. This suggests that there is significant value in community-based literacy organizations connecting with other community organizations and/or leverage their existing networks to support the scaling of their programs.

- The findings from the pilot projects validated that **learner-centred and place-based approaches to program development and implementation were critical for engaging learners**, motivating them to participate, and building their confidence to engage in LES and employment training programs. These approaches consider the context, assets, and needs of the community in program ideation and development (e.g., integrating culture into program content), as well as the individual learning and broader well-being needs and experiences of each learner (e.g., building in time for one-on-one support outside of group learning). Similar to the beta-test findings, the operationalization of these approaches varied across pilot projects, but the *importance* of its use was a point of connection across all of them.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS FROM PILOT PHASE

Two additional key findings also emerged from the pilot phase of DWLES. These were 1) the learners' increased clarity and confidence for moving forward on their employment journeys and 2) the pilot sites scaled their projects in diverse ways.

Learners' clarity and confidence in moving forward

For the majority of learners, the pilot projects were successful in **increasing their clarity and developing their confidence to continue their journey towards employment**. For example, some learners enrolled in additional training with the same or another organization in the community, while other learners had plans to enrol. This was evident in Capilano University's Gathering Together pilot project were some learners shared that they had enrolled in Employ to Empowers mentorship program. Some learners had also submitted job applications and were waiting for responses from employers. For example, some learners from Literacy Quesnel's pilot project indicated that they had applied for jobs and were either waiting to hear about interviews or whether they received an employment offer. Furthermore, other learners indicated that their participation in the pilot projects gave them the confidence and motivation to identify their next steps, which they did not have prior to the pilot projects.

Across the pilot projects, learners came away with a greater understanding of how to identify their skills and experiences that are applicable in other employment contexts, how to turn their skills and passion into an entrepreneurial goal, or how to use their new digital skills to further their employment opportunities. This suggests that even if learners do not become employed upon completion of a short-term, basic LES and employment program, it can be an important stepping stone towards further opportunities in their employment journeys. The pilot projects provided learners with an important boost, through the skills, confidence, and support they gained, to take their next steps towards meaningful employment.

Diversity of scaling across pilot projects

As described previously, the purpose of this phase of DWLES was to expand the five selected organizations' beta-test projects into scalable and transferable pilot projects. The pilot projects illustrated that **community-based LES and employment programs can be scaled in diverse ways**, such as scaling out, scaling up, and scaling deep.

"Scaling out" refers to impacting greater numbers of learners by directly replicating a program in a different context (Moore et al., 2015). For example, Capilano University's Gathering Together pilot project involved scaling out to a new community of learners in lower mainland BC. Scaling out can also be done by spreading the general principles of the program, but with an adaptation to a new context. This was the case for LPL/RO's Moving Forward program that was adapted and delivered by SETA for the pilot phase. Furthermore, scaling out can be done by leveraging online platforms for open scaling, which was the case for MWFLS's Connect4Work curriculum that was further developed and made available online so that it was transferable to organizations and learners across Canada.

"Scaling up" refers to making an impact through new policy development, partnering, or advocacy (Moore et al., 2015). Literacy Quesnel's pilot project was a small-scale example of scaling up through their partnership with WorkBC, which is the Province of BC's employment service. Upon completion of the pilot phase, the Quesnel WorkBC office recognized the value of the programming and formally took over the Skills Discovery Program. This solidified the sustainability of the program beyond the DWLES project.

Finally, "scaling deep" refers to impacting cultural roots by reframing stories to change beliefs and norms and investing in networks and communities of practice (Moore et al., 2015). CLA's Next Steps pilot project was a small-scale example of scaling deep. From beta test to pilot project, staff became a more unified team with a shared vision of the goals and outcomes of Next Steps that they shared within the community and their networks. Their messaging and communication helped to shift the perspectives of some community organizations to see the value in community-based literacy programs and refer clients to Next Steps.

These findings suggest that when community-based literacy organizations are supported in scaling their programs (i.e., through funding, capacity development, networking), they can increase their organizational capacity to reach and engage learners through different strategies, such as scaling out, up, or deep.

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APPENDIX A: EVALUATION MATRICES

Table 10   Implementation evaluation matrix

Implementation questions	Indicators	Data sources
1. Recruitment / Participation / Engagement		
1.1 What recruitment strategies were used and how effective were they in recruiting individuals from the populations of interest?	Comparison of demographics of actual versus intended participants	▪ DWLES survey ▪ Literature review ▪ Database metrics ▪ First survey
	Accounts from staff about recruitment strategies and success	Final staff interview
1.2 To what extent were learners engaged in the program?	Attendance rates	Database metrics
	Proportion of learners reporting high level of interest and participation in program activities	First survey
	Accounts from learners about level of engagement	Focus group
1.3 How well did the program address barriers to participation?	*Proportion of learners identifying:*	
	▪ Supports that aided participation	First survey
	▪ Supports not offered that would have helped	First survey
	Accounts from learners about supports offered	Focus Group
2. Program Design/Delivery		
2.1 To what extent was the program implemented as intended?	Qualitative assessment of alignment	▪ Final staff interview ▪ Document review
2.2 How well did the intervention align with clients' needs?	Proportion of learners reporting that their needs were met	First survey
2.3 How adaptive were programs in adjusting to accommodate learner needs and other factors (e.g., COVID-19)?	Accounts from learners about whether needs were met	Focus group
	Accounts from staff about adjustments made to accommodate learners and other factors	Final staff interview

Implementation questions	Indicators	Data sources
2.4 To what extent were learners satisfied with the program?	Proportion of learners satisfied with the program	First survey
	Accounts from learners about satisfaction with program	Focus group
3. Partnerships / Capacity Development		
3.1 To what extent were programs able to develop community partnerships? Were there obstacles to developing/strengthening partnerships?	Accounts from staff about partnership development and obstacles	Final staff interview
4. Support to beta test programs		
4.1 Were you adequately supported throughout the program? (e.g., support from funding agency, project partners)	Accounts from staff about project support	Final staff interview

Table 11   Outcomes evaluation matrix

Outcomes	Indicators	Data sources
1. To what extent have <u>immediate</u> outcomes been achieved?		
1.1 Improved Essential Skills	*Proportion of learners with gains in:*	
	▪ Essential Skills (standardized assessments)	Database metrics
	▪ Interest in continuous learning/adaptability	First survey
	Accounts from learners about gains in Essential Skills	Focus group
1.2 Improved skills and confidence using digital technology	*Proportion of learners with increased self-rated levels of:*	
	▪ Confidence using computers/technology	First survey
	▪ Independence using computers/technology	First survey
	Accounts from learners about gains in digital skills	Focus group

Outcomes	Indicators	Data sources
1.3 Improved skills and confidence in job preparation, career planning, job search or self-employment skills	*Proportion of learners with increased self-rated levels in areas related to:*	
	▪ Career planning	First survey
	▪ Career decision-making self-efficacy	First survey
	▪ Job search self-efficacy	First survey
	▪ Knowledge of Canadian workplace culture and expectations	First survey
	▪ Self-employment skills	First survey
	Accounts from learners about gains in employment-related skills	Focus group
1.4 Improved awareness and connection to community services, resources, and networks	*Proportion of learners with increased self-rated levels of:*	
	▪ Knowledge of services/resources	First survey
	▪ Confidence in ability to find info on services/resources	First survey
	▪ Confidence reaching out to employers/contacts	First survey
	Accounts from learners about gains in awareness and connection to community services/resources/networks	Focus group
1.5 Improved knowledge and skills related to social and emotional health	Accounts from learners about gains in knowledge and skills related to social and emotional health (e.g., mindfulness, stress management, etc.)	Focus group
	Indicators from partner surveys	LOC survey
1.6 Increased knowledge and awareness of displaced workers' needs amongst beta test organizations	Accounts from staff about change in knowledge and awareness of needs of displaced workers	Final staff interview

Outcomes	Indicators		Data sources
2. To what extent have intermediate outcomes been achieved?			
2.1 Greater confidence and motivation in taking steps to improve labour market resilience/success	*Proportion of learners reporting:*		
	▪	Plans to take further training or to look for work	First survey
	▪	Increased employment-seeking actions	Second survey
	▪	Increased actions to improve work-related skills	Second survey
	▪	Plans to take further training	Second survey
	▪	Searched/applied/enrolled in further training	Second survey
	▪	Started volunteering	Second survey
	Accounts from learners about gains in confidence/motivation related to improving employability.		Focus group
2.2 Improved well-being	*Proportion of learners with increased self-rated levels of:*		
	▪	Self-esteem	First survey
	▪	Hope for the future	First survey
	▪	Confidence	First survey
	▪	Sense of connection to community	First survey
	▪	Life satisfaction	First survey
	Accounts from learners about gains in well-being		Focus group
	Proportion of learners taking steps to improve well-being		Second survey

APPENDIX B: LEARNER DATABASE METRICS

PART 1 – Learner Database

- Program Name

- Contact name

- Email

- Home phone

- Mobile phone

- Best method of contact: Email, Home phone, Mobile phone

- Town/city

- Province

PART 2 – Demographics

- Gender: Man, Woman, Non-binary, Two Spirit, Declined

- Age group: 18 and under, 19-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+, Declined

- Indigenous identity: Yes, No, Declined

- English as a second language: Yes, No, Declined

- Identify as immigrant to Canada: Yes, No, Declined

- Self-identify as visible minority: Yes, No, Declined

- Self-identify as having disability: Yes, No, Declined

- If so, is disability a barrier to work: Yes, No, Declined

- Pre-training employment status: Employed, Underemployed, Unemployed but looking for work, Unemployed but not looking for work, Unemployed due to COVID-19, Retired, Declined

- Education level: Less than high school completion, High school completion, Some post-secondary education or training, Post-secondary diploma/certificate, Declined

PART 3 – Pre-training Skills Assessment (Notes)

- Digital

- Communication

- Participation

- Adaptability

- Problem Solving

- Collaboration

- Other notes about beginning of training activities/status (please use this column to add any brief notes about learners' pre-training skills level/ability)

PART 4 – Post-training Information

- Number of hours of training

- Training completed: Fully completed, partially completed, Left program

- If they left, reason for leaving program

PART 5 – Post-training Skills Assessment (Notes)

- Digital

- Communication

- Participation

- Adaptability

- Problem Solving

- Collaboration

- Post-training skills improvement: Limited improvement, Moderate improvement, Significant improvement, Declined

- Post-training status – Formal education or training: Further training with the same organization, School or training with a different organization, No training, Don't know

- Post-training status – Employment: Employed, Underemployed, Unemployed but looking for work, Unemployed but not looking for work, Unemployed due to COVID-19, Retired, Declined

- Examples of training outcomes: Use this column to note any key outcomes for learners (e.g., updated a resume; signed up for another training, applied for a job). No specific format is necessary.

- Other notes about post-training activities/status

APPENDIX C: POST-TRAINING SURVEY

1. INTRODUCTION

This survey will ask you questions about your participation in the employment skills training class.

Your literacy program, as well as Decoda Literacy Solutions Society and Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) are working together to help people get back to work through the Enhancing Displaced Workers Literacy and Essential Skills (DWLES) project.

The answers you give in this survey will only be used by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) for research and reporting purposes.

We will make sure:

- Your answers will only be used for the DWLES project.

- Your information is safe and will not be shared with anyone other than the SRDC team.

- Your answers will remain anonymous and confidential.

- You do not have to answer a question if you don't want to.

- You can stop the survey at any time.

If you have any questions about the study or how we will be using your information, you can contact Patrick Wray at pwray@srdc.org, or call 1-866-830-9436 ext. 2073.

Do you agree to participate in this survey?

- Yes

- No

2. PROGRAM DETAILS

Contact Information	As part of the research project, we would like to follow up with you in three months to see how you're doing. • The follow-up survey will only take 5 minutes. • We'll ask about your current work situation, if you are taking any further training, and how you have used the skills that you learned from this training. Q1. What is your name? - First name [open] - Last name [open] - Prefer not to include my name What is the best way to reach you for the follow-up survey (choose any of the following) ☐ Email: _____ ☐ Phone call: _____ ☐ Text message: _____ ☐ Prefer not to respond
Community	Q2. Where did you attend the program? *[drop down menu]* ☐ Quesnel ☐ Lethbridge ☐ Bay of Quinte Region of Hastings County (Belleville/Trenton area) ☐ North Vancouver Island (Port Alice, Port Hardy, Port McNeill area) ☐ - Lil'wat and N'Quatqua First Nations
Referral	Q3. How did you find out about the program? ☐ Social Media ☐ Word of mouth ☐ Newspaper ☐ Poster ☐ The organization that delivered the training suggested that I attend ☐ Another organization suggested that I attend ☐ [Other, please specify] ☐ Prefer not to respond ☐ Do not know

3. SUPPORT SERVICES

Type of support services	Q4. What support did you get from the program that helped you participate? (choose all that apply) ☐ Childcare ☐ Transportation ☐ Access to a computer/Laptop/Tablet ☐ [Other, please specify] ☐ None ☐ Prefer not to respond
Support asked for and received	[scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, prefer not to respond] Q5. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I asked for support from program staff when I needed help. I received support from program staff when I needed help.
Support services that would have been helpful	Q6. What support would have been helpful that you did not receive? - [open] - None - Prefer not to respond

4. CERTIFICATES

Certificates	Q7. Did you get a certificate as part of the program (for example, first aid or WHMIS)? *(If no, skip to section 4)* - Yes - No - Prefer not to respond

Type of certificates	Q8. What certificate(s) did you get? (choose all that apply) ☐ First aid ☐ WHMIS ☐ H2S Alive ☐ [Other, please specify] ☐ Prefer not to respond
Certificate helpful	Q8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: [scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, prefer not to respond] -The certificate(s) will help me get a job. -It would have been difficult to get this certificate without this program (for example, through a different program or centre)

5. SATISFACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Satisfaction	Q10. How satisfied are you with the program? ☐ Very unsatisfied ☐ Somewhat unsatisfied ☐ Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied ☐ Somewhat satisfied ☐ Very satisfied ☐ Prefer not to respond
Program met needs	Q11. How well did the program meet your needs? ☐ Not at all ☐ Not very much ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very much ☐ Completely ☐ Prefer not to respond
Program improvement	Q12. How could the program be improved? - [open] - Prefer not to respond

Engagement	[scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, prefer not to respond] Q13. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: I was very interested in the program. I actively participated in program activities.
Plans after program	Q14. What are you planning to do after the program? (Choose all that apply)? ☐ Further training with the same organization ☐ School or training with a different organization ☐ Continue current employment ☐ I have found short-term employment ☐ I have found permanent employment ☐ Look for work ☐ Not employed and not looking for employment ☐ Retired ☐ [Other, please specify] ☐ Prefer not to respond ☐ Don't know

6. CAREER PLANNING AND JOB PATHFINDING SKILLS

Career	[scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, not applicable, prefer not to respond] Q15. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? The program helped me... - get a clearer idea of the type of job I want. - develop a plan for achieving my career goals. - find information about education or training programs. - search for and find good job opportunities. - find out where job openings exist. - prepare resumes that will get me interviews. - Participate in job interviews.

	- recognize and communicate my skills and experience to employers. - understand how my skills are relevant for different jobs. - use personal networks (groups of friends, co-workers, and other personal contacts) to find job leads. - adapt to new situations (for example, new learning environments or new job sites).

7. PROFESSIONAL, PEER, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Accessing community resources	[scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, prefer not to respond] Q18. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? As a result of the program… - I know more about services/resources in my community. - I have greater confidence in my ability to find information on services/resources in my community. - I intend to use a greater number of services/resources in my community. - I have greater confidence reaching out to employers and personal contacts (e.g., friends, community members) to learn about job opportunities. - I intend to reach out to employers and personal contacts (e.g., friends, community members) to learn about job opportunities.

8. TRANSFERABLE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Receptive to continuous learning	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Q19. As a result of the program, I am more interested in learning new skills that will help my career. ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree

	☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Prefer not to respond
Transferable Skills	Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: [scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, prefer not to respond] - The skills I learned in this training are useful for finding new/better employment. - The skills that I learned in the training are useful for my life in general.
Digital Skills	[scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, not applicable, prefer not to respond] Q20. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? As a result of the program… - I am more confident at searching for jobs online. - I am more confident at applying for jobs online.

9. PERSONAL WELL-BEING

Personal well-being	[scale 1-5: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree; prefer not to respond] Q21. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? The program improved my… - Self-esteem - Hope for the future - Confidence

10. CAREER INFORMATION

Employment Status	Q26. What is your employment status? ☐ Employed ☐ Underemployed (not working full time or in a position that doesn't use your skills) ☐ Unemployed due to COVID-19, but looking for work ☐ Unemployed (not due to COVID-19), but not looking for work ☐ Unemployed but not looking for work ☐ Retired - Prefer not to respond
What was the industry	Q22. What industry is your current or last job in? *[drop down menu]* ☐ Forestry ☐ Construction ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Mining ☐ Fisheries ☐ Oil/Gas ☐ Retail ☐ Tourism ☐ Food & Beverage ☐ Trucking ☐ Technology ☐ Education ☐ Health ☐ Government ☐ Non-Profit ☐ Agriculture ☐ Other _____
	Q25. How long have you been without work since your last job? *[only ask if unemployed]* - [open] months (max 120) - Prefer not to respond

	How many months have you not worked in the past 5 years? (Please estimate the number of months) - [open] months (max 60) - Prefer not to respond

11. DEMOGRAPHICS

To help us understand who has participated in the project's training programs, please answer the following questions about yourself:

1. What is your gender?
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Non-binary
   - ☐ Two Spirit
   - ☐ Prefer to describe myself as: _____
   - ☐ Prefer not to respond

2. What is your age?
   - ☐ 18 and under
   - ☐ 19-24
   - ☐ 25-29
   - ☐ 30-39
   - ☐ 40-49
   - ☐ 50-59
   - ☐ 60+
   - ☐ Prefer not to respond

3. Do you identify as …?
   (Choose all that apply)
   - ☐ Indigenous, Métis, First Nations, Inuit
   - ☐ Visible minority
   - ☐ Immigrant or refugee
   - ☐ Person living with a disability

4. What language do you speak most often at home?
    ☐ English
    ☐ French
    ☐ Other
    ☐ Prefer not to respond

5. What is your highest level of education?
    ☐ Less than high school completion
    ☐ High school completion
    ☐ Some post-secondary education or training
    ☐ Post-secondary diploma, certificate, or degree
    ☐ Prefer not to respond

Thank you for completing this survey!

If you have any questions about the study or how we will be using your information, you can contact Patrick Wray at pwray@srdc.org or call 1-866-830-9436 ext. 2073.

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction and Consent

Before we review the consent together, I'd like to first introduce myself, so that you can get to know who I am a bit more and once we start the discussion, you're welcome to introduce yourself as well.

In a moment, I'm going to ask you a series of consent questions, but before I do, I'd like to share a bit of information about the purpose of the project, why we're here today, and what happens with the information that you share with us today. I recognize you might have a few questions as well, so we'll also have some time for that.

Overview of SRDC & the Decoda Project

SRDC is a non-profit research organization that works with partners to conduct research on programs across Canada. Through this work we help to inform, as well as understand how well a project is working, who it's working for, and how it's working.

We are here today as part of a project that is led by Decoda Literacy Solutions called Displaced Workers Literacy and Essential Skills. The aim of the project is to learn about how literacy and essential skills programs, integrated with employment training, can help people build the skills they need to find and maintain employment. In addition to [ORGANIZATION], there are 4 other organizations that are part of this project.

Purpose of Discussion

Today, we'd really like to hear from you about what worked well in the [PROGRAM NAME], what you feel could have worked better, and what you gained from your participation in the program.

Your input and feedback will be used for research and reporting purposes as part of the broader DWLES project to help enhance programs to help everyone, as well as to help [ORGANIZATION] enhance their own programming.

For your participation in the focus group, each of you will receive a $30 honorarium in the form of a gift card. At the end of the focus group, we will collect your emails and your preference for a gift card.

Confidentiality & Use of Information

The focus group will last about 1-1.5 hours. While we can't guarantee confidentiality in our discussion today given the group format, it's important for all of us to agree to keep other people's comments confidential. We ask that you please do not share specific comments or identify who said what from our discussion today.

This discussion today is entirely voluntary. You can end your participation at any point and/or you can pass on any questions you don't want to answer. This won't have any impact on your current or future involvement with the organization, Decoda, or the overall program.

We will be taking notes during our discussion to help with the final reporting. We also wish to record the audio/video to help us with notetaking.

Only members of the SRDC research team will have access to the notes and recording and they will be kept on our secured server; they won't be shared with Decoda, the program staff, the government, or anyone else. What is shared will be the analysis and summary of what was learned from the discussion today. The notes and the recording will be destroyed as per ethical research standards one year after the project ends.

Any quotes or themes that we include in the report will have all identifying information removed from them (apart from listing that it was from a focus group participant).

▪ Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

▪ Does everyone agree to allow us to record the audio/video? (Y/N)

▪ Does everyone agree to participate in the focus group? (Y/N)

Starter Questions

Let's start with a few questions where we'll go around and give everyone the chance to answer.

a) To begin, we'd like to get to know each of you a bit more. Can you please tell us a bit about who you are?

b) Can you share one word that describes how you are feeling now that you've completed [PROGRAM NAME]? Can you tell us a little bit about why you chose that word?

Let's take a moment to reflect on where you started. Think back to when you first joined the [PROGRAM NAME] a few weeks ago. What was your employment situation like? How were you

feeling about your employment situation at that time? What skills and knowledge did you have or wish you had?

    a) How did you find out about the program and what motivated you to apply for it?

    b) What were you hoping to get out of the program when you signed up?

    c) Thinking about your participation in the program, were there certain things that made it easier for you to participate and remain engaged in the program?

        i. *Were there things that would have been helpful that you did not receive or have access to in order for you to participate and remain engaged in the program?*

    d) Thinking about where you are at now, in what ways do you think you have changed as a result of participating in the program?

        i. *Probe: For example, this can be in terms of your confidence, your knowledge, a different outlook on life, etc.*

Questions about specific elements of the pilot program

Now I'd like to ask some questions about specific aspects of the program. A unique part of [PROGRAM NAME] is the focus on [specific skills].

    a) Thinking about the part of the program that focused on **[specific skills]**,

        i. *What were some of the things that you learned that particularly stood out to you?*

        ii. *What was most helpful part of the program for you in terms of developing your entrepreneurship skills?*

        iii. *Was there any part that was not particularly helpful? If so, can you provide some details?*

        iv. *Was there anything that you would have liked to have learned about or that you would have liked to be included that wasn't? In other words, was there anything missing that you would have liked to be in it?*

        v. *How do you plan to use the entrepreneurship skills that you've gained through the program, or have you been able to use any of these skills? If so, how?*

General questions about the pilot program

Before we wrap up, we just have a few final questions for you to provide any additional insights.

a) In terms of how the program was delivered, is there anything that could have been done differently to make it more helpful or impactful for you?

b) Have you had previous opportunities to take part in employment and skills training programs? If so, how do they compare to your experience in this program?

c) Who do you feel would most benefit from this participating in this program?

d) How would you describe this program to a friend?

e) Do you have any final thought or comments about the program that you would like to share?

APPENDIX E: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Thank you for making time to talk with us! A bit about myself and why we're having this conversation – My name is [researcher introduction]. I work at SRDC, a non-profit research organization that works with partners to conduct research on programs across Canada. Through this work we help to inform, as well as understand how well a project is working, who it's working for, and how it's working.

We are working with [PILOT ORGANIZTION] on a project led by Decoda Literacy Solutions, which is called Enhancing Displaced Workers Literacy and Essential Skills. The aim of the project is to learn about how literacy and essential skills programs, integrated with employment training, can help people build the skills they need to find and maintain employment. In addition to Decoda and SRDC, there are 5 other organizations that are part of this project – 3 in BC, 1 in Alberta, and 1 in Ontario.

You may recall completing a survey at the end of the program, as well as participating in a focus group with us on your last day of class. The purpose of this conversation today is to follow-up on your experience participating in the [PROGRAM NAME].

This discussion will take about 30 minutes. I will ask you questions about topics such as your current employment situation, activities you have been involved in, and how the program impacted you. For your participation in the discussion, you will receive a $30 honorarium in the form of a gift card. At the end of our discussion, we will ask for your preference for a gift card.

Your input and feedback will be used for research and reporting purposes as part of the broader DWLES project to help enhance programs to help everyone, as well as to help [ORGANIZATION NAME] enhance their own programming. Any feedback that you provide will not be reported on in any way that can identify you. Any quotes or themes that we include in the report will have all identifying information removed from them (apart from listing that it was from a focus group participant).

I will be taking notes during our discussion to help with the final reporting, but with your consent, I'd also like to record the audio/video to help with notetaking.

We will make sure:

- Your answers will only be used for the DWLES project.

- Your information is safe and will not be shared with anyone other than the SRDC team.

- Your personal information will be safeguarded according to strict confidentiality.

- Summary reports of the project results will not identify you or your personal details in any way.

- • You do not have to answer a question if you don't want to.

- • You can end your participation at any time.

If you have any questions about the study or how we will be using your information, you can contact Patrick Wray at pwray@srdc.org, or call 1-866-830-9436 ext. 2073.

- Do you have any questions before we begin? Yes/No

- Do you agree to take part in this interview? Yes/No

- Do you agree for the interview to be recorded? Yes/No

Name: _____

Email: _____

Organization: _____

Gift card choice: _____

- Can I begin recording our conversation? Yes/No

General questions

1. In general, how have things been since you finished [PROGRAM NAME]? What, if anything, has changed in your life since then, either for better or worse?

2. How have you been spending your time since [PROGRAM NAME] ended? (e.g., doing another program/training/education, applying for program/training/education, working or volunteering, looking for work, volunteering, etc.) *Follow-up based on response knowing that it could be multiple:*

    a. **Working:**

        i. Can you please share a bit about your work (e.g., F/T or P/T, contract/permanent, sector, role, etc.)?

      ii.   How does this job fit in with your career goals?

     iii.   Was taking [program name] important for getting this job? If so, how?

b. Looking for work:

      i.   Can you please share a bit about where you are at with looking for work (e.g., finding jobs, applications, any interviews, type of work looking for, etc.)?

      ii.   What barriers are you facing with finding employment, if any?

     iii.   What do you feel would help you in finding and securing a job?

     iv.   Have the skills that you learned in [program name] been important for looking for work? If so, how?

c. Another program/training/education:

      i.   Can you please share a bit about this program/training/education (e.g., what is it, length, etc.)?

      ii.   Why did you enroll in it?

     iii.   What are your plans for after?

     iv.   Was [program name] an important reason for why you decided to take training? If so, how?

3. Have you made progress on or achieved any goals you set during your program, or have any other successes you'd like to share since finishing?

4. Are there any barriers or challenges you have encountered since finishing the program? If so, could you share a little more about those?

5. What have been your main sources of help or support since finishing the program?

    a.   Are there other resources, services, or types of support that would be helpful to you right now?

    b.   Have you connected with other supports, resources, or services that you learned about through the program (e.g., another training course or service provider)? If not, why not? If so, what does this look like?

Program-specific questions

6. How do you feel [PROGRAM NAME] has helped you with what you are doing now, if at all?

7. Now that you have had some time since finishing the program, what do you think were the main takeaways for you from the [PROGRAM NAME]?

    a. What skills and knowledge have you used that you learned through the program since it ended?

    b. Are there any skills or knowledge that you wish you would have gained in [PROGRAM NAME] that you feel would benefit you now?

    c. Is there anything you wish would have been different about your experience in [PROGRAM NAME]? Please explain.

8. Are you still in contact with anyone from [ORGANIZATION NAME] or any of the other learners from the program? If not, why not? If so, what does this look like?

9. Compared to how you felt on the last day of the program, how are you feeling today about your future?

10. Reflecting back, how satisfied on a scale of 1 to 5 are you with:

    a. The relevance of the program in supporting you with your career goals?

    b. Your overall experience in the program?

11. Do you have any additional comments, thoughts, or recommendations about your employment journey in general or related to your time in the [PROGRAM NAME]?

APPENDIX F: STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

On behalf of SRDC, I thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. This interview is intended to inform the overall evaluation of the Enhancing Displaced Workers Literacy and Essential Skills project. The goal is to get an in-depth understanding of various aspects of the development and implementation of your program, as well as your reflections on successes and lessons learned.

We seek your honest feedback – there is no wrong or right answer.

Please note that all your answers will remain confidential and will be presented in an aggregated way to avoid any identification. We would also like to record the interview to assist with note-taking. Notes will be anonymized, and recordings will be used for research and evaluation purposes only and will be erased once the analysis is completed.

- Are you comfortable with us recording the interview?

Starter/Background Questions

1. Please describe your role or connection with [ORGANIZATION NAME] and your role in the [PROGRAM NAME].

2. Can you please describe the shift from the beta test phase of the DWLES project to the pilot phase?

   a. Based on what you learned in the beta test phase, how did that inform the pilot phase?

   b. What were the key changes from the beta test phase to the pilot phase?

   c. What prompted these changes?

   d. Partner agencies – were these new partnerships? How were they chosen?

Program-specific questions

Now I'd like to ask some questions about the [PROGRAM NAME] specifically.

3. Did anything change in terms of the design and delivery of Next Steps compared to the beta test phase?

    a. If so, how?

    b. What challenges, if any, did you experience in the design and/or delivery of the program?

    c. Were they similar or different from the ones you experienced in the beta test phase? How?

4. Can you tell me about how participants were recruited into your program for the pilot phase?

    a. Overall, how successful do you feel that the program was in reaching the populations of interest?

    b. What activities or strategies were used to try to recruit participants?

    c. How were participants onboarded into the program?

5. Thinking about the learners in the program, what do you see as the main outcomes they are coming away with by participating in the Next Steps program?

    a. How well do you feel the program met their needs?

    b. Were there needs/interests that the program was not able to meet for learners? If so, why not? What would help meet these needs/interests?

6. Can you please share more about the partnerships involved in the pilot phase?

    a. Were these new partnerships or ones that the organization had an ongoing relationship with?

    b. Will these partnerships continue beyond the project?

DWLES Pilot Phase

7. Thinking about the pilot phase of the project, what worked well at the overall project level (e.g., support, communication, etc.)? What could have worked better?

8. What has the advocacy component of this phase looked like for your organization?

9. Reflecting back from the beginning of the beta test to now, what have been some of the key learnings for [ORGANIZATION NAME]?

10. How has being part of this project enhanced your understanding of literacy and essential skills, alongside employability, needs in the [COMMUNITY] (and beyond with partners)?

11. How has being part of this project enhanced the capacity of [ORGANIZATION NAME] to address literacy and essential skills, alongside employability, needs in your region?

    a. What more is needed to support your work in this area?

12. What learnings will you take from this project moving forward?

    a. How has being part of a research project influenced the work of [ORGANIZATION NAME], if at all?

    b. Are there any future plans for the [PROGRAM NAME]?