

As a partner in adult foundational learning, Calgary Learns stays in regular contact with the field. Throughout the year we seek to gather timely information relevant to the field of adult learning through program visits to funded programs, application review, final reports, community consultations and PD events. The input we gain from these processes guides our work and helps Calgary Learns shape future funding priorities.

On May 12th, 40 leaders and educators of Foundational Learning programs gathered on zoom and shared their perspectives and experience. Small breakout groups reflected on:

1. Their needs to better support learners/practitioners in programs
2. The current and evolving professional development needs of practitioners serving adults learning at the foundational level
3. Their needs to enhance their ability to serve Indigenous learners
4. Our Granting processes

Changes

In addition to our annual community conversations, we complete an extensive needs assessment approximately every 5 years. Our last needs assessment in 2019 was published in early 2020. We all know that the world has evolved since then. By early spring of 2020, most programs had pivoted to remote learning where possible. Over the past two years there have been some notable changes in the environment including:

- Digital skills becoming critical for all
- Programs being delivered on line, in person and in hybrid modes
- Reconciliation being prioritized with the discovery of unmarked graves
- Increase in isolation and mental health challenges
- Funding challenges with the pandemic and decrease in Alberta's economy
- Hesitation of learners and/or practitioners returning to in-person learning

What we Heard

1. What's needed to better support learners/practitioners

- Staff need to have two different skill sets to deliver online vs in person delivery. A refresher on facilitation skills and creating welcoming space for in-person delivery was suggested
- Delivering in a hybrid model to account for learner needs requires additional practitioner support
- With online delivery continuing, there needs to be an intentional development of materials to ensure they are relevant for learners (e.g. age, culture). The quick pivot didn't allow the time for this and it was a stop gap measure at the time

Note: Our new Foundational Learning Specialist role is designed to support funded programs by providing mentoring support for practitioners and program staff incorporating best practices and

trauma-informed approaches that meet the specific needs of adults learning at the foundational level. We partner with our funded agencies to help identify and address gaps in the adult foundational learning field. We are also committed to working with you to create solutions to challenges that arise in the design and delivery of your programs. For mentoring support, please contact Heidi at mentoring@calgarylearns.com.

2. Current and Evolving Professional Development Needs

Calgary Learns shapes our professional development offerings based on the ongoing input from practitioners in our funded programs through our membership forms, our PD evaluation forms and in conversation with our funded programs. Online delivery of PD over the past few years has enabled more staff to attend. Practitioners expressed that Calgary Learns PD has helped:

- connect research to practice
- reinforce approaches and/or bring new perspectives/introduce new tools
- reduce isolation
- address emergent issues
- provided a platform for identifying challenges and sharing resources and successes

The top ten requests from the participants included:

1. Working effectively and respectfully with Indigenous learners
2. Using digital tools effectively for teaching and learning online
3. Understanding learning disabilities/differences
4. Trauma-informed program design and delivery
5. Strengthening participatory learning methodologies in an online/blended classroom
6. Strengthening Skills for Learning
7. Emergent Curriculum Design
8. Ensuring safe and welcoming online classrooms
9. FASD and adult learning
10. Plain Language

Note: Watch for some of these sessions in our upcoming PD offerings. Our newsletter is the best place to learn about upcoming sessions in a timely manner. If you have other PD needs, please contact Berniece at pd@calgarylearns.com.

3. Serving Indigenous Adult Learners

As the groups discussed how to best meet the needs of Indigenous learners in Calgary, the following areas were identified by practitioners:

- Understanding Indigenous learners' unique needs
- Assistance with making connections to the Indigenous community for guest speakers, field trips
- How to engage more Indigenous learners through program promotion
- More resource sharing to understand what others agencies are doing to know where to send learners

The groups also referenced the need for practitioners, whether serving Indigenous learners currently or not, to have the opportunity to learn:

- about Indigenous specific resources
- through Indigenous PD offerings for facilitators

Note: Our new Indigenous Education Liaison role is designed to support Indigenous grants and assist the adult foundational learning field in addressing the needs of Indigenous adults in programming. The latter includes professional development for practitioners around Indigenous history and ways of knowing that impact Indigenous learners. If you need support for serving Indigenous learners in funded programs or have a new program idea, please contact Lisa at indigenous@calgarylearns.com.

4. Our Granting Processes

The group discussed how grants need to respond to the impact of the pandemic on program delivery. As a result, practitioners expressed need for:

- Flexibility to manage hybrid models that may need more time/resources for facilitators to prepare for and manage
- Additional resources and support to manage digital gaps of learners. Practitioners are stretched when learners are struggling to use the digital tools to which they have access
- Classroom support for learners coming out of isolation who are getting used to managing social cues, potential conflicts and anxiety
- The ability to have flexibility when programs are unable to meet expectations
- Continue to offer opportunities to connect within organizations in environments like the virtual resource fair. This helps create pathways for learners when organizations become more aware of what might be available.

The groups also suggested that Calgary Learns provide clarity when terms specific to Calgary Learns are used. They also felt that a video tutorial on completing budgets and multi-delivery forms would be useful.

Note: Our Grant Liaison is available to support programs throughout the grant process. If you have any questions, please contact Kristine at grants@calgarylearns.com.

What Next?

As always, your input helps to shape our work moving forward. If you have further input or needs, we would welcome you to connect.

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

Aboriginal Futures	CCIS	Making Changes
Agape	Centre for Newcomers	Momentum
Bow Valley College	Deaf and Hear Alberta	Prospect
Calgary John Howard	Diversecities (formerly CCCSA)	The Alex
CIWA	Elizabeth Fry Society	TIES
CanLearn	Families Matter	Vibrant Communities Calgary
carya	Kindred (formerly Catholic Family Services)	