



Enhancing the Literacy and Basic Skills Program Through Integrated Digital Delivery: An Opportunity and Needs Assessment

March 2022

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This Employment Ontario project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

The views expressed in this report are the views of the Recipient and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The transition to virtual service delivery of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programming brought on by the pandemic in early 2020 created and catalyzed opportunity and innovation, as well as significant challenges for LBS providers and learners across Ontario. This is true for those across all of the streams and sectors (Anglophone, Deaf, Francophone, Indigenous, Community, School Boards and Colleges). In fall of 2021, the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development approached AlphaPlus and Contact North to consult with LBS stakeholders and identify gaps and priorities in utilizing digital services and tools to support remote and blended learning in Ontario. Under the guidance of an advisory group composed of representatives from AlphaPlus and Contact North, an independent evaluation firm, Cathexis Consulting conducted 18 online facilitated consultations with sector support organizations, educators, administrators, and learners across all LBS streams and sectors. This brief builds on the results of the consultations, complemented by additional key informant interviews. The brief highlights identified challenges, promising practices and specific opportunities to enhance the digital capacity of the LBS network. It is acknowledged that the insights that have informed these findings were informed by LBS stakeholders who volunteered to participate in the consultations, and therefore do not represent the views of all LBS stakeholders.

Ontario's LBS program provides instruction and services to adults (aged 19 and over) to build the essential skills necessary to reach their goals of employment, higher education, apprenticeship, or independence. Providing high-quality and accessible literacy and basic skills instruction is critical to supporting an inclusive society and economy and creating accessible pathways to higher education and employment. The LBS program helps adult learners develop and apply communication, numeracy, interpersonal and digital skills to function more efficiently in their professional and personal lives. The experience of online service delivery during the pandemic revealed

that digital literacy¹ is an inseparable and indistinguishable part of adult literacy. Beyond education and professional requirements, digital literacy is required for managing financial interactions, as well as social and political engagement. Integrating digital skills and digital literacy while building other essential skills supports learners to successfully pursue their goals related to education, employment, and independence.

Almost all of Ontario's LBS providers that participated in the consultations had moved some or all of their services online over the last two years². Through this process the LBS ecosystem has experienced and experimented with the benefits of online learning and has also experienced several shared challenges. Although digital instruction is more accessible for some learners, it also creates significant barriers for learners with lower digital literacy skills, unreliable internet access, and limited access to devices. The challenges are most significant for lower skilled and economically disadvantaged learners but also differ with age and, in some cases, are also linked to geographical resources and infrastructure. Many service providers are trying to bridge this gap through a range of tactics and adaptations, often requiring ingenuity and an entrepreneurial approach. Challenges experienced in the LBS system are indicative of the growing and persistent digital divide where a proportion of Ontario's population is unable to afford, access, or navigate digital technology adequately. For example, a 2020 study found that 39% of low-income Ontarians don't have an internet connection at home, whereas only 1% of high-income Ontarians lack in-home web access (AlphaPlus, 2020a). However, some learners, such as those with inflexible work schedules, transportation challenges, and childcare responsibilities, have benefited from the flexibility and convenience of scheduling their learning around their other life commitments. Across all consultations, a silver lining of the transition to online learning is that the majority of learners who were able to successfully access online learning, including some with the lowest skills, have made tangible gains in their digital literacy skills by upgrading their academic skills online.

¹ The skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information- Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS, 2022)

² The only providers consulted who had not been delivering online instruction were those who deliver services in correctional facilities who are not permitted to access the internet due to corrections policy.

Increased delivery of LBS through online or blended learning³ (Appendix B) platforms can increase access and eliminate barriers for some learners (e.g. transportation, childcare and scheduling restrictions). However, it also exacerbates barriers for those who are already the most marginalized, creating a risk of inequity. If left unaddressed, discrepancies in skills and access may increase the likelihood that some learners could fall through the cracks and not receive the services they need if not adequately supported. Additionally, significant implications and technical inputs are required for a system and network of service delivery providers and educators who have historically delivered services in-person to leverage the potential of online and blended learning for Ontarians.

Within this system, there are wide disparities between access to organizational resources. For example, college and school sectors often have access to space, digital resources, technical support, and educational materials through their organization. In contrast, community sector organizations often lack comparable resources and facilities and often rely on volunteers and partner organizations to support them, which became an issue during the pandemic when these resources were not available to support the transition to online learning. Francophone, Indigenous, and Deaf streams have the additional responsibility of finding and developing culturally appropriate and relevant online learning content and identifying appropriate online delivery mechanisms to meet the needs of their learners.

Even though different streams and sectors are aligned with different interests, goals, and types of learners, many aspects of how services are planned and delivered (including curricula and assessments and infrastructure) would benefit from shared resources and collaboration. However, the program's current design lacks the structure and incentives to enable effective province-wide planning and coordination. Without adequate support and incentives to enable collaboration, organizations often operate in silos that limit access to information and knowledge sharing, and the fragmented development that results from this becomes a barrier to achieving program-wide efficiency and innovation.

³ Blended learning is an educational methodology that blends online or digital components with face-to-face instruction. (Learning A-Z, 2021)

All LBS programs consulted who were delivering online or blended learning intend to resume in-person instruction when it is safe to do so. However, all of the providers consulted also intend to continue providing some online and/or blended learning instruction. Online learning in LBS has the potential to increase access and remove barriers for many while also building critical digital literacy skills. However, to achieve this goal, specific resources and capacities are required in the system to provide a consistent standard of service, remove barriers and foster innovation and knowledge sharing among a diverse network. Additionally, future in-person LBS programming has the opportunity to fully integrate applied digital skills with academic upgrading to ensure that LBS learners develop their digital skills while preparing for education, employment or independence.

Ultimately, technology is intended to make education more efficient, scalable and accessible. To support and enable province-wide optimization of online and blended learning across a decentralized system, collaboration and knowledge sharing are critical to prevent duplication, support innovation and consistent learner experience. Although strengthening opportunities for collaboration is discussed in opportunity area four, this infrastructure and capacity will enable and support each of the other opportunity areas as well. The four thematic areas of opportunity and potential action identified include:

1. Provide access to technology devices, digital skills and tech support across the province to increase access and remove barriers
2. Provide a shared repository of vetted, high-quality, open-sourced curricula, assessment and online learning teaching resources and a comprehensive learning management system
3. Provide accessible provincial professional development and structured forums and methods for knowledge sharing focused on online and blended learning best practices.
4. Strengthen the enabling environment for system-wide effectiveness and coordination, including:
 - a. Support and incentivize collaboration and planning among e-channel and non-e-channel providers and support organizations in order to enhance learner experience and system efficiencies;
 - b. Develop a centralized marketing campaign to increase awareness of the LBS program; and
 - c. Review the LBS funding formula to align funding processes and allocations to be in proportion with clients' needs, support quality services for all learners, and to reflect the actual costs of online delivery and curriculum development

The opportunities and potential actions highlighted in this brief acknowledge and build on ongoing work led by stakeholders within the system to improve learner and educator experience and create an infrastructure and environment that streamlines processes and fosters community building and collaboration.

**Current State
Challenges and
Opportunities**



01
**Digital Resources,
Infrastructure and
Skills for Access**

02
**Online Learning Curriculum,
Assessments and Resources**

03
**Professional Development for
High Quality and Consistent
Learner Experience**

04
**System Infrastructure and
Enabling Environment**

Digital Resources, Infrastructure and Skills for Access

Technology has the potential to expand access to education. However, several conditions, such as the presence of equipment, the internet, technical support, and a basic level of digital and digital literacy skills, need to be in place to maximize the potential of online learning. Many learners lack access to devices and the internet to access remote learning. Others lack access to reliable or high-speed internet, which impedes learning due to poor connectivity. These discrepancies create significant barriers to access and impact the availability of online teaching tools.

It was reported in the consultations that many learners do not have sufficient digital literacy skills or comfort to participate in remote learning, which is a greater challenge for low-level and economically disadvantaged learners. However, service providers have also indicated that they have been able to serve different types of people through online and blended learning. For example, learners with inflexible schedules, transportation issues, and childcare responsibilities benefit from the flexibility, access, and autonomy that online learning offers. Overall, many learners and educators also report improvements in digital and digital literacy skills through participation in online learning.

Quotes from Consultations

- *We have really low-level learners. I was always reluctant to deliver online because of the nature of their challenges. But for my student population, the pandemic has really forced us to improve our digital literacy, and has also exponentially improved my students' skills in online literacy. It has really been a blessing. [college sector educator]*
- *We are able to reach learners who pre-COVID had trouble with us – single parents, people with transport issues. Also lost a lot of learners – we lost people who are helping their school-age children during the day.*
- *Seems to be under 40 are doing well with picking up digital skills, but we have several over that age threshold who have been laid off, are looking to upgrade their skills and re-enter the workforce, but are having trouble with digital skills. There is nothing else – we can't refer them to another program for computer training – it's just us. COVID has put a hold on us taking on more learners.*
- *Our average learner age dropped 10 years across all sites. Online doesn't work best for very many.*

- For learners with poor digital skills, the initial orientation to online learning needs to be in-person. Very difficult to use online methods to teach people how to access and use an online platform.
- Interestingly, one of the biggest demands we've had for service delivery is the basic digital literacy – we had a waiting list the whole time. We tried to get people to participate one on one. You want people to be successful online, but to get to that point you have to teach them in person, one on one. Our capacity has been way reduced in our ability to support learners.

Opportunity	Challenges	What is Already Being Done	Potential Actions
<p><i>Provide learners with the required technology devices and internet access to remove barriers and increase access, especially for the lowest income and those in rural and remote areas.</i></p>	<p>There are areas with no internet access at all 'internet blackout zones'.</p> <p>Many learners do not own devices; many rely on their phones to participate in online learning, which has limited functionality.</p> <p>Some less expensive devices are limited (e.g., Chromebooks) in functionality and cannot be used to access some tools and activities.</p> <p>Deaf learners need access to larger screens and fast internet for effective visual communication.</p> <p>Many organizations in the indigenous stream serve remote communities where internet infrastructure is poor.</p>	<p>Rogers/Telus offer internet for \$10/month for people in receipt of OW or ODSP with some conditions.</p> <p>Some groups, such as school boards utilize a centralized system to make group purchases.</p> <p>Instructors are mailing physical textbooks to learners to remove barriers to accessing materials.</p> <p>Some providers have been able to provide loaner devices using their own laptops or use training support budgets or other unused budgets (e.g., transportation during the pandemic) to purchase internet sticks or devices. The ability to use LBS training support funds to purchase devices was identified as being very valuable.</p>	<p>There is an opportunity to support group purchasing of devices for students to keep or to create a loaner program. There is a need for specific expertise to manage group purchasing of devices and oversee their maintenance. This coordination is especially needed in the community sector.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to streamline communication with providers about how funds can be spent to address technology barriers and dedicate financial resources to addressing technology barriers.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to explore private-public partnerships to expand or enhance affordable internet to learners in LBS (e.g. Rogers / Telus program).</p>

	Learners in correctional facilities do not have access to online learning.	In many cases, providers sourced non-ministry funds to purchase devices and pay for learners' internet.	
<i>Provide dedicated digital literacy skills education as part of the LBS curricula.</i>	<p>Many learners lack the digital literacy skills to engage with online services. In addition, educators have indicated losing people that were unfamiliar with or lacked the confidence to attend online sessions.</p> <p>In situations where most learners are proficient in digital literacy skills, it gets harder for the minority with low levels of digital literacy skills to keep up.</p>	<p>Providers have offered a range of solutions to address their learners' digital and digital literacy skills needs. These include offering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free online tools and resources to address the gaps in their digital skills (e.g., online typing practice) • Mandatory orientation to online learning. Including short courses that students have to take before they can take an academic course online. The orientation helps to determine readiness for learning and introduces them to the tech in a low-stakes environment. • Some e-channel organizations offer courses in computer fundamentals, self-management and self-direction, and a learn-to-learn introductory course. 	<p>There is an opportunity to close the digital skills and literacy gap for learners through the LBS program and facilitate access to online learning, including by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing open-source curated online introductory digital and digital literacy skills curricula to all LBS providers to be used to deliver online learning and face-to-face LBS programming. • Instructor train-the-trainer resources to support all providers to offer high-quality introductory digital and digital literacy skills as part of LBS programs. • A centralized structure and incentives for providers to share effective online learning resources and practices (see opportunity 4).

<p><i>Provide technical assistance to troubleshoot technology issues for learners (asynchronous and synchronous learners).</i></p>	<p>With the adoption of online learning, learners have a much greater need for technological support and troubleshooting. This support typically falls on the instructor and the program. In many cases, program staff have had to learn how to offer this support while also learning how to adapt to online delivery. These processes overwhelm small programs that may only have 1-2 staff members.</p> <p>Students in asynchronous programming experience setbacks when technology issues arise.</p> <p>There is uneven access to resources and capacity to support learners with lower levels of digital and digital literacy skills.</p>	<p>Some providers rely on on-site tech departments or dedicated tech personnel to support learners and educators with technical support and guidance. However, even in school and college sectors where a dedicated tech support department is present, it is a shared resource, and they cannot dedicate all their time and resources to the LBS program.</p> <p>An Indigenous stream organization provides a 1-800 number for assistance.</p>	<p>LBS programs require staff resources and specific expertise related to technology troubleshooting to support learners to participate successfully in blended and online learning. This capacity needs to be resourced to effectively support the delivery of online and blended learning.</p> <p>A resource could be offered at the provincial level (such as a 1-800 #). If offered through a third party, offering it during extended hours (evenings and weekends) would support learners in asynchronous programming.</p> <p>If offered at the program level, technical capacity building and training should be made available to program staff to support an even higher quality of service across the system (see opportunity section 3).</p>
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Online Learning Curricula, Assessments and Resources

Educators need support in redesigning content for an online environment so they can create positive learning experiences, intentionally integrate technology, and put the right structure and support in place to promote self-directed learning. Much of the traditional content and assessments require changes to make them effective and responsive for online learning. Additionally, educators do not have ready access to content and resources that is culturally appropriate and relevant for their learners. Since there is no shared repository of vetted content and resources, each service provider has to put in the effort to either find or develop their own. This approach is time-intensive and leads to duplication of effort at a large scale since different organizations and instructors are having to do this themselves.

Quotes from Consultations

- *It takes a long time to develop curricula. It is more manageable if we do it in partnership with other organizations.*
- *Online assessments are a lot more difficult...it is hard to assess levels of learners without those assessments.*
- *A big change has been the resources. We had all kinds of face-to-face resources. Then suddenly, without warning, we were scrambling to look for online resources... Some of my materials are not the quality that I had in the textbook.*
- *We need educator support in how to make the content dynamic - can't just transfer materials - need to make it interactive and so learners feel challenged.*
- *All the educators say they don't have enough time. They don't have time to look for them (resources), or they don't exist, so they reinvent them.*

Opportunity	Challenges	What is Already Being Done	Potential Actions
<p><i>Create and provide a shared repository of vetted, high-quality, open-sourced curricula and teaching resources for LBS educators across the province.</i></p>	<p>Online learning curricula and resources require different learning plans and designs in order to effectively deliver and facilitate engaging, dynamic and applied online learning. In-person materials and lesson plans cannot be applied without adaptation to the online environment.</p> <p>Curriculum development takes time and is resource intensive. These resources are often not available in small programs.</p> <p>In some cases, educators struggle with identifying copyrighted material and are unaware of what steps they may need to take to use information that they found online.</p> <p>Even those that understand this are often not aware of the steps that they would need to take to incorporate some materials while complying with different levels of copyright protocols.</p> <p>The Deaf, Francophone and Indigenous Streams have the additional requirements to source or develop culturally appropriate and accessible materials.</p>	<p>Some organizations are engaging in partnerships to build curricula. Some of these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPARK, a community-based program in Sudbury, was partnering with a local college to develop a digital literacy program for job seekers. Both partners developed the curricula. • Good Learning Anywhere partnered with the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition to develop a curriculum. • 8 colleges worked together to develop a 1.5 hour online orientation for incoming learners. They developed a template the colleges could modify for their use. • The Toronto regional network held a silver lining café with practitioners regularly to talk about what curriculum and learning resources were out there. 	<p>Centrally support and resource the development and sharing of high-quality online curricula and learning resources across the network. Curricula should ideally be vetted to ensure it meets specific standards and is informed by the LBS community.</p> <p>Centrally supported and intentional knowledge and resource sharing across the network will increase access and reduce duplication of efforts.</p>

<p><i>Develop learner assessments that can be effectively administered online and that align with the online curricula.</i></p>	<p>Educators have to find or develop new assessments that cover the materials and examples that are being taught online, which can be different from in-person instruction.</p> <p>But many issues arise with these methods. For example, some educators are unaware of what tools to use to assess speaking and listening skills and are unsure whether writing errors are due to knowledge gaps or inexperience with technology (e.g., typing). In face-to-face instruction, educators would depend on observation and open-ended responses. Now they are unsure how they can counter that without making it difficult for both the educator and the learner.</p> <p>A challenge that some educators have faced is that some learners can circumvent the intended goals of assessments (e.g., repeating online assessments without preparation to get perfect scores), making it hard to assess the learner's level.</p>	<p>Some organizations still try to schedule times to do assessments in person.</p> <p>Many have manually input traditional assessments into web-based documents and forms (e.g., Word, Google forms) to make it easier to share and administer online.</p> <p>Many providers have incorporated a variety of assessments to place students in classes and courses (e.g., Accuplacer), gauge their readiness to transition into secondary and postsecondary programs, and collect information about learner progress, goals and experiences (e.g., Canadian Adult Reading Assessment).</p> <p>ACE built formative assessments as a prerequisite for participating in online learning.</p>	<p>Centrally develop high-quality and effective online learning assessments, which align with the online LBS curricula.</p> <p>Central professional development support for educators related to challenges developing and administering assessments or supporting working groups (e.g., community of practice) to address specific challenges.</p>
<p><i>There is an opportunity for a comprehensive learning management system (LMS) with a</i></p>	<p>Many educators indicate that the shift to online learning has created additional work and effort that is often not acknowledged or accounted for.</p>	<p>Many e-channel providers and college sector organizations have access to learning management systems that provide a one-stop solution to track and manage all</p>	<p>There is an opportunity to provide an accessible tool with comprehensive features for educators to manage learner resources, administer</p>

<p><i>dedicated resource and community manager in the LBS program.</i></p>	<p>In addition to instruction, educators have to respond to emails, provide timely feedback, maintain documents and resources on online platforms, and foster online learner communities. Some individual instructors and organizations are unaware of tools to streamline this and are piecing together different resources and platforms as makeshift solutions to keep up with these tasks. These tasks put undue pressure on their limited time and capacity.</p>	<p>aspects of the learning process. They can store materials, conduct assessments, communicate with their learners and create groups and communities using a single platform.</p> <p>Some providers maintain multiple platforms as learners with different levels of digital and digital literacy skills have different comfort levels depending on the platform.</p>	<p>assessments, track progress, and support communication. Additionally, building integration between an LMS and CaMS would reduce the redundancy of entering information into multiple systems.</p> <p>A comprehensive LMS system that is vetted through official channels will also ensure that all sensitive information is securely stored and offers the opportunity to further automate processes with the CaMS database.</p> <p>Such a tool should be informed heavily by practitioners. Implementation of such a platform would benefit from professional development and technical assistance.</p>
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Professional Development for High Quality and Consistent Learner Experience

Professional development is an important input to support effective service delivery. This is especially true during times of significant technology and operational changes. The transition into online delivery placed new expectations and demands on educators related to managing technology tools, providing technology support, adapting curriculum and assessments in order to support and manage online learning. Additionally, digital norms are different online, and successfully engaging and interacting with learners requires new tools and skills. Many educators would benefit from professional development to build the skills required to deliver effective online learning. Training in digital and digital literacy skills and tools was not a mandated requirement or part of continuing professional development for many educators previously. Many educators have shared their interest in professional development to improve their course material and delivery. However, they cite a lack of guidance and time required to participate in professional development. Some providers have tried to support educators through internal resources and training conducted by support organizations.

Quotes from Consultations

- *Educators need time for PD. This needs to be acknowledged, and other things need to be taken off their plates so they can put in the time and effort that's needed to adjust to this change.*
- *Educators need to know how to use the technology themselves. They need to know how to teach online, with relevant best practices. Teaching online is very different from teaching in person. They need to know what tools are available and when/how to use them.*
- *I am allotted 2.5 days a week. In that time, I have to do all my planning, admin, prep, and teaching. If I'm also going to do training, I need a few more hours each week.*

Opportunity	Challenges	What is Already Being Done	Potential Actions
<p><i>Provide accessible provincial professional development for LBS educators focused on online and blended learning best practices.</i></p>	<p>Delivering online learning requires additional skills and practices to build trust and motivation and administer ongoing tech support. As a result, educators are interested in training to improve their knowledge of tools and delivery.</p> <p>Many educators cite that they often lack time to participate in training and seek guidance in tools and pedagogies that would enhance the experience for their learners.</p>	<p>Many educators have indicated that they have taught themselves how to use digital tools and they continue to learn and progress with the program.</p> <p>Each organization is responsible for planning their continuous improvement activities. Some of them took an opportunity to invite support organizations to present workshops on navigating digital tools and associated best practices.</p>	<p>Centrally offer and resource professional development through dedicated programming or through funding agreements.</p> <p>Compulsory funded professional development would also ensure a certain minimum level of skill development and training was delivered across the system.</p>
<p><i>Facilitate knowledge and best practice sharing to address common concerns and share best practices across the network.</i></p>	<p>There are numerous shared challenges across sectors and streams related to technical support, digital access, and effective delivery of online training.</p> <p>Administrators shared that they would enthusiastically take up opportunities to come together as a program and share challenges and best practices. But doing so consistently requires some structure and dedicated coordination and resources. Currently, providers have been stretching their capacity to do so informally.</p>	<p>Many providers have extended their resources and built informal connections to develop the capacity of learners and educators and make this transition more inclusive and accessible. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COFA arranges bi-weekly meetings to discuss relevant topics, share resources, and to provide organizations a space to network and connect with others. • Some community program staff have voluntarily connected to learn the things they needed: e.g., how to use Zoom, more 	<p>There is an opportunity to provide structured and dedicated knowledge and resource-sharing support across the network.</p> <p>Additionally, there is an opportunity to facilitate Communities of Practice (CoPs) to support educators and administrators to address specific issues, challenges or opportunities that they are experiencing.</p>

	<p>Educators from face-to-face delivery have suggested that they could learn a lot from the resources and experience that e-channel has garnered on how to best conduct online learning and assessments.</p>	<p>advanced features of Google Classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A volunteer facilitator convened a community of practice among school board and community program staff in Toronto. The facilitator's role was critical to generating a critical mass to make the group viable. 	
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System Infrastructure, Coordination and Enabling Environment

The LBS program exists to serve multiple goals and very diverse learners. There is an opportunity to enhance learner experience and overall program outcomes by enhancing the program's infrastructure and levers to enable, support and incentivize better learner experience and outcomes across the network. Specifically, this relates to how the program's structure, funding, and guidelines incentivize and support collaboration and alignment between organizations and streams, allocate resources for clients that require greater support, as well as centralized efforts to promote and market the program universally to Ontarians as a gateway to skills development and adult education.

Quotes from Consultations

- *There has to be a realistic funding model that reflects the real cost of these models. E-channel is currently priced at half the price per learner, and it's frustrating to run a fully online program that doesn't reflect the real cost of delivery.*
- *We're not delivering the same way, different methods and delivery but I am being evaluated the same as in the classroom.*
- *If there is ever an increase in funding, there is always an added expectation for additional learners, etc. Never is there a cost of living increase, or inflation. That sets us up for failure.*
- *Our community (Deaf stream) is different from other online learner programs. A hearing audience that has basic English literacy can have their needs addressed more easily and cheaper. Accessibility costs more but is critical to allow our learners to be engaged. It takes months to develop the content, put it on a storyboard, translate and quality check the ASL.*

Opportunity	Challenges	What is Already Being Done	Potential Actions
<p><i>Support and incentivize system alignment, especially between e-channel and non-e-channel providers. Learners should be able to access both services, in order to maximize their learning without duplicate registration and duplicate follow-up processes.</i></p>	<p>Learners can co-register in both an e-Channel program and a face-to-face LBS program as “shared learners”, providing additional online learning opportunities to meet their needs. However, under the current protocols, learners have to register with the same details a second time and respond to identical follow-up calls by the two networks. This repetition also increases the likelihood of people not responding to follow-up calls.</p> <p>E-channel has more experience and capacity currently to provide online learning assessments. E-channel also has established curricula designed for online learning.</p>	<p>There is an interest and appetite among e-channel and non-e-channel providers to increase collaboration and to better support learner outcomes.</p> <p>For example, e-channel has offered to conduct online assessments for face-to-face providers while letting them keep the credit. However, there is a limit to how many learners e-channel can support with this structure.</p>	<p>To enhance learner experience and incentivize collaboration across the system, there is an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Performance Management Framework (PMF) specially to eliminate redundancies in the learner registration and follow-up process, while still resourcing both e-channel and in-person providers to serve learners that benefit from dual enrollment. • Explore opportunities to resources e-channel to provide services to the rest of the LBS network that builds on their expertise and will complement and strengthen the rest of the service delivery network.
<p><i>Support enhanced coordination and cohesion among support organizations to support service planning and enhanced service delivery.</i></p>	<p>Through regular interaction and research projects, the support organizations are closely acquainted with the needs and challenges of service providers related to building digital capacity. They have built their own resources around digital tools and best practices for service providers to access. Individual</p>	<p>There is a desire among support organizations for greater collaboration and resource sharing to support the LBS network. There is some very informal knowledge and resource sharing occurring across support organizations at the initiative of staff. There is no formal sharing of resources</p>	<p>To reduce duplication and increase utilization of effective tools and resources and maximize the role of support organizations, there is an opportunity to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial planning and coordination across support

	<p>program delivery organizations often request support organizations to provide training, presentations, or webinars to assist them with digital tools and resources.</p> <p>Due to the guidelines that indicate who support organizations are permitted to support, a lot of good work is replicated and not shared.</p>	<p>or planning across support organizations occurring at the provincial level.</p>	<p>organizations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated resource sharing through an open-sourced shared platform to support knowledge sharing and elimination of duplication.
<p><i>Develop a centralized marketing campaign to increase awareness of the LBS program (consider rebranding the LBS program name).</i></p>	<p>The name 'Literacy and Basic Skills' can be stigmatizing and evoke a sense of shame. This can serve as a disincentive for people to engage for this reason.</p> <p>Organizations also lack the expertise and resources to effectively market the programs online.</p> <p>There is a shared perspective that a provincial marketing campaign would support the program's goals and complement the activities of local organizations.</p>	<p>Currently, organizations do their best to market and promote their program using social media and other tools.</p> <p>The indigenous stream started a podcast to promote the program, and explicitly highlight program goals.</p>	<p>To increase awareness and participation in the LBS program, there is an opportunity to work in collaboration with LBS educators and learners to inform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rebranding of the program, focusing on empowered adult learning and skill development for the future • Design and run centralized, province-wide marketing efforts to inform and engage adult learners.
<p><i>Review the LBS funding formula to align funding processes and allocations to be in proportion with clients' needs, support quality services for all learners, and to reflect the actual costs of online delivery</i></p>	<p>Many community sector programs have limited staff, rely heavily on volunteers and resources that are already overburdened. Even when funding is increased, it is always tied to additional expectations and not to ease the problems that already persist.</p>	<p>The organizations and streams that experience resource shortcomings, do their best to adapt resources and complement LBS program funding with other sources. Some of these initiatives include:</p>	<p>To ensure that LBS program is set up to provide high-quality services to all Ontarians, especially those with lowest skill levels and greatest level of need, there is an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a review across the

<p><i>and curriculum development.</i></p>	<p>Students in the Deaf stream often need extra support. However, there are not enough teachers to provide dedicated 1:1 support.</p> <p>Many workers in the community programs are unpaid volunteers and essential to the smooth running of operations. This includes volunteer administrators, tutors, and educators. During the pandemic, the community sector lost a significant number of volunteers who were not interested in transitioning to online delivery.</p> <p>Delivering online learning often requires additional staff resources to support learners' to troubleshoot technology.</p> <p>The average funding for each learner in e-channel is about half that of an in-person learner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Deaf stream develops most of its own content. • The Indigenous stream works with traditional knowledge keepers, elders, language holders to enhance learning content for Indigenous learners. • Francophone stream dedicates time and resources to creating new curricula or transplanting existing ones. 	<p>system to assess the actual costs of online and blended learning service delivery, especially for streams that serve learners with more complex needs, or those with lower skill levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the current LBS funding formula to allocate funding in proportion with the level of learner needs.
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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Consultations

Cathexis Consulting facilitated 16 online consultation sessions between January 2021 and March 2022 with the following stakeholders from across all LBS streams (Anglophone, Deaf, Francophone, Indigenous) and sectors (college, community, school board):

- 25 LBS program administrators (coordinators, managers, executive directors)
- 30 educators who deliver LBS programming
- 27 learners who have participated in LBS programming

Additional to these, 2 sessions were held with e-Channel providers and LBS Support Organizations: the first session in December 2021 with 17 attendees, the second session (co-facilitated with Purpose Co) in March 2022 with 19 attendees. Recruitment was led by Contact North | Contact Nord and AlphaPlus. The project partners also invited written submission/feedback.

Representatives from 14 organizations participated in the two consultations with e-Channel and Support Organizations:

1. ACE Distance/Online, College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC)
2. AlphaPlus
3. Centre franco Ontarien de ressources en alphabétisation (Centre FORA)
4. Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes (COFA)
5. Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO)
6. Contact North | Contact Nord (Contact North)
7. Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA)
8. Deaf Learn Now
9. Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI)
10. Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC)
11. Good Learning Anywhere (GLA)
12. Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO)
13. Le Programme de formation à distance (F@D)
14. The LearningHUB

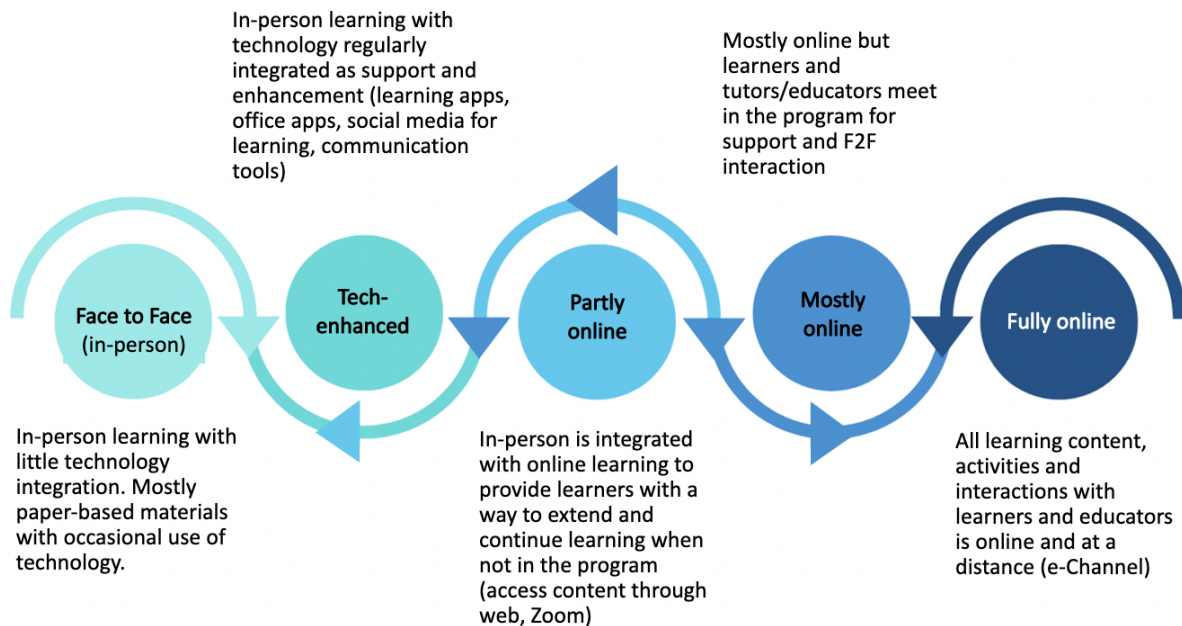
16 small online focus groups were held with participants from the following stakeholder groups and sectors:

Stakeholder group	Total # of participants	Sector			Stream				Example Job titles
		College	Community	School Board	Anglophone	Deaf	Francophone	Indigenous	
Administrators & Executive Directors	25	11	10	4	16	7	2	-	Administrator, Chair, Coordinator, Director, Executive Director, Manager, Officer
Educators	30	9	17	4	17	2	5	6	Coordinator, Online Educator, Instructor, Lecturer, Practitioner, Professor
Learners	27	10	14	3	16	6	4	1	N/A
Total	99	30	41	11	49	15	11	7	

Source: Cathexis Consulting

APPENDIX B. DIGITAL AND BLENDED LEARNING

Digital and blended learning are approaches to learning that make use of digital technology. We can think of learning as incorporating different levels of digital technology at different times. Traditionally, blended learning in LBS means learners are registered with both e-Channel and in-person agencies. In addition to this understanding of blended learning, educators and programs integrate technology for learning and with learners in many other ways. To better reflect the realities of program approaches, it is useful to think of blended learning as a continuum that includes both in-person learning and online distance learning with variations in-between. This continuum was used in consultations with educators and administrators/EDs.



Source: Cathexis Consulting