A GUIDEBOOK for
Place-Based Approaches to Literacy and Essential Skills Development

Our people. Our communities. Our future.

A Guidebook for Place-Based Approaches to Literacy and Essential Skills Development is a publication of Decoda Literacy Solutions, British Columbia's province-wide literacy organization. This guidebook provides information about how to conduct a place-based approach to create literacy and essential skills action plans.

The guidebook and its companion research document can be found on the Strengthening Rural Canada website at **strengtheningruralcanada.ca**

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ROADMAP FOR CANADA'S OFFICIAL
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EDUCATION
IMMIGRATION
COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

This guidebook is the result of the Strengthening Rural Canada-Renforcer les communautés rurales du Canada Project. The project was a comprehensive study about the human and social capital of rural, small town and remote communities in Canada. The initiative investigated the connections between human capital and rural growth in communities. Human capital is defined as the value of an individual's or population's skills, knowledge and experience to an organization, community or country.

In particular, the project examined how literacy and essential skills play a role in community development. For the research project, the communities of Gold River and Salmo in British Columbia, Rosetown and The Town of Hudson Bay in Saskatchewan, and Hearst and Kapuskasing in Ontario prepared literacy and essential skills plans. The Ontario communities are mainly Francophone.

This guidebook describes the process that these pilot communities used for literacy and essential skills planning over the course of a year. Also, the project and this guidebook were informed by annual place-based community planning for literacy in over one hundred communities in British Columbia. That planning process has been going on since 2004.

> *Literacy is a key lever of change and a practical tool of empowerment on each of the three main pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development and environmental protection.*
>
> — Kofi Anan, former Secretary General of the United Nations

The Place-Based Approach and Community Planning

Literacy and essential skills are "joined up" to many aspects of the lives of individuals and communities. In fact, literacy is connected to health, having enough to eat, employment, family well-being, further education, and justice. To support literacy effectively we need to place it in the context of community and connect it with real life issues and events. To resolve complex community issues, we need to think about what role skill development plays. To act on these "joined up" issues we need to join up community agencies, organizations, and institutions that focus on them, providing a place and opportunity to pool resources as well as to experience and view things through a literacy lens.

Place-based approaches assume that the community matters and that the residents are the key to understanding and addressing their issues. Large variations exist between communities in terms of their local economies, industry composition, human capital, resources and assets. These variations are often attributed to natural resources, historical developments and socioeconomic conditions. Policy analysts, practitioners and residents alike are increasingly putting a higher value on the importance of "place" as the organizing principle and unit of analysis for social and economic change. Place-based approaches are increasingly being seen as effective strategies for meeting the needs of local communities.

Place-based approaches are well suited for rural communities. While many rural communities lack certain kinds of assets that are often located in larger cities, they are usually able to mobilize more quickly and with greater collective efficacy. In most rural communities, residents take on multiple roles. Rural communities often have stronger cultural identities and higher levels of social capital which can help foster collective actions. In many ways, it is easier for rural communities to organize themselves and bring people together towards a common goal. Given the nature of rural communities, place-based approaches offer a relevant and practical framework that can be aligned with their unique assets, socioeconomic conditions and identities.

Central to place-based thinking is the idea that in order to improve the lives of individuals and families, it is essential to strengthen the community in which they live. Place-based approaches have several key characteristics which include:

- ► multi-sectoral stakeholders,
- ► leverage of local knowledge and assets,
- ► shared stakeholder ownership,
- ► pooled resources, and
- ► entwined accountability.

Decision-making and other responsibilities are often diffused and shared at many different levels. This can make the process more challenging because consensus is often difficult, requiring compromises and trade-offs. However, it is ultimately the degree of collaboration and stakeholder engagement that is the key to securing community buy-in and improving the effectiveness of the initiative. Working with a variety of actors also means a certain level of flexibility must be practiced, as place-based initiatives often follow an emergent learning process that evolves and shifts as they progress.

> **What is a Community?**
>
> **"A community is a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographic locations or settings."**
>
> — Canadian Institute for Health Information
>
> **Put much more simply, the Zulu people share the philosophy of "Ubuntu" which states that "I am what I am because of who we all are."**

Community planning is an important part of place-based approaches. It provides a way to:

► Build and strengthen relationships with different community stakeholders.

► Provide a platform for different types of stakeholders to express their particular interests and concerns to one another, allowing conflicting views to be heard and debated.

► Build consensus on priorities that can guide later implementation steps.

► Allow community stakeholders to discover opportunities to assemble complementary resources and expertise, thus providing a stronger foundation for plan implementation.

► Draw attention to the community and its issues among larger prospective internal and external stakeholders.

> **All of us can reach entirely new levels of possibility together, possibilities that are not possible from soapbox rhetoric. To achieve this we need to begin these conversations about purpose and shared significance and commit to staying in them. As we stay in the conversation we will start to work together rather than trying to convince each other of who has more of the truth. We are capable of creating wonderful and vibrant communities when we discover what dreams of possibility we share.**
>
> — Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers

About Literacy and Essential Skills

With the emergence of the "new knowledge economy," globalization, and advances in technology and communications, our understanding of literacy has changed considerably over the last two or three decades. It means something very different to be literate in the digital age of early 21st century North America than it did in the Canadian resource-based economy – different skills and knowledge sets beyond print literacy are now required. Indeed, researchers indicate that analytical skill and the ability to work in heterogeneous groups are literacy skills (also called basic/essential/key competencies) that are at least as or more important than reading in today's world.

The most commonly accepted definition of literacy is this one from UNESCO: "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts." Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society.

Literacy and essential skills are the basic skills necessary in order to succeed at home, at work and in the community. They are foundational. They make other learning possible, such as gaining technical skills or various workplace-specific skills needed on a job site. Essential skills are transferable. Once developed, essential skills can be used in many different environments. They allow us to perform daily tasks, help us become more adaptable to change, and enable us to be fully engaged in the world around us. The Canadian government developed the framework of essential skills. The nine essential skills that have been identified so far are:

WHEN WE INCREASE LITERACY,
WE CREATE JOBS.

Improve health. Reduce crime. Build stronger families. Make safer communities. Improving your literacy helps you be a smarter shopper. A safer driver. A better parent. A happier person.

When we choose to make literacy a priority in our community, good things happen.

- ► **Reading Text** - reading different types of material such as notes, letters, memos, manuals, specifications, books, reports and journals;

- ► **Document Use** - reading tables, graphs, lists, blueprints, drawings, signs, labels, equipment gauges, maps, clocks;

- ► **Numeracy** - using numbers to perform calculating and estimating tasks such as handling cash, budgeting, measuring and analyzing;

- ► **Writing** - doing tasks such as filling in forms, writing text and using computers to write;

- ► **Oral Communication** - using speech to exchange ideas and information with others;

- ► **Working with Others** - doing tasks with stakeholders or in a team;

- ► **Continuous Learning** - participating in an ongoing process of building skills and knowledge;

- ► **Thinking Skills** - knowing how to problem solve, make decisions, plan and organize tasks, find information and make good use of memory;

- ► **Computer Use** - working with computers from entering information, to knowing a software package, to managing a network, to analyzing and designing systems.

A renewed and expanded vision of literacy is essential for success. Such renewed vision admits that literacy is not confined to any particular age (childhood or adulthood), institution (i.e., the school system) or sector (e.g., education); that it is related to various dimensions of personal and social life and development; that it embraces a wide range of scenarios, strategies and means; and that it is a lifelong learning process.

— United Nations

About Collaboration

The place-based approach requires collaboration and so does making a community plan. Collaboration has been defined as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (Gray, 1989).

But collaborations can come with challenges. Because organizations and individuals come with their own ways of thinking about the assets and challenges of the community, working together successfully takes time and thought. Strengthening and building relationships is integral to the planning process. Cultivating strong relationships enables all of us to appreciate the power of working together.

Collaborative action is built by:

► Learning how community groups are already inter-related and how they currently work together.

► Listening carefully to what everyone says regarding the potential of working together and how people in the community can benefit from that.

► Participating in the work arising from discussions at the community table.

► Understanding that everyone's knowledge about issues and ideas can be brought together in a way that can make a difference.

> *We spent a couple of years learning from each other and that's the key if you are starting from square one. We all have something to teach and we all have something to learn. And a big part of the learning is trust and context — understanding where everyone is coming from.*
>
> —Tracy Spannier, Community Literacy Coordinator, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, Revelstoke

Collaborating requires knowledge of consensus building and agreement about how decisions will be made. In order to reach agreement, participants will need:

▶ A willingness to listen to all points of view;

▶ Respect for diversity and the richness that it brings to community work;

▶ An appreciation of minority viewpoints and of the importance of including people and groups who are the hardest to reach;

▶ An understanding of community;

▶ A commitment to the integrity of the process;

▶ An ability to step back and trust the group;

▶ A commitment to maintaining the unity of the group, and;

▶ A willingness to commit to the beliefs and values of a collaborative process.

> *Be rigid in vision and goals, but flexible in strategy: Collective impact initiatives succeed when they are rigorous in agreeing to what they will accomplish, but adaptive and flexible with strategies to accomplish those goals.*
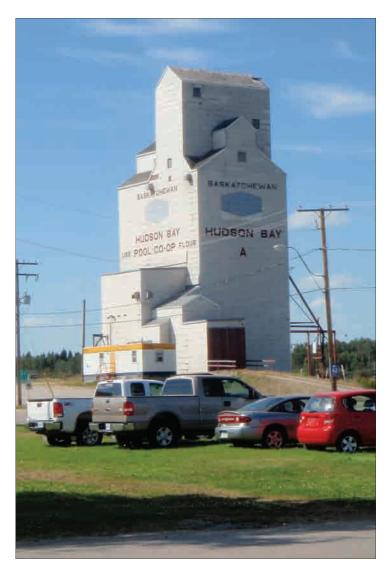>
> — Franklin County Communities that Care Coalition

About Evaluation

It's important to not only track the outcomes and impact that result from the specific goals and actions in the community plan but to track the growth and impact of the planning process itself. To do this, outcomes and indicators need to be established at the beginning.

The following indicators of success relate to the process of place-based planning and acting:

1 Community connections are created.

   ► How many people are talking about/engaged in discussions about literacy?
   ► Who are they and where are they coming from? (employment, education, health, library services, justice)
   ► What is the growth of the conversation over time? Does the conversation move from a focus on one age group or segment of the population to others, for example?
   ► How many relationships/partnerships are developed for delivering initiatives?
   ► How many connections are there between the planning task group and various other groups in the community?

2 Actions are identified to improve the community and learning in the community.

   ► How many ideas for improving community and learning are generated?
   ► How many ideas are feasible? How many can actually be implemented?
   ► What is the depth and breadth of ideas? What is the level of impact of ideas?

3 Awareness is created about literacy and essential skills and the importance of continuous learning.

- ► What are some examples of comments and actions that indicate increased understanding?
- ► How many learning events (eg: Family Literacy Day) have taken place?
- ► How many people attended learning events?

Longer term outcomes and indicators that are more about the effectiveness of supporting literacy development could be the following:

1 People in communities participate in literacy and essential skill opportunities.

- ► How many literacy and essential skill programs are there in the community?
- ► What are the types and variety of literacy and essential skill programs in the community?
- ► How many people (by age groupings) are participating in programs?

2 Levels of literacy and essential skills are increased in communities.

- ► What are some examples of comments and actions that indicate that people have stronger skills?
- ► Are programs reporting increased progress for individuals?
- ► Are more people employed in the community?

How to Create a Community Literacy and Essential Skills Plan

Key Roles

You will need to have a guiding group which will be called the **task group** throughout this guidebook. Essentially the work of the task group is about guiding the process of creating a community plan and monitoring progress toward the goals of that plan. The task group should be made up of individuals who are interested in ensuring a collaborative process that can identify community problems, as well as creative ways to solve them.

The task group will need to hire or identify someone who can coordinate its work. This person will be called the **planning coordinator** throughout this guidebook. The planning coordinator facilitates the discussions of the task group and ensures that the actions identified by the task group are carried out.

The task group will need to choose an organization that can receive and manage any available funds for the planning process. This organization will be called the **steward organization** throughout this guidebook. The steward organization will formally hire or contract the planning coordinator. The steward organization is a member of the task group and participates in the thinking about the community plan.

Deciding on a Process

This guidebook is provided for… well, guidance. Each community will determine a process that works best for it. And the process is as important as the plan itself. Bringing people together to discuss the community and its needs reinforces and creates the relationships required to carry out actions. Without those relationships and the commitment to acting on the plan, it is difficult to carry out the goals. In many ways, the plan is the tool that defines and facilitates the process of people working together.

The task group and planning coordinator will need to decide on a process for getting community input and creating a plan. Ideas for getting input are outlined in the next section. A possible timeline is shown on the next page.

Possible Timeline

September, October	Meet with project stakeholders and form a task group
November	Lay out process for development of community plan
December	Invitation to first community meeting
January	First community meeting
February	Meetings with individuals and interest groups
March	Second community meeting
April	Draft plan
May	Community input
June	Final Draft of plan — Celebrate

Guiding Principles for Making a Community Plan

Community collaboration work can feel (and be) quite messy and ambiguous, especially at the beginning when no clear directions have been set yet. The task group will need to set some guiding principles for how it is going to work. In particular, these principles will probably include some thinking about how decisions will be made and how people's ideas will be treated. Experience indicates that it is best to:

1 Build on what you've got. The community will have many assets that include people, organizations, programs, buildings and possibly other plans.

2 Focus on what you need. What would be helpful to reach the goals of the community and support the people who live there?

3 Integrate and embed literacy and essential skills and other skill development into other community issues. Literacy is joined to many aspects of community life and to assisting in the resolution of community issues. How can it be embedded as part of various solutions?

4 Think about everybody in the community; all ages, all socio-economic groups. Literacy is developed throughout life; consider everyone and determine where there is the most need to create supports.

5 Consider that we learn much of what we know and gain many skills outside of formal learning contexts. Informal learning happens as we conduct our day to day business, in conversations or by watching others. We can be more intentional about that kind of learning when we realize the value of it. Learning also happens in non-formal contexts — courses and instruction that are outside of credentialed courses.

Civil society has always been a crucial stakeholder in designing flexible programs for specific groups at the community level and in lobbying for the interests of vulnerable populations. After all, it is in communities themselves that literacy is practiced and sustained. Therefore, community engagement is essential to creating an environment in which literacy programs can be successful.

— Canadian Council of the Ministers of Education

Linking Literacy and Essential Skills to Social and Economic Capital

As people start discussing and planning, they may identify issues that don't seem connected to literacy and essential skills. However, when you look at these issues in more depth, with a "literacy lens," you may find that literacy and essential skills connects with just about everything that people put on the table. Ask the question: what skills are needed to solve this problem or accomplish this goal?

In one community, the main issue was the decline of the downtown core. The group thought about what it would take to revitalize their main street. They needed small businesses to move into the empty buildings. They needed to find people who were entrepreneurial. They happened to have some retired seniors who had been entrepreneurs. This led to a discussion about a mentorship program which would match seniors with youth to learn the skills they would need to start their own businesses.

In several communities, the main concern was the low number of youth who were volunteering. The community's volunteer base was dwindling because the seniors were aging out and the youth were not stepping up. They decided on a volunteer awareness campaign highlighting the many opportunities to learn skills and get credits towards high school graduation. They created a list of volunteer positions that required various skills and levels of commitment.

One community decided that they needed to create on-line shopping opportunities with value-added products, providing for a niche market. When thinking about this with skill development in mind, they listed many technology skills as essential along with document use; problem solving; team work and collaboration; and strong communication and marketing skills.

Getting Input from Community Members

Planning for community change involves many different people. You will need as many organizations, groups and interested individuals as possible at the table in order to find solutions for the whole community.

Multi-sector groups tell their individual stories and listen to understand the other sectors' points of view. The conversations are divergent and sometimes heated but most often they lead to good ideas that the whole community can embrace.

Consider who to talk with and invite to the meetings. Think about people who are productive, creative and committed to realizing change. Think of organizations that can bring resources to the table. Identify the people who are in need and what issues they experience. Think about who cares and who should care. Think about how you can consult with people who do not usually get asked. Consider all age groups – what would high school students say about what the community needs to be successful? What would they say about learning, literacy and skills? Ask from the beginning, "What gifts do you bring, what do you need and why is it important that you are here?"

Use multiple ways to get information and points of view. Hold community forums. Meet with smaller interest groups and individuals who care about the community and want to explore how skill development can strengthen the community. Conduct a community survey so that you get ideas from those who you can't reach in person. Finalize the ideas and actions that you have come up with collectively.

Here is an exercise to help you think about possible participants in the planning process.

Top 100 Stakeholders Exercise

1 Brainstorm your stakeholder list and put into 4 sector quadrants:

   ► business,

   ► government,

   ► voluntary,

   ► people affected by issue.

2 Rank your list by people – identify the top three people in each sector:

   ► people your group knows best,

   ► people or organizations that can contribute to the vision,

   ► people or organizations who are ready to be a part of the collaboration.

3 Consider who to approach first:

   ► people who you know will say yes,

   ► people with significant influence,
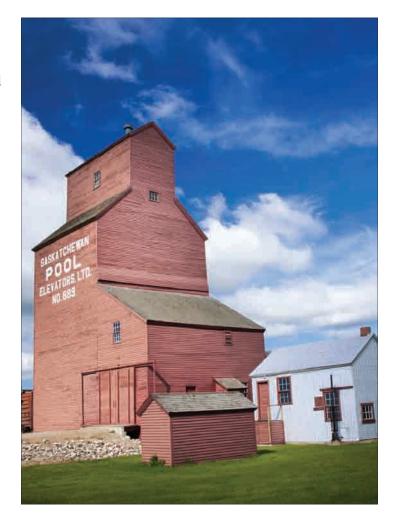
   ► people who are known for taking action.

Guiding Questions for Discussion

During discussions with community members, in groups or with individuals, there are three major questions that could lead to action. These are:

1 What are our issues?

2 How can we solve them?

3 What role does skill development play?

Other questions that are useful to facilitate discussion and draw out ideas are:

► What's working well?
► What isn't working well?
► Where would we like this community to be in 5 years?
► If you were writing to a friend in 10 years, what would you want to tell them about your community?
► What are our goals and actions for the coming year?
► What are the difficulties related to reaching those goals or performing those actions?
► What would help?
► What are the important collaborations?
► Who's not here and should be? How can we engage them?

> *Our plan is not doing more; it is about pulling together and having respect for the work that has already been done. We need to be smarter and say to ourselves that we could do even more if we do it differently.*
>
> — Sheila Rooney, Retired Superintendent of Schools, Burnaby School District

Tips for Facilitation

The Latin root of *facilitate* means "to enable, to make easy." Facilitators enable groups and organizations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. The facilitator's job is to support everyone to do their best thinking and practice. To do this, facilitators encourage full participation, promote mutual understanding and cultivate shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best thinking, facilitators enable group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements (Kaner, 2007).

Facilitators guide the process; they do not create the content. They need to establish an environment where it is safe - a place where people can learn from others, voice their fears, find a common language, and be able to build and implement together. They need to understand the complexity of the issue and how things are interrelated. Good facilitators have the ability to see and nurture patterns.

Some of the actions and responsibilities of facilitators are to:

► Create an agenda and talk about the purpose of the meeting - a community movement for change, not just to decide on a specific project.

► Ask the questions "What is the change you want to see?" and "Why is it important that you are here?"

► Explain the process of open discussion and rules of engagement - respectful discourse even when there is disagreement, one person talks while the rest listen, assumptions will be unpacked and either verified or discarded.

► Remember that some people are more comfortable writing their thoughts down first. Allow time for this.

► Include time for sharing of pairs and triads before reconvening the big group.

► Acknowledge and nurture the tension between process and action.

► Try to get the group to come up with "early wins" or "low hanging fruit" to establish momentum.

► End with a call to action.

> *Like a tide that lifts all boats, community conversations enable real and lasting community change.*
>
> — Paul Born

Following are some facilitation exercises that might assist you in community or small group meetings.

Future Search Meetings Exercise

Using flipcharts and markers in small groups, create mind maps (diagrams used to visually organize information). A mind map is often created around a single concept, drawn as an image in the center of a blank page, to which associated representations of ideas such as images, words and parts of words are added.

1 Focus on the Past: what are some milestones (personal, local, or global) that have impacted the community?

2 Focus on the Present:

   ► What trends have you noticed, what's happening in your community?
   ► What is the current state of the community?

3 Ideal Future Brain Storming:

   ► What is your vision of the ideal future and skills development related to it?
   ► What are some ideal future scenarios for…?

4 Share your mind maps with the bigger group. Identify the common ground and connect the things that are interrelated.

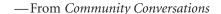5 Make recommendations for change.

6 Start an action plan.

—From *Community Conversations*

Give Voice to Photos Exercise

The 3 goals of this exercise are:

► To enable people to record and reflect on their community's strengths and problems;

► To promote dialogue about important issues;

► To come up with some actions.

Ask people to take pictures of the community ahead of time, letting them know the goals of the exercise. Ask them bring the photos to the community meeting. This can be on a digital device. Break up into small groups and talk about the pictures and why people picked the ones they did. This helps to start the conversation about what you already have in your community and what you need. Find common themes in the small groups and then pick 3 to share with the larger group. Find common themes and patterns in the larger group. Ask for recommendations of actions to be taken.

— From *Community Conversations*

TRIZ Exercise

Every act of creation is first an act of destruction. — Pablo Picasso

You can clear space for innovation by helping a group let go of what is limiting its current growth. **TRIZ** makes it possible to challenge sacred cows safely and encourages heretical thinking. The question *"What must we **stop doing** to make progress on our deepest purpose?"* induces fun yet very courageous conversations. Since laughter often erupts, issues that are otherwise taboo get a chance to be aired and confronted. With creative destruction come opportunities for renewal as local action and innovation rush in to fill the vacuum. Whoosh!

In small groups with flipchart paper:

1 Make a list of all you can do to make sure that you achieve the worst result imaginable with respect to skill development or a community issue.

2 Go down this list item by item and ask yourselves, 'Is there anything that we are currently doing that in any way, shape, or form resembles this item?' Be brutally honest to make a second list of all your counterproductive activities/programs/procedures.

3 Go through the items on your second list and decide what first steps will help you stop what you know creates undesirable results?

— From *Liberating Structures*

Writing the Plan

The content of the community plan will obviously vary considerably depending on the current assets and needs of each community. In a similar way, the layout of the plan will vary. However, there are some common elements for community plans which make it easier for everyone, including potential funders, to understand them. Following are some guiding questions and tips for clear writing that will assist you to include important elements.

1 The People:

    a) Who took part in the task group and community discussions?

    b) Briefly, what was the process used to make the plan?

2 Community context:

    a) Describe your community in one or two short paragraphs (e.g. size, economy, demographics, and trends).

    b) Are there any major changes that have taken place over the last few years that impact the ability of the community to support literacy and skills development – positive or negative?

    c) What is working well? This does not need to be – nor should be – a comprehensive asset list, but a review of what the community can build from.

3 Community development and literacy collaboration:

    a) What essential collaborations already exist to support literacy and skills development?

    b) What are some important collaborations that need to take place in order to support literacy and skills development?

4 Goals and actions:

    a) What are the priorities, goals or objectives that the community wants to address?

    b) What actions will be taken to reach these? What organizations, groups, or individuals will participate in these actions?

    c) What are the expected outcomes of these actions?

5 Indications of success:

    a) Has the planning process made a difference to the community?

    b) How will you know if your actions are making a difference?

Examples of Ways to Lay Out Goals, Actions and Outcomes

There are many ways to lay out the goals, actions and outcomes of a plan. Some people prefer logic models, others prefer tables and some prefer a vertical descriptive layout. There is no one right way to do this, but it needs to make sense to people in the community and to those who will be performing the actions.

Here are some of the ways that people have designed their plans. See examples 1, 2 and 3.

Example 1: Themes, Issues, Strategies…

Themes	Issues	Strategies	Partners	Actions	Goals
Essential skills development at an early age.	• Low creativity, problem solving and math skills in younger children. • Shift work makes it difficult for parents. • Need to increase awareness of early years programing. People who often need programs the most do not attend.	• Encourage parents to participate in school programs. • Encourage family literacy and involvement. • Encourage parents to balance technology in the early years. • Grandparent mentoring program & Family Literacy Training.	Families, School Division, Day Care, Stepping Stones Playschool, Early Ages groups, Family and Support Centre and Interagency committee.	Encourage communication & participation between groups and parents by connecting them through community calendar, local radio and newspaper. Expand on current mentorship program at High School to include seniors and community elders. Celebrate grandparent day through the mentorship program.	Parents involved in early years' development. Higher participation in early years programing. Children entering school with a good start on essential skills development. Mentorship program expanded to include seniors.

Example 2: Logic Model

INPUT	
• Staff time	• Curriculum
• Partners	• Travel
• Funding	• Publications
• Youth	• Volunteers

OUTPUTS	
Activities	**Participation**
Educational activities for youth	Older Youth
Entrepreneurial skill development	Adult Mentors
IT	College
Trades	High School

OUTCOMES — IMPACT		
Short	**Medium**	**Long**
Youth become involved in the educational activities	Youth demonstrate entrepreneurial skills	Increase in small businesses
Adults become involved in mentoring	Cohort of entrepreneurial mentors	Employment in the tech field
College provides IT program	Youth have IT skills and credentials	Employment in trades
College provides pre trades programs in high school	Youth have trade skills and credentials	

Assumptions
Youth are interested in learning these skills.

External Factors
School teachers don't have time to include these extras in the school curriculum.
Adults don't have time to be mentors.
College has to have a minimum number of students to run programs.

Example 3: List of Partners, Actions, and Outcomes

Strategy: Introduce Immigrants to Driving Laws
Partners: Chamber of Commerce, Literacy Committee, Age Friendly Committee

Actions:

1 Obtain information from the drivers' licensing and vehicle registration company to see if they have any documents written in different languages that could be passed on to immigrants that are looking to obtain their driver's license.

2 If documents already exist, ensure that they are ordered for the community and are made available to individuals who require them.

3 If documents do not exist, look for options to create the required documents.

4 Find a volunteer who can assist people to find driving information and get driver's licenses.

Outcomes:

1 Immigrants will find it easier to get their driver's license which will make them more available to the work force.

2 They will be practising their English skills more which will also help them in the work force.

Tips for Clear Writing

Here are some guidelines and tips to ensure your plan is easy to read and understand.

1 Limit the length of your plan (10-20 pages is ideal).

2 Consider your audience: The plan is primarily for community members; however, it may also be read by possible funders.

- ► Design and write the document in a way that best serves the reader.
- ► Resist the urge to sound overly formal.
- ► Omit unnecessary detail.
- ► Use stories and examples to help explain the text.

3 Use a reader friendly design:

- ► Make a table of contents.
- ► Use at least 10 to 12-point type for text and a readable font.
- ► Leave plenty of white space on the page.
- ► Use highlighting techniques such as bold, italics, bullets and numbering.
- ► Use pictures, diagrams, tables, and charts as needed to help explain the text.

4 Organize your work:

- ► Sequence the parts logically.
- ► Use headings for the main sections and subsections.

5 Keep the language simple:

- ► Use short and medium-length sentences.
- ► Use the active voice.
- ► Use familiar words – ones that are simple and direct.
- ► Avoid jargon and the overuse of acronyms.
- ► Omit unnecessary words.

Be sure to get someone to proofread your plan when you have a draft ready.

> *While we weren't sure what the plan was going to look like, we knew we had to figure it out as a community — as a group. It was important that we built the understanding of what we were undertaking together.*
>
> — Rod Allen, Former Superintendent of Schools, Bulkley Valley School District

Community Stories

The important overall outcome of place-based planning, of course, is about how the issue that is central to the plan is addressed – in this case, the issue of improving literacy and essential skills. Here are some stories from communities that have participated in community literacy planning. These stories are about the actions that have been the result of community members talking and working together to create an annual plan for literacy and skill development. Some of these communities have been engaged in annual planning for several years in British Columbia. This iterative planning has deepened relationships and broadened actions. Some of the stories are from the communities that took part in the Strengthening Rural Canada pilot project for one year.

Hornby Island, BC

Hornby Island is a small, remote community off the east coast of Vancouver Island. Two ferry rides are required to get on and off the island. Hornby has an aging population, lack of affordable year-round housing and limited job opportunities, many of which are seasonal. There is potential for a trades industry on the island but there are multiple barriers to establishing it; transportation to training facilities is one of them.
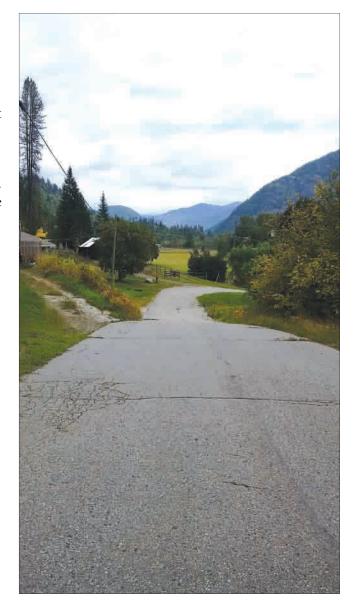
Hornby Island Education Society (HIES), Hornby Island Economic Enhancement Corporation (HIEEC), and North Island College (NIC) partnered to do a feasibility study on providing a carpentry course on the island. It included an overall assessment of whether there was a need for such a course and whether there was commitment from the partners, the community and individuals interested in taking the course. The target groups were the unemployed and the underemployed with a high school diploma or equivalent. Over 20 people showed up to the

orientation and two more partners joined in the pilot. The Hornby Island Athletic Association provided workshop space in their building and the Islanders' Secure Land Association provided a worksite, a first year project (a small house) and materials.

Twelve students enrolled in their first year of the Red Seal Carpentry Course. They were supported by HIES with the literacy planning coordinator helping them apply to NIC, helping them with the equivalency testing and entrance exams by providing a math tutor, and helping them access financial aid. In addition, due to Hornby's seasonal economy, NIC agreed to split the course into two sessions to accommodate students' working schedules.

In the end, nine students completed the program and the majority are now employed locally. There is a noticeable increase in their self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Organic mentorships have been formed in the work environment. And a new house has been built. Some of the students would like to continue with the 4-year certification program. Also, there has been interest expressed among some long-time carpenters for the course material to be available in order to challenge the Red Seal Certification.

There has been a recent trend among young families to leave the island due to the high cost of living, unstable employment and lack of affordable housing. Making training accessible and affordable (or free) to a younger work force has direct and measurable benefits which resonate deep into the community, keeping schools and businesses open, as well as infrastructure and ferries in service.

Training nine people in a remote community of 900 permanent residents (25% over 60 years of age) equals a 1% increase in skilled labour, employability, and translates directly to economic enhancement and sustainability for the entire community.
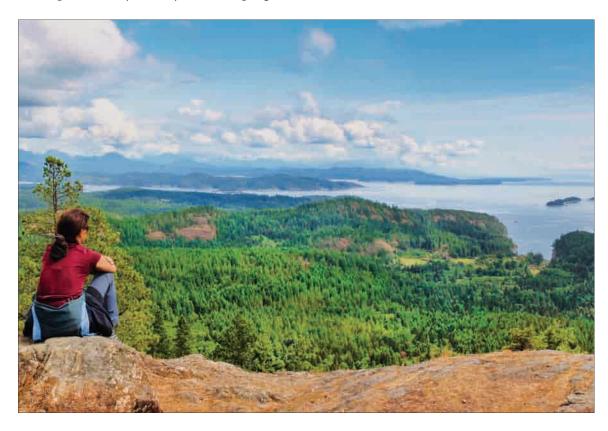
Comox Valley, BC

The Comox Valley is a region of over 63,000 people on the east coast of Vancouver Island. It includes the city of Courtenay, the town of Comox, the village of Cumberland, and the unincorporated settlements of Royston, Union Bay, Fanny Bay, Black Creek and Merville.

During the 1990s, the region was one of the fastest growing in British Columbia, although the growth rate between 2001 and 2006 has averaged just 2.0% annually. The growth industries are tourism and construction, with the Canadian Forces in the form of CFB Comox having long provided significant economic stability since the decline of logging and mining in the region after the 1960s and fishing in the 1990s. The service sector accounts for over 50% of employment.

Originally developed as an agricultural settlement in the 1860s in the wake of the Fraser Gold Rush, the area became the centre of one of the British Empire's largest private railway concerns, the Comox Logging & Railway Company. For many years, logging was the single largest industry. Today, the wealth of the region is in its combined natural beauty, relatively mild climate and rich cultural scene.

Members of the community literacy task group in the Comox Valley noticed that many young mothers were waiting at the school or bus stop for their children. They thought that there might be an opportunity to support further learning for some of those young parents. They developed a family literacy outreach program.

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

► Connect adults and families to community social and literacy supports;

► Connect adults to formal and non-formal literacy practitioners and their respective learning organizations and;

► Increase learner confidence to pursue further learning and education by creating a positive learning experience.

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

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

Haida Gwaii, BC

Haida Gwaii consists of six main communities widely spread apart – Queen Charlotte, Skidegate, Port Clements, Masset and Old Massett on Graham Island and Sandspit, isolated on Moresby Island. There is no public transportation on the islands and commuting between the two islands involves a ½ hour user-paid ferry service. Sandspit has the fewest facilities with no banking, no medical centre and no major shopping facilities.
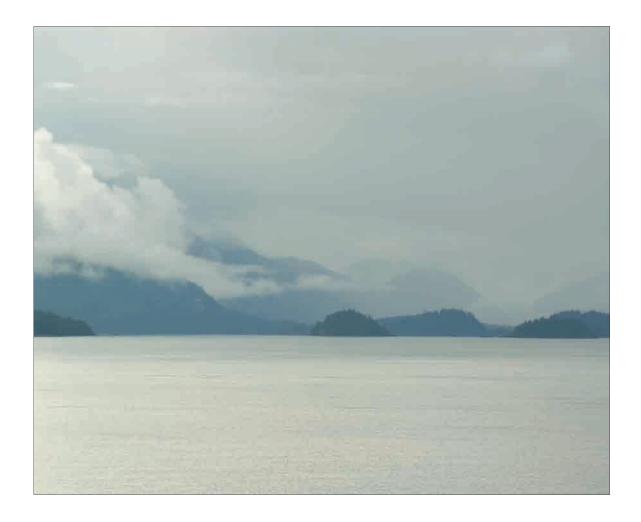
Haida Gwaii is also isolated from the rest of the province. It is a 6-hour ferry ride from Prince Rupert, the closest northern community, or a two-hour flight south to Vancouver. Food and mail come by ferry twice a week.

The islands' population is down to 4,300, a 9% decrease from the 2006 Statistics Canada census figure. More families have moved away in order to seek better job prospects. This in turn affects the local economy and school enrolment. School District 50 remains one of the smallest school districts in British Columbia, with approximately 600 students spread over the small communities.

When the Queen Charlotte community was slated to have a new hospital, there were insufficient local workers who had the skills to do the plumbing and carpentry work. There were no electricians and no Class 1 commercial truck drivers. Eighty percent of the workers on the job site were from off-island. This three-year hospital construction project did not help elevate job opportunities for the people of Haida Gwaii.

To address this lack of employment readiness, Literacy Haida Gwaii changed the name of their literacy task group to The Community Coalition. This allowed them to pursue wider outreach and communicate and involve many more agencies. They discussed how in-kind partnerships can make a difference and how it is as important as funding dollars in addressing community literacy.

As a result of this coalition, the School District piloted a trades credit course in one high school in partnership with Northwest Community College. They witnessed the progress and growth of "hard to reach" youth. The students, who in the past, came in late or didn't show up at all, who had little motivation and passion, were showing up early. These students showed strong drive to finish their wooden shed projects, even putting in extra time to understand the math and carpentry skills. Because of this success, the 2nd high school is slated to start a similar course in September.

The Early Childhood Development Committee was concerned about the lack of preschool daycare facilities in Masset and the need to help train more Early Childhood Educator (ECE) licensed professionals. They partnered with The Community Coalition, Success by Six, Child Care Resource and Referral, and Gwaii Trust. The partners paid Northwest Community College to bring an instructor in to run an ECE course. They subsidized the tuition fee for 8 students who are now all working in daycare facilities.

The Community Coalition is in the beginning stages of developing mentorship and job shadowing programs as well.

Atlin, BC

Atlin is a small, isolated community in the northwest corner of British Columbia, on the traditional lands of the Taku River Tlingit. Glacial fed Atlin Lake is approximately 100 miles long, in a wide wilderness valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Atlin is a 2-hour drive from Whitehorse, Yukon. The current population is approximately 400 full time residents. During the Klondike Gold Rush of 1889, the population was approximately 10,000. Many buildings from that era still exist. Though mining, commercial fishing and tourism underpin the economy of Atlin, there is a large and very influential population of artists, artisans, and authors.

There is a health centre, schools, a government agency, RCMP detachment, ambulance service, and volunteer firefighters. There are 2 grocery stores and 3 restaurants.

Culture in the region is diverse. The Taku River Tlingit live on and off reserve. A small percentage of the community is comprised of transient professionals, such as RCMP officers, medical professionals and teachers who call Atlin home for a few years.

Previously, Atlin did not provide any extra-curricular activities for children between the ages of 8 and 12 years. The literacy task group, Literacy Now, decided to meet this need (for girls) by running a 'Girls Only Book Club'. In order to bring this about Literacy Now collaborated with Atlin School Teachers, Tlingit Family Learning Centre, Atlin Teen Centre and parents.

The purpose of the "Girls Only Book Club" was to introduce the 'classics.' Now that the girls have read numerous classics, they are reading other books. The girls have focused on new vocabulary words and their definitions. There have been productive discussions allowing the girls to develop and use their critical thinking skills.

Last September the school principal said there was a bullying situation and suggested some books to read. The girls read and discussed the books, becoming more aware of the negative effects of bullying.

Literacy Now has provided all of the reading material for this club. When the books are read, the girls add them to their own personal libraries.

Rosetown, Saskatchewan

Rosetown is located in West Central Saskatchewan and has a population of approximately 2,315. Its location provides an opportunity to serve a large surrounding agricultural area. It is located at the juncture of major highways going north/south and east/west. The large city of Saskatoon is an hour and 15 minutes away; North Battleford is an hour and a half. Historically an agriculture and farming community, Rosetown has maintained its roots and continues to thrive in this industry. The town acts as a transportation and logistics hub.

At Rosetown's first community meeting, the main concern initially was the decline of the downtown core. As the discussion continued, the need for more small businesses and entrepreneurism was brought up along with the need to engage youth in volunteering. By the end of the evening, a number of actions were identified. Before leaving, the question was asked, "who isn't here and who should be?" In the following few weeks, the task group identified certain groups who weren't at the meeting and went to talk with them. This changed everything.

Many new immigrants have recently come to Rosetown. When those people were asked what they needed to be successful, they said that they needed to know about the services and opportunities for skills development. This group also identified the need to be able to read the drivers' manual so that they could get their drivers' licenses. There isn't any public transportation in Rosetown, so having a driver's license is essential. This information changed the focus of the community planning discussion. Community members are working on a welcome package for newcomers to their community and translating copies of the drivers' manual into the language of immigrant community members.

The Rosetown task group and the larger community identified actions that they could work on immediately. They recognize that their community plan is a living document and will change as the needs of the community change. The partnerships and collaborations that came about from the original planning process will continue.

The Town of Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan

Hudson Bay, approximate population 1,500, is located in Saskatchewan's northeast Red Deer Valley near the Manitoba border. The town was originally part of a fur trading post district. The area grew from the presence of the Canadian Northern Railway Company and was established as the Hudson Bay Junction village in 1909, growing to a full-fledged town in 1947. Hudson Bay is about an hour and a half drive from the nearest larger community of Tisdale.

With the vast forests around Hudson Bay, mills and related forestry industry services have been the most prominent employers and contributors to the local economy since the early 1960s. However, in just over a decade, the area has transitioned from three fully operational mills to just one. Hudson Bay Regional Park, located two kilometers south of the town, attracts tourists with its access to natural habitats, snowmobile trails, birding, fishing, and big game hunting. Hudson Bay is known as the "Moose Capital of the World."

The Town of Hudson Bay task group decided to hold interviews with individuals before having their town meeting. They came up with many themes that they wanted to address in their community wide discussion and ultimately, in their plan. They discussed the lack of awareness of essential skills; how to develop essential skills at an early age; the promotion of resources and programs that they already have and how to get people to attend; postsecondary education (the local campus of the regional college had closed); volunteerism and the lack of youth involvement; the need for computer and other technology skills; the inability of many to fill out government forms online; business and entrepreneurship; the need for job readiness workshops; and financial literacy needs.

After much discussion, the community came up with a comprehensive plan which included actions to address all the themes. One of the immediate results was that the library became

the hub where people could go for workshops to help with job resumes and interviews, find information and help on how to fill out government forms, and attend a series of workshops on financial literacy. Many partners came together to make this happen, including local businesses. The precedent has been set.

Kapuskasing, Ontario

Located in Central Northern Ontario in the Grey Clay Belt, is the bilingual community of Kapuskasing, approximate population of 8,200. Formerly known as MacPherson, Kapuskasing began alongside the development of the National Transcontinental Railway. Hearst and Kapuskasing are about an hour and a quarter drive away from each other and Kapuskasing is about two hours from the larger city of Timmins.

The abundance of black spruce around Kapuskasing led to the opening of Spruce Falls Power and Paper Company Ltd in 1920 when many townspeople gradually began to abandon farming to work at the mill or in logging camps. Kapuskasing offers many activities for outdoor enthusiasts, such as fishing, skiing and canoeing. Currently, Kapuskasing's economic development team is trying to expand on its existing resources while integrating into different sectors like solar energy, tourism, and mining.

The task group in Kapuskasing decided to hold small meetings with focus groups before having a larger meeting with the community. They were able to meet with service providers, non-profit organizations, the university, businesses, local government, and aboriginal groups. The task group came to the community wide meeting with people's ideas of the challenges but not many solutions.

Kapuskasing's literacy and essential skills plan is to become part of the town's official economic development plan. Though this is a good indicator of the importance placed on the plan, the task group believed that this stifled the solutions discussion because the responsibility for actions was placed in the hands of the town administration. As the conversation continued and the 'they should do something' became 'we can do something', some actions were identified that could be worked on immediately with collaborations between the organizations represented in the room. One of the challenges they discussed is lack of youth engagement and youth volunteerism. A volunteer appreciation event was planned in conjunction with an event that the university already puts on.

Hearst, Ontario

The small town of Hearst is located in Central Northern Ontario and has an approximate population of 5,090, with a unique blend of rich cultural French, Oji-Cree and Euro-Canadian heritage. Developed with the construction of the National Transcontinental Railway in 1913, Hearst was officially incorporated in 1922, with many of the town's settlers originating from Quebec. Thus Hearst is proud to be a primarily French-speaking community, an exceptional case particularly since it contains all the infrastructure of a hospital, college, university, and recreation centre.

Located in the boreal forest, Hearst (known as the Moose Capital of Canada) offers an abundance of outdoor activities all year around – from canoeing and kayaking in the summer, to snowmobiling on over 1,000 km of marked trails in the winter. Forestry is the town's current primary industry, with mill and tree planting work available throughout the area. Economic developers are looking to other opportunities to help build the community back up again with the potential for a graphite mine in the next few years, as well as talk of rehabilitating the local airport and developing the tourism industry.

The literacy organization in Hearst, La Boite à Lettres, was the lead on the Strengthening Rural Canada project. Following a meeting with the development officer of RDÉE, (the regional economic and employment development organization), where the planning needs of both organizations were discussed, it was decided that the literacy planning meetings would be combined with economic development meetings. In addition to people having to attend only one main event for discussion, the combined community forum also met both organizations' needs.

After the main community forum was held, several community meetings with interest groups and community organizations were held to make sure that as many voices as possible were heard. Results from these discussions were taken into account before the plan was written. In addition, it was important to consider all projects that were underway, acknowledging that the community had assets from which to build.

Through this planning process, new partnerships were formed and old ones were strengthened. The overarching goal was to make Hearst a more welcoming and inclusive community.

Their community plan has actions to:

► attract people to empty job positions left by people retiring;

► help community members understand the different cultures within the community;

► overcome the language barrier;

► engage youth in volunteerism;

► centralize community and business information;

► increase the knowledge and use of digital technology in businesses.

The task group prioritized their goals and started on the ones where they already had some of the elements in place.

Hearst, Ontario, courtesy of Google Earth

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