



Accountability in Adult Literacy:

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# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

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## Snow Globes

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**A**s I read over the one hundred plus pages of quotes and sentences about who feels accountable to whom and how, I struggle to find a way to include the multitude of perspectives and all the knowledge, understanding and wisdom I find there. There's the rub. Of course I cannot possibly describe everything that might possibly be described. Not here, not now. But by what criteria do I, a literacy worker who feels such strong accountability to the field, to learners and to literacy program workers, discard data?

There are so many stories I can tell with this data. In some projects, looking for the story was like playing with a snow globe. I shook it this way and then I shook it that way. Each time, the snow rested differently over the tiny landscape. Something different was covered and something different was revealed. Eventually I learned what was under each snow bank and I could tell a story. I checked back with the original storytellers and they said, "Yes. That is the story."

Tracey Mollins



# Preface

## • CONTEXT

This report is one of several that will be published through the Connecting the Dots: Improving Accountability in the Adult Literacy Field in Canada project. The two-year project was designed to examine the impact of accountability on the adult literacy field across the country and explore new ways of approaching it.

The project is collecting data through varied means, including a traditional literature review, a field review described in this report, and a face-to-face symposium to validate early findings. Each of these has been designed to capture a specific perspective on the issue of accountability in adult literacy in Canada. When the findings from the field review, literature review and symposium are combined in a synthesized report, we believe that the full range of understanding about accountability and its impacts on adult literacy in Canada will be represented.

This report is from the field review. The research was done by seven reviewers and a coordinator, using a research in practice approach, described in detail in the body of the report. They interviewed 136 informants, providers and funders, to learn about the state of accountability practices in every province and territory. Preliminary findings were shared at a national symposium in May 2008. This report synthesizes and analyzes the data from the field review and includes recommendations made by interviewees.

## • LIMITATIONS

The project invited participation from practitioners and funders in every province and territory. The issue of accountability is sensitive, and both groups of interviewees were concerned about confidentiality and identity. We created a process to ensure both, as described in the report, but some individuals declined to speak and some deleted significant parts of their interviews when they received them for validation.

The field review includes only what was collected through its own data-gathering. The report also notes limitations regarding minority francophone and Aboriginal data. Connecting the Dots was designed as an English-language project, and while it has done some interviewing in French and had some Aboriginal contributions, it acknowledges that further study of these population groups would be needed to fill in the picture.

Connecting the Dots wants to help identify common ground between funders and practitioners about the purpose and impact of various accountability structures on adult literacy practice. It also wants to create opportunities to open and sustain dialogue between funders and practitioners about ways to improve systems and outcomes for Canada's adult literacy learners. This review contributes to these goals; it brings powerful evidence from the field about what is currently working well and what needs to be rethought. We hope it provokes new conversations and action.

<sup>1</sup> Connecting the Dots: Improving Accountability in the Adult Literacy Field in Canada is funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Social Development Canada and sponsored by The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, Movement for Canadian Literacy, Literacy BC, and Research in Practice for Adult Literacy – BC (RIPAL-BC).

### Connecting the Dots Steering Committee



Sandy Middleton



Marina Niks



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## Acknowledgements

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**W**e would like to thank all field review participants for their willingness to share their thoughts, experiences and dreams with us. They include practitioners in the community, school and college sectors, federal and provincial government officials, coalition executive directors and officers in other funding organizations.

We decided to not post their names or positions to protect the identity of those who were concerned with confidentiality. We certainly hope we have captured their ideas.

– The Field Review Team

*The Steering Committee thanks the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Social Development Canada for support of this project.*

*Thanks go as well to provincial government departments for supporting funders to attend the May 2008 Symposium.*

# Introduction

To understand and describe the state of a field, researchers traditionally carry out a literature review. This approach is widely accepted as a way to summarize “what is known” in the field. With Connecting the Dots: Improving Accountability in the Adult Literacy Field in Canada we knew we needed to do that. But we needed to do more. While a literature review was critical to understanding the conceptual underpinnings of recent initiatives for greater accountability, we also wanted to know the impact of these measures on the field. To do this, we had to talk to people who work in the adult literacy field to hear their perspectives and learn about their experiences. The field review presented here offers those voices to complement the literature review.

The field review, rather than engaging in a traditional approach to research, took a research-in-practice approach where the review was designed and carried out by adult literacy practitioners who brought rich experience in adult practice as well as research. The team was composed of seven field reviewers and a coordinator. Each researcher covered a region that included one or more provinces and/ or territories. One field reviewer covered the federal level. The regions were: British Columbia and the Yukon; Alberta, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories; Saskatchewan and Manitoba; Ontario; Quebec; New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland & Labrador (See Appendix A for the field reviewer in each jurisdiction).

Despite significant differences among jurisdictions, there are enough similarities in how the field has been experiencing the move towards increased accountability structures that it made sense to present the data as a whole. This approach also allowed us to protect the identity of participants, a concern which was at the forefront of our work (see a more detailed discussion of confidentiality issues in the Consent section, p. 9).

*With limited resources of time and budget we decided to focus on the accountability structures between funder and delivery organizations regarding adult literacy service delivery.*

## • FOCUS OF THE FIELD REVIEW

The field of adult literacy is broad and not well defined as it intersects with the fields of community education, adult education, and community development among others. Trying to study accountability initiatives in adult literacy, the issues are further clouded as there are many definitions, and multiple perspectives on the concepts and practices regarding accountability.

With limited resources of time and budget we decided to focus on the accountability structures between funder and delivery organizations regarding adult literacy service delivery. For the definition of adult literacy, we decided to follow the funder and service delivery organizations’ definitions. In other words, if the funding body defined the service as “adult literacy”, we would consider it a part of the field review. This meant that in some jurisdictions we covered family literacy programs, for example, because they fell into the adult literacy funding portfolio, while not addressing them in others where they were not funded as adult literacy activities. Adult basic education is another example of a stream that is considered part of adult literacy in some jurisdictions and not in others.

<sup>1</sup> Research in Practice is research that is conducted by practitioners on questions that have arisen from their own practice/experience. It is not academic in intent (although it may become so), but it can inform policy, and contribute to learner success. It is distinguished from reflective practice by being more systematic and accommodating a broader range of “evidence” than academic research has done e.g. artifacts and testimony play larger roles than they do in traditional research. For more information see Horsman, Jenny and Norton, Mary (1999). *A framework to encourage and support practitioner involvement in adult literacy research in practice in Canada*. Edmonton: The Learning Centre.

# Introduction

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## • FIELD REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

To get a sense of the impact of accountability strategies on the field, we spoke to literacy program practitioners, literacy coalitions, networks and resource development organizations, and government departments and other organizations that fund adult literacy programming. Aware of the limited time allotted in this project for data collection, the team developed a set of priorities for selecting interviewees. Each of us first contacted the provincial official responsible for Adult Literacy in each jurisdiction and the coalition executive director who then identified key informants. Through personal connections as well as recommendations from the other reviewers, we contacted project, provincial and coalition staff and service providers. An invitation was also posted on provincial adult literacy networks and through professional organizations throughout the country.

We were intent on capturing different perspectives on accountability developments. We made sure we contacted people who work at different levels in organizations (Executive Directors, managers, instructors, tutors), in different streams (colleges, community organizations, school boards) and settings (rural/urban), and with different populations (aboriginal, Francophone, etc.).

We made an explicit attempt to connect with minority groups such as Aboriginal, Francophone and Deaf communities. We were, however, limited by the timeframe and resources. For example, the project did not have funds to translate materials into French.

While we welcomed the involvement of any individual or organization who wanted to participate, we had to recognize that this project would be conducted in English. Although most of the project staff was English-speaking, we did our best to collect information from Francophones who met the selection criteria through written interviews in French and in some situations conducting the interview in French. We nevertheless acknowledge that this project probably best represents the experiences of mainstream Anglophone adult literacy programs. To capture the particular views of minority groups, further data and analysis should be done.

## • DATA COLLECTION

As a team we developed consent forms and interview questions for funders and service providers (see Appendix B & C) to guide the conversations between field reviewers and interviewees. Each of us adapted the forms to the specifics of our jurisdiction.

Data was collected between November 2007 and May 2008. Interviews were carried out in person, on the phone and in some cases, the questions were sent by e-mail and participants typed their answers and returned the document to the field reviewer. The questions were also modified for use with focus groups.

We took notes - and in some cases taped - the conversations. Notes were then typed and sent back to the interviewee to give them an opportunity to make changes and confirm consent.

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<sup>1</sup> In the initial stages of the project, there were conversations with the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) to develop a parallel project that would look at the specific issues faced by Francophone organizations. In the end, that project did not materialize. We also envisioned hiring a field reviewer who would cover the aboriginal experiences with accountability. We understood that the issues required a specific focus and were beyond the scope of this project.

# Introduction

Jurisdiction	Service Providers			Other	Funder		Total	Event
	COMMUNITY	COLLEGE	SCHOOL DISTRICT		GOV'T	OTHER		
British Columbia	4	4	1		4	1	14	1
Alberta	10	3			5	1	19	
Yukon	4	3			2		9	
NWT	2	3			1		6	
Nunavut	2	1			1		4	
Saskatchewan	5	4		1	2		12	2
Manitoba	6	1			2		9	
Ontario	11	1	3	8 (SUPPORT)	2		25	
Quebec	5		5		2		12	
New Brunswick	3				1	1	5	
PEI	1				1		2	
Nova Scotia	5		1		1		7	
New Foundland & Labrador	3			1	1		5	
National		1		4	2		7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>3</b>

Field review Informants by jurisdictions

# Introduction

## • CONSENT

The adult literacy field in Canada is small and people know each other. In addition, in some jurisdictions, there are so few programs or funding bodies that it would be easy to identify participants simply by stating their role and jurisdiction or territory. Based on previous experiences with accountability issues, we knew that both service providers and funders might be unwilling to expose themselves by sharing views that might be perceived as critical.

We agreed that if the choice was between losing valuable data and the risk of exposing the identity of the interviewee, we would choose confidentiality. We have not used words, examples or any other piece of information that could identify the source. Interviewees' confidentiality has been our commitment. Understanding that agreeing to share their thoughts might be a complex decision for some participants, we developed a consent process that offered participants several opportunities to reiterate permission to use their words. When interviewees first agreed to be interviewed, they received a consent form (see one example in Appendix B) that explained the project and their options regarding use of the interview data. After receiving their interview notes, participants had an opportunity to change, add or delete any of their comments. Finally, the quotations in this report have been reviewed by those quoted so they could see the context within which their words have been used.

To ensure we fulfilled our commitment to confidentiality, we created a system where only the researcher who collected the data had access to the information associated with the interviewee's name. Notes shared with the team were identified only by province or territory, role of the interviewee in the field (funder or service provider) and date of the interview.

We think the process worked well. Although some people declined, most of those who were contacted agreed to be interviewed. In a few instances interviewees deleted a large portion of the notes for fear they could be identified. On the other hand, there were interviewees who felt comfortable sharing their thoughts freely and who said they would have said exactly the same even if their names would be published.

## • DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse the data, the field review team members collectively identified emergent themes that were noted as they collected the data. Then, each field reviewer read and coded her notes using the themes as codes and adding more topics. The data was then organized into the following main themes:

- Understanding/defining literacy
- Type of data collected
- Usefulness of procedures
- Implementation of accountability structures
- Resources and funding
- Accountability to whom?
- Geography / Culture Matters

*In a few instances interviewees deleted a large portion of the notes for fear they could be identified. On the other hand, there were participants who felt comfortable sharing their thoughts freely and who said they would have said exactly the same to the funder representatives.*

## Introduction

### MAYBE IT'S THE FULL MOON! BUT TODAY THIS PROJECT WAS HARD

Each field reviewer assumed responsibility for one theme and did a more in-depth analysis of the coded data before writing a draft document on the topic. The field review coordinator collated and edited these documents to prepare a first draft of this report which was circulated among the field reviewers for a thorough read, feedback and final edit.

As described, the field review took a research-in-practice approach. By having practitioners design and carry out the project, we had the intention of grounding the project in practice, of asking questions that would probably not have been asked had they been designed by outside researchers. All the reviewers are long time practitioners who also brought their own connections in the field. Thus, we were able to reach some practitioners through the researchers' networks who would otherwise have been harder to identify.

For the field reviewers this was not an easy process. Having worked in the adult literacy field for many years, we brought our own perspectives on accountability to the project. We worked through these experiences as a team and developed a series of strategies that would allow each reviewer to be open to different perspectives when doing the interviews. Each of us worked hard at listening to all interviewees and "parked our own ideas at the door." This was not an easy task.

Throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the project, we were often overwhelmed by emotions. We brought these experiences to the team. In some cases we were struck with admiration for the adult literacy practitioners who, against all odds, kept working with learners. At other times, we were surprised to hear ideas we did not expect from individuals. However, we mainly experienced overwhelming sadness, frustration and sometimes anger when we heard the challenges in and prospects for the field. The quotation below from one researcher's debrief after an interview with an adult literacy instructor captures a sense of what was experienced.

Well it was my turn today to cry...

A huge wave of sadness hit me listening to a passionate and articulate instructor saying that even though she is only [young] and has been a practitioner for [a few] years, she does not see that she will be doing this work at the end of her career, even though she strongly believes in what she is doing. I got very emotional during the phone call, and was relieved that she talked so much so I could pull myself together before having to ask the next question! I am not sure why this interview got to me so much, I was just struck with the thought that: How can we just keep losing exceptional people who are doing amazing work?!!! This woman is even doing her masters in adult education but feels she will not be able to work in the field long term because of the devaluation of adult literacy.

*Throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the project, we were often overwhelmed by emotions. We brought these experiences to the team. In some cases we were struck with admiration for the adult literacy practitioners who, against all odds, kept working with learners. At other times, we were surprised to hear ideas we did not expect from individuals.*

# Introduction

## • THE REPORT

The report is organized into four sections. We first describe how participants defined accountability and the different emphases they place on the concept. We then present a picture based on interviewees' descriptions of how accountability information is collected, by whom and the gaps and challenges encountered. The next section explores the issues associated with the implementation of accountability measures, the need for respectful, knowledgeable relationships and clarity in communication and expectations. We then turn to the topic of resources and funding related to accountability structures. We end the report with recommendations articulated by participants.



### *3 Standard Stoppages, a sculpture by Marcel Duchamp*

*"If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane twisting as it pleases [it] creates a new image of the unit of length." Duchamp dropped three threads one meter long from the height of one meter onto three stretched canvases. The threads were then adhered to the canvases to preserve the random curves they assumed upon landing. The canvases were cut along the threads' profiles, creating a template of their curves creating new units of measure that retain the length of the meter but undermine its rational basis.*

[www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=78990](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=78990)

*Each shape is different but each one is a metre. If you cannot see that it is a metre, it is not because it is not a metre; it is just that you are not used to seeing metres that way.*

*Can we let the threads land as they please and then study the shapes even if, especially if, the 'rational basis' is undermined? Or must we maintain the integrity, the rational basis, of the metre stick, mark notches at certain intervals, determine where we are, decide where we need to be and keep track of our progress by checking in to see which notch we are at?*

# Definition of Accountability

The delivery of literacy programs and services is located in different government offices in different jurisdictions: ministries or departments of education, training, employment or workplace skills development, labour, economic development, human resources, culture, immigration, or in literacy secretariats or commissions. In some places, literacy has been moved from home to home by successive administrations. Whether they mean to or not governments communicate their vision of literacy and what they intend to fund and how, by where they situate literacy.

Governments that place literacy in secretariats that work with all other government departments and ministries can be seen to view literacy as a practice that is integrated into all aspects of life. Governments that place literacy in culture, citizenship, immigration and/or education can be seen to view literacy as an expression of culture and a gateway to a wider and deeper participation in society and access to resources. Governments that place literacy in training, skill development, labour, and/or economic development can be seen to view literacy primarily as a functional skill and a gateway to work.

The location of literacy programs in governments has an impact on the accountability structures developed to document and monitor the processes and outcomes of delivery. For the field review we were interested in better understanding how those working in the adult literacy field thought of accountability, regardless of where literacy delivery is located in the different governments.

*Some interviewees found it difficult to answer directly, particularly without using the word “accountable” in the definition. Others felt that it was sometimes hard to step out of the existing structures in their own province/territory to envision something ideal.*

In order to explore the perspectives of practitioners and funders on the accountability structures for adult literacy in each of the provinces and territories in Canada, we thought it was important to explore what people mean when they use the word “accountability”. At the end of each interview we asked participants the following questions:

- Can you define accountability?
- What does accountability mean to you?
- If you could develop an accountability system, what would it look like?

Some interviewees found it difficult to answer directly, particularly without using the word “accountable” in the definition. Others felt that it was sometimes hard to step out of the existing structures in their own province/territory to envision something ideal.

Some interviewees asked field reviewers to define accountability for them before starting the interview.

Despite this, there were many similarities in response. Many people provided a general definition of accountability before going on to describe it in more detail. Their definitions were often similar to these:

*When I say I am going to do it, I should do it and I should be able to show that I have done it. It means taking ownership and responsibility for the program...*

The definitions included some element of responsibility. Interviewees used key words like ‘being responsible,’ ‘taking ownership,’ ‘answering for,’ and ‘justifying.’ They also included an aspect of what was promised: *commitment, agreement, and what we said we would do.* Finally the definitions included the action of describing what was done in the program: showing, sharing information, explaining, demonstrating results, and telling the story.

# Definition of Accountability

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One practitioner put it this way:

*It means taking ownership and responsibility for the program... It's about providing services to those who need them, and providing it well... It's about... seeing you've done your job. That you've had an impact on their lives. It's more than statistics, it's about giving them what they need, the resources in the community.*

A funder described it another way:

*I think it is to provide a satisfactory explanation for how funds were expended or programs administered. Responsibility for our decisions and actions. It's why they are doing what they are doing.*

In addition to these broad definitions, several sub-themes were also identified.

## • MULTIPLE ACCOUNTABILITIES

One of the main themes that arose was of multiple accountabilities. A large number of practitioners stated that their primary accountability is to the learner.

*For the most part, I think my number one accountability is to my students... With the funder I feel I need to let them know what I am doing and why.*

*Accountability to students is the most important thing. It is our responsibility to help students get where they want to go within our mandate.*

Two funders also put learners first, although they tended to describe their accountability for learners as having them achieve their goals, whereas practitioners talked about accountability to learners. As one said:

*At the end of the day the learner matters and (the) learner should be able to make progress and should be aware of that. We are accountable for learners. Learners are there for lots of different reasons. We need to make sure learners are successful at the end of the day.*

While some of those interviewed described accountability as two-sided – accountability to the funder and accountability to the learner – most described multiple accountabilities. This included accountability to: the funder, the taxpayer, the learners, their board of directors/agency, the community, and the literacy field/the profession.

One practitioner said:

*While we have a responsibility to funders, we also have responsibility to our clients and to the volunteers that run our programs and therefore a definition of accountability should also include these very important components which are fundamental to achieving our mission.*

When service providers talked about accountability to the funder, they talked about accountability for how they used the funding. Interviewees similarly described accountability to the taxpayer as money being spent efficiently and effectively. A funder described it in the following way:

# Definition of Accountability

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*Accountability is used by government to be fiscally responsible so taxpayers know that their money is being spent appropriately.*

When practitioners talked about accountability to their learners, most qualifiers focused on being accountable for adapting a program to learners' individual needs

*I would like to see accountability defined by going back to the learners, and asking them if their needs and learning desires are being met. Have the learners tell us what they would like to learn, how they are going to hold themselves accountable, and to honour and respect that.*

According to many practitioners, this type of accountability is not so easy to measure and goes beyond increases in literacy level. It also includes recognizing non-academic outcomes and progress that was relevant for that particular learner in his/her context.

Several people talked about accountability to their agency or board of directors and about the importance of staying true to their agency's mission and vision.

## • ACCOUNTABILITY AS A PROCESS

A second theme that emerged was the idea that accountability is a process. It is a process that practitioners engage in to reflect on their program, raise questions, and make changes to improve the quality of programming. Many practitioners talked about the importance of reflection, of looking at what was happening, questioning what they were doing and looking at ways to improve the quality of the program.

*I think accountability and reporting should be proactive, generating something good or raising questions, taking on a life of their own that moves the program or other programs further toward real success for learners.*

Some practitioners talked about the importance of accountability to themselves as professionals. They talked about personal integrity, about the importance of being able to leave the program knowing they had done the best they could do.

*That I can run a program and come away with a good conscience... I feel within myself it was worthwhile.*

*There is also accountability to ourselves. As practitioners, we must always do the best job possible. We need to look at how we are doing, how we can make progress.*

The issue of trust was identified. Some said they trusted practitioners – that as professionals they had more intimate knowledge of learners' needs and the best approach. One practitioner felt that the focus of accountability should be creating a "healthy organization" where this kind of reflective process could regularly take place.

*Well, maybe it should be around accountability for a healthy organization, because if you have a healthy organization with the time for reflection, preparation ... good file management... adequate resources, knowledgeable staff, then you're much more likely to be providing effective teaching. If the outcome, if the ideal was a healthy organization – and part of that is effective teaching, and people making movements in various domains – that to me would be the ideal accountability, that it looked at all aspects and then it would be funded based on all aspects.*

## Definition of Accountability

- **ACCOUNTABILITY AS CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE**

A third theme emerged particularly from practitioners' definitions of accountability. Practitioners from across the country saw accountability as a system that needs to recognize different contexts, meaning that it is appropriate, given the level of resources, the learners' situation and the environment. They included the broader social and economic environment. In other words, a program should not be held accountable for having lower numbers of learners moving on to employment or further education if the program serves a community where there are few jobs and where the majority of learners are dealing with issues of depression, abuse, or family crises that impact their ability to learn.

*Accountability has at its heart integrity, and it isn't a one-size-fits-all format. Local communities and learners have individual needs which must be recognized.*

*I think our Native programs in particular – and probably the deaf stream too – need to be able to tell the stories of the kinds of circumstances they work with in their communities. And some of it's really positive, but a lot of it is very, very challenging. And I don't think it's possible to hold us accountable if you don't know that story, and there doesn't seem to be any time taken to really listen.*

*We need to explore alternate learning structures, models based on existing culture, on cultural expectations, schedules or understanding how the place and the people can be served, not diminished. Finishing "using this module" in "this length of time" doesn't seem to be a system that works for everyone here. The question then is, how do we adapt, create, and encourage a higher success rate among indigenous people of the North? How do we make education not only inclusive but relevant to all? "Finishing this module" "in this length of time" is just not a system that works for everyone here.*

According to these practitioners, as well as at least two funders interviewed, accountability should include sufficient resources to achieve the commitments undertaken. These include funding as well as other resources such as professional development, and specialized training.

*[There] needs to be adequate funding, salaries, training, resources, and space.*

*Accountability means finding funding strategies with humane guidelines (daycare, transportation).*

It also relates to the availability of other community resources that enable adults to participate in literacy programs, and the involvement of a variety of stakeholders.

*Is there integration at all levels – government, business, etc., that can really make the required changes, instead of disparate initiatives that won't have the culminating impact required for real change. Accountability means we all take responsibility at whatever level we are working at.*

The concept of mutual accountability came up a number of times in this context. Accountability, through this lens, is seen as a relationship between two or more partners.

*Accountability has to be negotiated. Both parties need to agree on what is reasonable accountability.*

## Definition of Accountability

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The phrase “mutual accountability” was also used to refer to a system where all parties are accountable to each other or have equal accountability for ensuring outcomes are achieved.

*In order to be accountable to the community and the learner there needs to be a way that literacy workers, learners and the community can hold the funder accountable for providing the dollars and the resources that make providing the programming possible.*

Another word often used by practitioners was “flexibility”. Funders need to acknowledge different contexts/circumstances/environments and allow reporting that is relevant, rather than one-size-fits-all.

- **ACCOUNTABILITY WITH REASONABLE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

The final theme to emerge from definitions was the need for reasonable reporting requirements that are not burdensome. Practitioners, in particular, stated that reporting needs to be meaningful, rather than an exercise in collecting statistics and paperwork.

*Accountability should enhance what I do instead of hinder or stifle it. It should not drain too much time away from what one is doing. [It] should be minimal rather than oppressive.*

*We should not devote an unrealistic amount of time producing the accountability measures, but rather we should rely on more in depth evaluations. These would take a serious look, for example, at adult literacy efforts of the last 10 years and then use judgment to decide whether they are on track or whether they need to try something different.*

*Okay, can we find something where we can continue to evaluate purposefully without writing pages and pages and pages of reports?*

*My accountability system would be fairly minimalist. You must be accountable for the funds you receive. I think that the degree of detail of scrutiny is untenable for us and for the funder right now. There needs to be clarity regarding what is it that the funder really needs to know. There does need to be some clarity regarding the documents that organizations need to keep. I don't see any problems with that. However, we don't want this on-going [back and forth] into the minutia.*

## Collection of Accountability Information

While there was a variety of opinion about the definitions of accountability, who should be accountable to whom, and in what ways, a shared belief in the need for accountability itself was evident. Funders explained that they need information to justify the use of the resources in the programs and to advocate for more funds. For the most part, practitioners welcomed the opportunity that monitoring requirements provided for them to reflect on the consequences of their work, to share the literacy development of their students, and to be informed regarding potential improvements in their programs.

Measurement and collection instruments can both shape the design of accountability systems and determine priority of data. Underpinning how data collection is structured, conducted, and compiled are diverse of assumptions and perspectives about accountability, measurement, success, learning, and ultimately, literacy.

### **What is counted can easily become what counts.**

This section describes the information that is collected to meet accountability requirements in adult literacy programming across Canada and the comments from interviewees about its value. Although there are differences among jurisdictions, there are many similarities in the type of data that is required from programs.

### • WHAT AND HOW INFORMATION IS COLLECTED

While there are many differences among adult literacy service delivery programs in terms of how they are funded, by whom, what their accountability requirements are and how they are experienced (eg. community based programs experience accountability measures very differently from college-based programs), we focus here on the similarities among programs and point out when we are referring to a particular program.

A majority of reporting requirements focus on information about the learners, including learner demographics (gender, age, income, previous educational attainment, language, ethnicity), number of learners enrolled or reached, number of contact hours with learners, learners start and end dates, attendance records, number of learners who completed program or course, learner goals and progress (assessment), employment/employability outcomes, and learner satisfaction.

Along with data on learners, a majority of funders also require program data such as annual program or business plan, financial records, number of volunteers, training hours and activities, and professional development hours and activities. Some funders also request data on community partnerships and outreach activities, governance records (board structure, minutes and community membership), and full agency/program financials.

Additional data collected by the organization (e.g. non-profit agency) or institution (e.g. college) that is not required by the funder tend to be qualitative, such as learner portfolios, and learner, tutor and instructor anecdotal information.

The majority of interviewees noted an annual reporting cycle, including a mid-term report which was the main method of reporting. The reporting cycle usually included a proposal or program/business plan submission. A number of interviewees used databases to track and report such things as learner attendance and/or contact hours on a weekly or monthly basis.

## Collection of Accountability Information

Stronger financial management and time to reflect on various aspects of the service provided were recognized as positive outcomes of this procedure.

*In (this province) we have a lot of accountability measures. They could be streamlined but it is making us keep an eye on ourselves. I would not have started gathering stats if I didn't have to. I might have had a sense of our population but now I have evidence.*

### • STATISTICS: A FRAGMENTED PICTURE

Interviewees, however, had concerns about the kinds of data being collected. Many argued that the information collected captured only a fragmented picture of learner and program accomplishments. Funders generally used statistics to monitor program attendance, identify regional trends, gather learner profiles, determine program funding, and inform political reporting. However, most service providers and some funders perceived statistical information as a partial definition of learner and program success. Many practitioners felt that collecting statistics on “how many learners were enrolled in the program,” even though accurate in terms of attendance, was not a performance indicator or quality measure for education. As well, many felt that statistics were often unable to convey uniqueness of service and information that was relevant and specific, rather than general. This is captured in the following two quotes, one from a funder and one from a service provider.

*Many practitioners felt that collecting statistics on “how many learners were enrolled in the program,” even though accurate in terms of attendance, was not a performance indicator or quality measure for education.*

*It's accurate, but it's really bare bones, because statistics don't tell the whole story and nobody seems to want to hear the story that they could tell. So we have numbers of students, so at the end of the day that doesn't tell us anything about success, what kind of impact we have had on those students' lives.*

*So we could be more creative in what we measure, but we get hung up on the numbers and we get hung up on what we are doing with the numbers, and what those numbers mean. And at the end of the day whether I had a thousand students or eight hundred and fifty that tells you nothing about what happened in terms of the education.”*

Many interviewees suggested that a focus solely on numbers implies a lack of understanding of the complexity of the adult literacy field and the adult literacy learner.

*Students need an enormous amount of out-of-class support (counselling and advising and having someone to listen) because they have a lot of barriers and they do not have a lot of support. If a student comes to see me during class time, this time gets counted as contact hours but it means my time is being used for something different (than teaching). It goes back to the nature of clientele and the type of support we provide that we do not get credit for.*

*What the federal and provincial governments are not seeing is that enrolment for literacy-level classes is typically quite low and the turnover is quite high. This is not because these adults are ‘low achievers’ or that they ‘don't care’; they are just people with a lot more on their plates than the fact that they cannot read and write as well as they need to. For many adults, life simply gets in the way (i.e. family obligations, lack of financial resources needed to attend a regular class) so that they tend to come and go on a regular basis.*

Practitioners worried about the effectiveness of the statistical evidence to convey adequate program and learner information especially since such data influences funder decisions regarding program funding.

# Collection of Accountability Information

*Interviewees identified culture, geography and economic conditions as variables that influence adult literacy service delivery inputs and outputs...*

## • CULTURE AND GEOGRAPHY MATTER

Describing the data they are required to submit to funders, service providers referred to what they perceive as a lack of understanding of the situational differences within programs. Not all literacy programs and organizations are the same. The contexts within which each operates differs considerably between municipalities, regions, or provinces and territories. There are variables beyond the control of the program or organization that affect service delivery and ultimately program outcomes. However, some funders require organizations within their jurisdiction to report on, and account for, their programs without any apparent recognition of external variants or contextual reference, as if all programs were operating against the same backdrop. Interviewees felt accountability measures should take context into consideration in the reporting process.

Interviewees identified culture, geography and economic conditions as variables that influence adult literacy service delivery inputs and outputs (i.e. learner enrolment, attendance, retention, learner exit, progress, expectations, program content, results, etc.). These variables shape how providers deliver services as well as the results they obtain.

## – CULTURAL CONTEXT

Interviewees working in the field of Aboriginal and minority Francophone adult literacy mentioned the cultural, social and linguistic contexts as factors that inherently influence program delivery and results. In addition to addressing issues that apply to all individuals with low literacy, service providers working with Aboriginals must deal with issues specific to this population. In particular, interviewees highlighted the fact that many Aboriginals have different learning styles from mainstream approaches. Reporting requirements do not acknowledge this essential difference, and this has created a certain degree of frustration on the part of service providers.

*It's a one-size-fits-all, there are huge capacity issues in (this jurisdiction) for many reasons. There are many people who have not had a chance to have high school and post-secondary level education. A lot of funding was training funding, and the outcome was supposed to be employment which is unrealistic (because of the economic context) so I had a difficult time being accountable for those funds because they were so far from the reality of my student's lives and the program. The funding and accountability measures didn't speak to the social, linguistic, and cultural context.*

This context not only defines what providers and learners expect from the program itself (which may not be what the funder expects), but moulds the definition of program success. What is considered successful in a mainstream program may not apply in a program servicing Aboriginal learners. The social and cultural context presents challenges unique to service providers working with the Aboriginal population. All too often this context is overlooked by funders who hold all programs to the same measures:

*First Nations peoples have different methods and acknowledgments for successes, achievements and accomplishments. Quite often, First Nations peoples are not just going to learn what is presented to them, there needs to be a purpose in what they do. For some, First Nations peoples are not interested in following a curriculum and being a success as to what Western culture measures success. Yet, they are "forced" to do so because of the society we live in and because in order to survive they need to adapt. So, it is difficult to reflect this in a report in which a template is provided.*

## Collection of Accountability Information

Francophone interviewees noted that funders did not understand or recognize the socio-cultural context within which minority Francophone service providers (often the only provider in the province) operate. Some interviewees described how they deal with bureaucrats who do not speak French, for example. Documents are not always as comprehensible to read, understand or draft for someone whose mother tongue is not English. Service providers may not completely understand what they are required to report, may be unable to effectively communicate with the funder, or may simply decide not to communicate at all.

### – GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Participants pointed out that geographic location is important to consider in the reporting process. Specifically mentioned were rural and northern programs operating in a context that accountability measures do not acknowledge. The sheer size of the territory covered by a regional or rural program clearly affects service delivery. Services may be offered in one or even several centres, but are not necessarily accessible to learners throughout a territory spread out over thousands of kilometres. A rural program's ability to offer accessible services across their territory is limited by availability of resources.

*We serve 47 communities. For family literacy I receive \$40,000 and try for ten communities but that is pushing it. I don't think they necessarily recognize the vast area covered by (the) college.*

One example of the impact of geographic context is transportation. Learners must be able to get to the program in order to participate. Where there is no public transport system, as is often the case in rural communities, learners must provide their own transportation to the centre or the centre must be able to pay to transport the learners. So, although students may be enrolled in a class, attendance at rural programs is adversely affected by dangerous or extreme weather, or simply because someone was unable to get to class that day due to a mechanical breakdown or other transportation issue. Using the number of contact hours as a measure of program success then becomes an ineffective measurement.

A standardized accountability process does not necessarily recognize geography as a factor in organizing service delivery, nor does it allow for the differences between rural and urban programs, nor between programs from different regions within the same jurisdiction.

### – ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Finally, interviewees mentioned labour market conditions in their locality or region as a factor that influenced participation and ultimately reporting statistics. A poor economy meant more out-of-work learners seeking to upgrade skills, while a good economy meant fewer learners enrolled in programs. In addition, those enrolled were harder to serve.

*(The provincial social assistance program) rolls have decreased in the past few years which is a good thing for them and for the clients—but for literacy programs what it means is that most of the people who are employment-able or employment-ready have jobs. The people who are still on social assistance are harder to serve, have multiple barriers to work, or have never worked and these are the people now in literacy programs and these people require more supports when they come to school.*

## Collection of Accountability Information

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The level of participants is affected by a depressed local economy because out-of-work residents leave the community to find employment elsewhere:

*We are affected right now by the economic boom in Alberta. So our rural sites are sitting at about half capacity. Many of the towns have lost three and four hundred people going to Alberta. So that's had an impact. Also if you look at the trend in our participation, when the economy is good our participation is low when the economy is down our participation goes up. So we are very tied to the employment cycle, but a lot of people simply don't know what they don't know.*

Cultural, geographic and economic contexts are essential elements that shape program success. Programs must contend with factors beyond their control that impact service delivery and results.

These include different learning styles, definitions of success, language of communication, transportation, access to services, human, material and financial resources, and local economic conditions. Programs are not well served when cultural, geographic and economic variables are not taken into account during the reporting process, and all programs are treated as if circumstances were identical in each organization.

*Programs are not well served when cultural, geographic and economic variables are not taken into account during the reporting process, and all programs are treated as if circumstances were identical in each organization.*

# Implementation of Accountability Measures

In this section we describe interviewees' perspectives on the implementation of accountability structures. We first look at aspects of the relationships between funders and service providers that work best. We then turn to what interviewees described as challenges in the relationships.

Both practitioners and funders understand the need for and value of accountability processes. For practitioners, accountability requirements have provided previously unavailable information that can help them do a better job. They have created an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on their work and have enhanced their practice.

According to one funder,

*People are cautiously optimistic that the direction we are going in is going to help not only in terms of more referral, more engagement with a broader system that should help our learners, but I think people feel that this will help them do a better job. And for the government, it will provide a simpler way of capturing return on investment.*

*Where effective communication existed between adult literacy service providers and funders, interviewees spoke positively of the effects. Good relationships also resulted in flexibility in implementing accountability procedures that practitioners viewed as positive.*

## • EFFECTS OF RESPECTFUL KNOWLEDGEABLE RELATIONSHIPS

Interviewees understand the value of establishing reciprocal, respectful relationships around accountability processes. Practitioners discussed how collaboration with funders could make, and in some cases, had made procedures more effective. Having the ability to provide input and articulate difficulties with procedures allows everyone involved in service delivery to collect more meaningful and useful data. Practitioners have "lived experience" in working with adult learners and are able to provide relevant knowledge of practicalities, and distinct program or learner considerations, affecting positive program development that might otherwise go unobserved.

Where effective communication existed between adult literacy service providers and funders, interviewees spoke positively of the effects. Good relationships also resulted in flexibility in implementing accountability procedures that practitioners viewed as positive.

*I appreciate our relationship. They have given us a year's heads-up so we can plan for it. For those conversations to happen you need a relationship.*

Knowledge of the field was seen as enhancing relationships between funders and service providers. When practitioners perceive that a funder is not knowledgeable, effective communication becomes difficult and accountability procedures may be negatively affected.

*If you're trying to explain your accountability to somebody who has no knowledge of adult literacy, and here we are at our table saying how complex it is and how we'd like to have other factors - not just heads or bums in seats or hours that we've taught - to be counted. Well, to me it takes an educated bureaucrat to understand that.*

*Currently (the government) appears to be replacing staff knowledgeable about literacy and the operation of community organizations by bureaucrats. I am very concerned about this "trend". I am afraid that we may be forced to become "bean counters."*

# Implementation of Accountability Measures

*In some cases, service providers were not sure why the requested information was required, how it was being used or if it was used at all.*

Many practitioners recognized the importance of accountability procedures, but emphasized that data collection procedures need to be practical and evaluation relevant to the program to enhance service delivery. Practitioners want to contribute their expertise in a collaborative process.

*After each of the categories I must report on, it would be useful to ask for my personal reflections on what I would have liked to do, what resources would have been helpful, then suggestions from the person being asked to be accountable would at least appear to give me some input in structure, and program, and possibly even policy for the future if not the present.*

## • NEED FOR CLARITY

While interviewees accepted their obligation to implement accountability measures and acknowledged the benefits, many said that implementation of the measures was inhibited by lack of clarity in terms of:

- What data was to be submitted how and when
- Changes in procedures mid way
- Differences between bureaucrats about what was required.

In many cases, lack of clarity resulted in programs not being able to provide information funders wanted.

*The requirements wouldn't be so bad if you had some clarity up front, but they keep changing what they want, or they haven't explained it clearly enough at the start. We're not stupid people. If you want it done on blue paper with these margins, I can do that. But we can't have you come back and tell us that you really needed it done on blue paper and with those margins. Why didn't you just tell us that?*

*(I) also find it very difficult when I see things being interpreted in different ways, I've been told it's okay to use funds in a certain way and then another person says it is not acceptable to use in a certain way.*

These inconsistencies make it difficult for programs to implement the accountability measures. They can lead to a sense of frustration and erode confidence in the accountability system.

*It is amazing the different messages we bring from our consultants across the province. Sometimes they are the same but sometimes they are hugely different about the same thing. When we talk about the program monitoring visits there are incredible differences in the level of expectation of the consultants when they do a program visit. So that's frustrating. It does not inspire a lot of confidence in the system when we realize that there are some pretty significant inconsistencies.*

Interviewees also cited lack of clarity in terms of the purpose and actual use of the information collected. In some cases, service providers were not sure why the requested information was required, how it was being used or if it was used at all.

*My bank training says pennies and dollars all have to be accounted for, but when it comes to some of the other documentation, I'm not sure that all of it is relevant. In any case, the relevance has not been made clear to the field.*

*I don't know what they do with [the data]. I believe that they are asking for information that they are not using.*

# Implementation of Accountability Measures

When there is lack of clarity about the purpose and use of the data submitted to funders, then monitoring procedures are not valued as integral to literacy practice. The procedures were perceived as imposed from the top with no additional value to the students or program. Practitioners suggested that criteria should be negotiated and come “from the ground up” as it has historically been in some jurisdictions.

*They think they know what is going on with the students and the stress of everyday life down here and so they'll send things down that they will want us to do and use that they have developed, but they don't ask. They don't ask those who live it every day what works, what doesn't work.*

Practitioners described the top down pressure to implement accountability measures but were also aware that some funders felt a top down pressure as well.

*(Mid level bureaucrats) are under a lot of pressure from above to deliver things. They need to answer to above. The situation seems very reactive. It is difficult for them to plan ahead, to develop a system, to think things through.*

## • THE COSTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Many practitioners noted that the implementation of reporting requirements does not acknowledge the time and capacity these requests demand. Interviewees' revealed concerns that increased administrative demands caused a considerable burden on program staff and in some cases affected quality of service. Funders too discussed the burden that accountability measures can place on programs that are already struggling to do too much with too little. This non-profit funder speaks to this issue:

*We don't want to burden those practitioners who are already playing multiple roles with additional bureaucracy for small amounts of money. We already know they need it.*

The time dedicated to collecting data, filling out forms and submitting information cannot be underestimated. Estimates of staff time spent on reporting vary widely across the country and even within provinces. While some program staff report spending less than 5% of their time on these activities, others report spending upwards of 50%. As many adult literacy providers do not get sufficient funding from one source to meet community literacy needs, they have multiple reports to prepare for the multiple funders, which exacerbate the demands on the program staff.

*We're open 43 weeks, as much as 2/5 of the time could be spent on reporting/paperwork. At certain times of the year we are working on reports 100% of the time.*

*Last year, I wrote 17 reports in 2 weeks in June.*

*Our auditor said that as a taxpayer he is appalled by the level of demands given the amount of money we receive for the project. He says it's not a good use of taxpayer's money to have this level of bookkeeping. And that's from someone totally external to the project. There have been tremendous additional costs also for the manager and support staff. People have to work on those documents every time you ask for a new revision.*

*The time dedicated to collecting data, filling out forms and submitting information cannot be underestimated.*

## Implementation of Accountability Measures

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Providers become concerned when time and resources spent on accountability take away from other program work, notably supporting learners. Some service providers worry that their ability to serve all students may be compromised in order to comply with accountability requirements.

*I would suggest that by the time we collect data, record data and report data, respond to the latest ministry initiative through various sources, we have spent at least 15 hours a week out of a 35 hour week (42%). And we do not have a large number of students or a lot of money! This does not include the hours spent researching other funding sources and submitting applications to them or reporting to them if we already have their money. That entails another 40% of the Coordinator's time. I don't know how programs with a staff of 1 have any time for learners.*

*That kind of reporting does require time and it's my job to do that, but it does take up a lot of my time where I could be spending doing other things, such as developing ways to hang on to those students who are hard to hang on to, go out and find the students we are not finding.*

## Resources and Funding

*The inadequacy of funding makes it difficult for some programs to fully meet the needs of learners in many ways. Interviewees discussed ways that literacy programs struggle with their capacity to secure adequate funding, to form partnerships, and to fulfill accountability requirements.*

Service providers repeatedly raised the topic of funding. For interviewees, funding was intrinsically linked to accountability measures. They argue that if programs are required to collect and submit program data, funders are required to support them by providing adequate funding so they can deliver the best programs.

Although there are exceptions, particularly among institution-based programs, funders and practitioners tend to agree that literacy programs are poorly funded. Interviewees identified specific challenges, including the insecurity of funding, the need for multiple funders and the lack of increases in funding levels.

Most adult literacy service delivery funding is adjudicated through yearly competitions. Programs are required to prepare and submit proposals every year which has implications for service delivery such as contact hours with learners or staff retention.

*Small organizations cannot keep consistent staff because their funding is within very short time frames. Most people who run organizations are having to write proposals for their own wages and that wastes a lot of time that could be spent with learners. But the biggest thing is that there is no consistency and learners need solid support. You don't get that when you have to learn to trust someone new and get to know someone new on a regular basis.*

*Funding provided on a per student or per contact hour basis can create insecurity. The teachers are concerned about losing their class, fewer students mean fewer classes. Fewer classes mean fewer teaching hours. We have to fill a class first before it can take place. It's a very stressful situation having to take someone's job, being told to find students or no class. We have to call the students directly. We start in September, pushing to ensure enough students to start a class, or there's no job.*

Service providers often mentioned that proposal writing was the most time consuming part of their jobs. Interviewees described how the writing requirements have become increasingly difficult and onerous. Furthermore, across the country, programs have seen few increases in funding and some have seen cuts. This has been further exacerbated where new accountability measures have been introduced with little or no additional funding to offset costs.

*As accountability measures have constantly increased, especially during the past 10 years, there has been no additional funding, no recognition that these things cost money—you have to do as part of your contract. There is only one place resources come out of and that is out of the classroom.*

*If they are really serious about increasing adult basic education as per the government policy on adult education, they need to put the money where their mouth is.*

Inadequate funding makes it difficult for some programs to fully meet the needs of learners in many ways. Interviewees discussed how literacy programs struggle with their capacity to secure adequate funding, to form partnerships, and to fulfill accountability requirements. We explore these challenges in the next section.

## Resources and Funding

### • CAPACITY OF PROGRAMS

The low levels of funding and increasing demands contribute to challenges in programs where staff are poorly paid, jobs are insecure and benefits are at a bare minimum. Funders and providers expressed concerns about attracting and keeping practitioners in the field.

One provider summed up the challenge this way:

*Reporting for accountability purposes can be more time consuming and challenging in programs that rely on volunteer tutors who would need additional training or a diverse set of skills to be able to collect and report information about the learners and the program.*

*What would we advertise for if we had to replace staff? An administrator who can dot the I's and cross the T's to jump through the hoops that keeps the bit of ministry funding, deal with the landlord, supervise and support staff, handle the payroll and funding applications. Or a teacher who can come up with resources on the fly in a room of 5-8 individuals who have different academic levels, learning styles and challenges? Or a social worker who can help the students sort out their personal problems while they are in literacy training? No administrator, teacher or social worker in their right minds would work for \$18.00 an hour with no benefits!! Staffing for the future when such strong administrative requirements and a myriad skills are in place are indeed major concerns for our little program.*

Adding to this situation, most community-based programs depend on the unpaid labour of volunteers and paid staff. Reporting for accountability purposes can be more time consuming and challenging in programs that rely on volunteer tutors who would need additional training or a diverse set of skills to be able to collect and report information about the learners and the program. In some cases, it is a matter of interest; volunteers refuse to use their time to collect and report data. For adult literacy programs that rely on volunteer tutors, practitioners have to take on more administrative, unpaid, work to avoid losing the volunteer tutors.

*The addition of extra reporting requirements has impacted adult literacy in that volunteers who have dedicated themselves to tutoring do not want to be burdened with the extra work required to comply with funding requirements. As a result, we have lost many good volunteers who feel that they are not appreciated, that they are being taken advantage of and their work is not valued. Losing good dedicated tutors impacts our ability to provide services to learners.*

# Recommendations Regarding Accountability in Adult Literacy

The interview questions asked respondents how they would like to see the accountability structures and measures changed or developed (see Appendix C). The field reviewers collated the answers to develop the following recommendations.

- **Accountability should be a mutual and reciprocal process.** As the field is accountable to funders, so should the funders be accountable to the field by providing appropriate level of funding and resources.
- If mandatory accountability procedures are implemented, **then funders need to be accountable to see that programs receive adequate resources to cope with the administrative burden.**
- Accountability initiatives and structures should acknowledge that each stakeholder has **multiple accountabilities**. Programs are accountable to their participants and communities in different ways than they are accountable to funders. While there will be some overlap in these accountabilities, sometime they will be at odds (cost-effectiveness/efficiency vs. broad range of flexible services on an on-going basis).
- **Open communication and a respectful relationship between service provider and funder** are necessary to facilitate effective development and implementation of accountability measures. Funding bodies should include **knowledgeable officers**, are experienced in the field, to work with the field in establishing priorities and procedures.
- **Programs should monitor and report on the use of the funding** and provide information to funders that enables them to advocate for the field and to demonstrate they are fiscally responsible.
- Funders should **review accountability systems regularly** and include feedback from the field to assure that the system is working well for everyone.
- Accountability structures need to recognize the **significance of context** in the delivery and outcomes of programs and allow for **regional differences in delivery realities** within which programs operate.
- **Funding should not be exclusively tied to learner outputs (increase in grade level, for example).** Learner progress may be more a reflection of the conditions within which the program or learner is operating than indicators of program quality.
- **Tracking learner progress should be done with long term goals.** Reporting tools need to "tell the adult literacy story."
- **Accountability requirements and the purpose of collecting this information should be clearly communicated.** Service providers need to know what is expected of them, and this must be clearly and adequately communicated by the funder. Special attention should be paid to the language and quality of documents sent to organizations operating in a language other than English.
- Adult Literacy programs should be reasonably **supported through training and financial compensation** to encourage skilled and experienced practitioners and staff to stay in the field.
- **Multi-year core funding** for literacy programs should be provided.

## APPENDIX A:

### Jurisdictions Covered By Field Reviewers

JURISDICTION(S)	FIELD REVIEWER
Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick .....	<b>Brenda Wright</b>
Quebec .....	<b>Joani Tannenbaum</b>
Ontario .....	<b>Tracey Mollins</b>
Manitoba and Saskatchewan.....	<b>Stacey Crooks</b>
Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Alberta .....	<b>Audrey Gardner</b>
British Columbia and the Yukon .....	<b>Paula Davies</b>
Federal Level .....	<b>Katrina Grieve</b>

## APPENDIX B:

### Consent Form

## Connecting the Dots:

### Improving Accountability in the Adult Literacy Field in Canada

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

This is a two-year project funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources Development Canada and sponsored by The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, Movement for Canadian Literacy, Literacy BC, and Research in Practice for Adult Literacy – BC (RiPAL-BC).

In its first phase, the project is collecting information about what is currently happening in the field regarding accountability policies and practices and what has been published about the topic. In the second phase, we will identify and implement five innovative accountability models using an action research approach. The project provides an opportunity for funders and practitioners to examine the impact of accountability on the adult literacy field across the country and explore new ways of approaching it. Ultimately we aim to increase understanding among practitioners, policy makers, and funders of the impact of accountability on the field and options for improvement

#### HOW WILL THE RESEARCH BE CONDUCTED?

In this first phase, seven field reviewers are collecting data in all provinces and territories in Canada through face-to-face, email, and telephone interviews and focus groups with adult literacy practitioners, learners, administrators and funders. A literature review is being conducted by a researcher in Montreal.

I would like to ask you several questions about your ideas on and experiences with monitoring, reporting and accountability of adult literacy delivery programs. We will analyze the information you provide together with the information provided by other interviewees. The primary purpose of the interview is to gather information about the state and impact of accountability strategies in the adult literacy field. We would like to use this information in a number of ways. We will write a series of provincial, territorial and national reports as well as post information on the project's web site. We might also publish the results in scholarly and/or non-academic publications as well as do presentations at professional gatherings.

#### WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Individual Interview: Your interview will be confidential. I will keep notes of/tape what you say.  
FG: You will be participating in a group process, where you will be sharing your perspectives and experiences. The group will be reminded to respect group process and maintain the confidentiality and privacy of fellow participants. The risks involved, therefore, are of a social nature, in that your thoughts and feelings will be shared in a group environment with your peers. I will keep notes of/tape what people say.

I will produce a summary of our conversation and send it to you so you can add/delete or make any

changes you would like. The document you send back to me will be used as data. Only the field review coordinator and the other field reviewers will have access to the data. We will not use your name (unless you say we can).

#### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

By participating in this research you will be contributing to a better understanding of the state of the field in your province/territory and the country. You will also provide useful information that will help us design innovative accountability frameworks. Finally, if you are interested in receiving updates and/or the final report for your p/t, we will gladly send a copy to you at the end of May 2008.

#### CAN I CHANGE MY MIND AND WITHDRAW?

Yes – you may withdraw without consequence, and your information will not be used in the research project. You can withdraw prior to the writing of the final report (March 2008). To withdraw, you must inform me, or the field review coordinator who will document your withdrawal request. If at any point you would like more information about this project or about the data collection process, you can contact me at... or the field review coordinator, Marina Niks at [mniks@thehub.literacy.bc.ca](mailto:mniks@thehub.literacy.bc.ca)

#### HOW WILL MY INFORMATION BE KEPT PRIVATE?

Your name and information will not be identified in the research report or other materials without your written permission. At the bottom of this consent form, you have the right to select how and if you would like the project publications to include quotes from what you say and your name.

#### IF I SIGN THIS FORM, WHAT AM I CONSENTING TO?

By signing this form, you are acknowledging the following things:

1. You have been informed of the purpose of the research.
2. You are aware of how the information will be used.
3. You are aware of the risks and the benefits of the research.
4. You are aware of who to contact for additional information.
5. You are aware of your right to withdraw from the research and how to do so.
6. You are giving The Centre for Literacy permission to include your responses in the final research report.

#### I grant permission for The Centre for Literacy to:

Use the information (including quotes) without using my name or any identifying information:

Yes  No

Use the information (including quotes) using my name:

Yes  No

I'd like to have an opportunity to see how my quotes are being used before giving consent for my name to be used:

*In this case, we will send you a paragraph with your quote so that you can make a decision about your name being connected to the information provided.*

Yes  No

\_\_\_\_\_  
NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## APPENDIX C:

### Interview Protocols

#### INTERVIEW WITH **SERVICE PROVIDER**

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##### I) **BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

- Name
- Background > Training > Previous work
- Position > How long?
- Responsibility

##### II) **ABOUT THE PROGRAM**

1. Can you describe your program? Volunteer tutors? Paid staff? Breakdown of staffing/funding?
2. Who funds your program? What do you have to report to the funder/s? Have these reporting requirements changed in the last two years or are they in process of changing? If so, how?
  - What documents do you have to keep?
  - Frequency
  - Monitoring by funder
  - Other requirements (computerized data, local committees)
3. How much of your resources are dedicated to reporting related activities? Who does the paperwork? Have any additional resources of any kind (staff, training, funding) been dedicated to the reporting (since the changes?)
4. How are the funding requirements influencing the way you deliver your service? On a daily basis, how do funding requirements affect your work?
  - Structure of program/organization
  - Content
  - Staff qualifications
  - Learner selection
  - Type of instruction (small group, 1 to 1, class)
  - Tutors
5. How do you see the requirements for funding affecting adult literacy in your province/territory?
6. From your perspective, are the accountability requirements accurately reflecting service delivery in the province (region, municipality)?
7. Which aspects of the system/structure/approach have been most/least useful? How easy/hard is it to talk about these topics/issues?
8. If you could develop an accountability system what would it look like?
9. What does accountability mean to you?

## APPENDIX C:

### Interview Protocols

#### INTERVIEW WITH **FUNDER**

##### I. **BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

- Name
- Background (training, previous work)
- Position
  - How long?
- Responsibility

##### II. **ABOUT THE FUNDING**

1. Type of funder (provincial/territorial, federal)
2. Size of annual budget for adult literacy services
3. Of the above amount, what percentage is core funding? How much is project funding?
4. What programs/services do you fund?
5. How many adult literacy programs do you fund? How many organizations (that deliver adult literacy programs) do you fund?

##### III. **ABOUT MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

6. How do you monitor program success (check all that apply)?
7. What information do you require the programs you fund to report on? How often? What does this framework show/measure? What are you trying to find out/finding from the data collected? Why? Since when? What changes, if any, are planned?  
  
From your perspective, are the accountability requirements accurately reflecting service delivery in the province (region, municipality)?
8. How do you use the information that you gather from literacy programs?
9. Which aspects of the system/structure have been most/least useful?
10. Please summarize the types of feedback or input you have received from literacy service providers about your accountability processes. What impacts have you seen or heard of?
11. How would you change the accountability process for adult literacy services?
12. Can you please define "accountability"?