



Promoting and supporting literacy and learning since 1990

Strategic Plan 2007-2010

Our Mission

We believe that literacy is a human right, that literacy is everyone's business and that we all have a part to play.

Our guiding principles and values are to:

- Promote literacy and learning
- Support adult learners and families
- Provide training and professional development for the literacy field
- Offer information, consultation, and resources about literacy
- Develop partnerships
- Present a united voice on literacy issues

Our Strategic Priorities

1. Raise public awareness and influence public policy on literacy in BC
2. Support innovation and collaboration to increase literacy rates in BC
3. Support learners
4. Support the regional and local literacy infrastructure in BC
5. Review the Literacy BC Mission and Mandate and governance
6. Diversify the funding base

I. Raise public awareness and influence public policy on literacy

Raising public awareness and influencing policy on literacy have always been central to Literacy BC's mission, and will continue to be so. As our mission statement makes clear, we believe that "literacy is everybody's business and we all have a role to play."

Three of our guiding principles and values speak directly to these roles: promoting literacy and learning, developing partnerships, and providing a unified voice on literacy issues. We are very pleased that the Government of British Columbia has made literacy one of its "Golden Goals;" that the City of Vancouver recently declared Vancouver a "Learning City;" and that tuition for all Adult Basic Education in the province has been eliminated. These developments, and others, reflect the fact that improving literacy is now a "front burner" issue in British Columbia. Literacy BC wants to ensure that literacy remains in the forefront of the public policy agenda. To do that, we need to deepen public understanding that literacy is a foundation investment in economic prosperity and social wellbeing, and identify steps that can be taken to increase literacy rates. We also need to broaden the ownership of literacy issues beyond government. In short, as our mission statement says, we need to make literacy "everybody's business."

Partnerships and collaboration have always been central to the way we approach public awareness and advocacy. We are part of a national network of provincial literacy coalitions and benefit from our partnerships with national organizations such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy and ABC Canada. At the provincial level, we have developed a strong partnership with the network of regional literacy coordinators across the province, Literacy Now (established as part of the 2010 Legacies infrastructure), community colleges and school districts. We are proud of the strong and collaborative relationships we have built with all levels of government, business and labour, academic and research institutions, and other non-profits. But we need to broaden our partnerships and bring even more players to literacy issues. To do this, we also need to expand our network of collaborators and champions – people and organizations who will join us in raising awareness of literacy issues in their respective communities.

Partnering with government agencies that have lead responsibility for literacy remains one of our highest priorities. We will also be directing our advocacy activities beyond these agencies to other government departments and to non-government players. Our goal is to "embed" literacy as a foundation issue in "everybody's business." To achieve this we will:

- a. **Search out new partners within government** (eg., Solicitor General, Income Assistance, Economic Development), **business** (eg., via Small Business BC and through fund development activities), **and community organizations** to augment current partnerships.
- b. **With partners, highlight the "links to literacy" in their mandates and operations**, and help them to develop action plans that will achieve their goals through investments in literacy.

We will also renew our public information materials. Specific activities will include:

- a. **Re-design of the Literacy BC website.** The website will become the authoritative source for information on literacy and literacy activities in British Columbia. It will house basic "facts and figures" on literacy in the province gathered from authoritative sources such as Statistics Canada, IALSS, and the Canadian Council on Learning. It will feature innovations, best practices, and summary research findings on issue affecting literacy in BC. The website will also provide a network, connecting practitioners, researchers, learners and other literacy champions.
- b. **Redesign Literacy BC public information packages.** At present, Literacy BC has an extensive collection of print-based information sheets and reports, including a printed Annual Report. Wherever appropriate, public information material will be migrated to the website. Print material will be re-designed so that it responds more directly to the needs and interests of specific audiences.
- c. **Develop additional public information material.** New public information material will be developed for all stages of lifelong learning and on specific populations with literacy challenges including non-English speakers, learning disabled, people living in rural and remote communities, and Aboriginal Canadians.

2. Support innovation and collaboration on literacy practices

Literacy BC has a longstanding reputation for supporting and facilitating innovation and collaboration that leads to improvements in literacy in BC. All parts of the Literacy BC organization contribute to this strategic priority. For example, through our Family Literacy initiative we distribute funds to community organizations that enable innovative family literacy programs and activities; in our research activity we administer research-in-action projects where researchers and practitioners join forces to explore innovative and effective approaches to programming; we also spearhead innovative demonstration projects often with a view to creating models for replication across the country.

Jointly with partners, we will sponsor initiatives that promote innovative practice and multi-partner collaboration in various sectors including in the workplace, with social services agencies, and in communities. Key new activities in each of these areas are outlined below.

- a. **Business and Labour.** Literacy BC did excellent foundation work a few years ago toward a workforce/workplace strategy, but implementation stalled when the project funding ended. Recently, largely in response to labour force demands, there is renewed public and government interest in the topic. We will re-activate work in this area, focusing on the links between community-based programs and workplace-based skills and bringing our information products to the workplace.
- b. **Social Services.** Research clearly indicates that people with low literacy are at risk of being economically and socially marginalized and excluded. There is also clear evidence that increasing literacy rates increases the chances of escaping marginalization permanently, both now and for future generations. In the coming years, Literacy BC will build partnerships with key social service agencies that provide essential services to at-risk populations. We will begin this work by focusing on developing partnerships with professionals in correctional services and social services agencies.
- c. **Communities.** The provincial government is investing heavily in community-based approaches to literacy and has recently legislated the requirement that school districts submit comprehensive, lifelong, community-wide literacy plans. The focus fits well with Literacy BC's longstanding advocacy of community-based, learner-centered literacy programs and our focus on both family and adult literacy. Working in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Literacy BC will be providing tools and supports to school districts as they prepare District Literacy Plans.

3. Support learners and families to achieve their literacy goals

Providing supports for literacy learners and families is one of our guiding principles and values. We offer two principal direct services to learners: information on programs and services to meet their needs, and financial assistance to help offset their costs. Both of these services are now being significantly expanded. We will also be launching a network of Learner Champions – adults who are willing to share their experiences and mentor others to meet their literacy goals.

- a. **Information and Referral Services.** Among Literacy BC's signature services is the operation of BC's only toll-free Learn Line providing information on literacy programs and services, and our lending library which houses BC's largest single collection of resources on literacy. In collaboration with the Province of British Columbia, we are significantly expanding referral information services through an expanded toll-free telephone service and a new, province-wide, on-line directory of literacy programs and services. These initiatives will strengthen and consolidate Literacy BC's reputation as the premier provider of this information for British Columbians. In doing so, we will also be delivering on a key element in the BC Government's literacy action plan announced in January, 2007.
- b. **Financial Aid to learners.** Literacy BC currently provides financial support to learners through the PACE and Gallagher award programs. To our knowledge, these are the only community-based province-wide programs of their kind in British Columbia. Over the years, recipients have told us that these small awards made "all the difference" in their being able to continue with their literacy studies. We plan to undertake a review of these financial assistance programs with a view to launching fundraising activities that will enable us to expand them in the future.

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- c. **A Network of Learner-Leaders.** Literacy BC has always attached importance to developing and recognizing the leadership of adult learner. This is reflected in our basic governance structure which reserves two positions on the Board of Directors for learners and one position on the provincial delegation to the national umbrella group, the Movement for Canadian Literacy. We plan to broaden our efforts to support learners who want to be literacy leaders by, for example providing training and development for learners who want to become tutors or mentors in their communities. We launched this at our 2007 Summer Literacy Institute with a new stream of activity to develop leadership skills of adult learners.

4. Support BC's regional and local literacy infrastructure

BC's unique infrastructure of regional literacy coordination provides support and leadership for adult literacy across the province. The Regional Literacy Coordinators (RLCs) play a critical leadership role coordinating literacy activities, providing information and referral to learners, creating local multi-partner coalitions for innovative programming, supporting literacy practitioners and generally keeping literacy commitments energized at the local level. However, the infrastructure is under immense stress – the result of inadequate, complex and unstable funding arrangements combined with expanded expectations for the role. Key decisions will need to be taken in 2008 on the future role and financing of this important part of the literacy infrastructure in BC. These decisions will also have implications for the provision of training and support to RLCs, which Literacy BC has provided for this group in the past. To that end, in this planning period we will:

- a. In 2007-08, press the Ministry of Advanced Education to clarify the role and stabilize the funding for the regional literacy coordination infrastructure.
- b. Develop and implement a framework to meet new and ongoing professional development needs of Regional Literacy Coordinators and adult literacy practitioners.
- c. In partnership with Vancouver Community College and others, launch and sustain the first Canadian certificate program for family literacy practitioners.
- d. Use the Literacy BC website to disseminate key research findings and share best practices in literacy program delivery.

Literacy BC and Literacy Now are working together to develop a system of benchmarks for community-based adult literacy programs. If our recommendations are accepted, by the end of this planning period there will be a province-wide system for monitoring and assessing the progress of learners in these programs. This will have particular implications for our research and professional development activities.

Building the volunteer base in community-based literacy provision. Volunteer tutors are the heart and soul of community-based literacy provision. They are one of the unique features that distinguish this sector from others such as the school and college system and workplace-based programs. Literacy BC plays a leadership role in supporting and sustaining this cornerstone of community literacy provision; we will:

- a. Develop and implement a province-wide program to recognize and celebrate the literacy volunteer.
- b. Increase the provision of training and development supports for adult literacy volunteers.

5. Review Literacy BC's mission, mandate and governance

Review of mission, mandate, and governance should be ongoing priorities in any organization, but important developments in the literacy scene in British Columbia make this a particularly timely strategic priority for Literacy BC. We have been both destabilized and strengthened by events over the past year – destabilized by cuts announced at the federal level which suggest a new, but as yet unclear, relationship with the National Office of Literacy and Learning which has been our primary funder of research activities and a key funder of our core activities; and strengthened by the Province's continuing commitment to make BC the most literate jurisdiction in North America, the release of a literacy action plan, the adoption of policy framework to achieve lifelong and life-wide literacy, and the identification of new literacy priorities in relation to immigrants, Aboriginal people, and the workplace. We have also been considerably strengthened by the success of our fundraising activities and the development of new partnerships both within and outside government. These developments raise some important questions for Literacy BC. A Board-led process will be launched to address the implications of these developments for governance practice at Literacy BC.

- a. **Reviewing Literacy BC's mission and mandate**, particularly in light of the findings of IALSS and the provincial government's focus on life-long and life-wide literacy. Does our mission and mandate position us optimally to lead on the most pressing literacy challenges in BC?
- b. **Strengthening our partnership with Literacy Now**. Literacy BC will continue to be attentive to our collaborative relationship with Literacy Now, in order to maximise results for literacy and learners in BC, and to minimise overlaps or inefficiencies.
- c. **Reviewing the governance structure and the composition of the Literacy BC Board of Directors**. The Board of Directors provides strong representation of regional and adult learner interests. As we look to the future, do we need to increase Board representation of other literacy partners such as the business sector, the formal education sector, ESL and immigrant services, and Aboriginal communities? Given the priority to diversify funding, do we need more Board experience in fundraising and financial management? Following action on item (a) above, the Board will review Board governance to ensure alignment with our mission and mandate.

6. Diversify the Funding Base

Since its inception, Literacy BC has depended heavily on governments (both federal and provincial) for core funding and almost entirely on the federal government for research funds. We need to reduce our reliance on government for core funding and to diversify our funding partnerships for specific projects. We also need to increase our unrestricted cash assets as a hedge against funding cuts such as those announced last year by the federal government, and to increase our reserve fund for other unforeseen contingencies. We recommend a multi-pronged strategy to achieve these goals.

- a. **Establish a target for a contingency fund** to meet legal obligations and as a hedge against future funding cuts.
- b. **Develop an overall fundraising strategy** to increase the percentage of revenues from fundraising and identify specific activities to be supported with fund-raised revenues.
- c. **Expand our project-based funding partnerships** to reduce reliance on traditional government funders.