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Community Literacy of Ontario

Our Voice

CIPMS Resources and Training

The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) first introduced the concept of a Continuous Improvement Performance Management System (CIPMS) to Literacy and Basic Skills adult literacy delivery agencies in 2001 when it implemented a computer-based Information Management System (IMS).

Since 2001, MTCU has gradually introduced some of the components of CIPMS to the Ontario literacy field. Those components have included the IMS and the Learner Satisfaction Survey (LSS). These two tools have enabled agencies to collect data that can be used for program evaluation. As well, the Program Monitoring Report has helped agencies report on the steps they have been taking towards program evaluation and documentation. MTCU has provided updates about CIPMS through a series of letters distributed to the field via AlphaCom postings on INFO-LBS. MTCU will continue to provide information as CIPMS rolls out.

In 2007, MTCU funded Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO), the Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC), Goal: Ontario Literacy for Deaf People (GOLD), the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) and La Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base to provide CIPMS training to their respective sector or stream.

As part of CLO's commitment to offering CIPMS information and training to the community-based sector, we will be providing:

⇒ CIPMS training at CLO's conference (October 2007)
⇒ Two online workshops on Centra (November 2007)
⇒ A self-directed training module on our Literacy Basics website (www.nald.ca/literacybasics) (available April 2008)
⇒ A resource manual on the CIPMS (available April 2008)
⇒ Two CIPMS bulletins
⇒ Two CIPMS E-communiqués
⇒ A CIPMS discussion on AlphaCom (December 2007 to March 2008)

CIPMS Resources and Training

In terms of activities to date, CLO distributed a survey asking about key CIPMS resource and training needs to community literacy agencies in Spring 2007. Responses were received from 74 agencies across Ontario. Information gathered from this survey helped CLO plan for the upcoming fall training events. As well, CLO developed two introductory workshops that were delivered to 35 participants at the Laubach Literacy Ontario conference in June 2007.

In addition to the training opportunities offered by Community Literacy of Ontario, each of the other funded CIPMS projects mentioned previously will also be providing training. La Coalition is delivering training to its members in October 2007. OLC, the ONLC and GOLD will be providing training for their respective sectors and streams in early 2008. Each of these organizations will be in direct contact about their training with their own stakeholder groups. CLO is very pleased to be working cooperatively in a Provincial CIPMS Working Group with these partners and MTCU in order to share resources, information and strategies.

The Ontario Literacy Coalition will be offering CIPMS training at six sites in 2008. At this point, the exact dates and locations have not yet been determined. These six training sessions will focus on literacy practitioners from the college and school board sectors. However, the sessions will be open to community based practitioners as well. The OLC is linking with the College Sector Committee, CESBA and the regional networks to further develop plans for their training. The OLC will be circulating more information to the literacy field in the future.

As well, the Ontario Literacy Coalition has received funding to take on the lead communications role about CIPMS with Anglophone agencies.

All of the CIPMS training events are designed to provide practitioners with the skills and knowledge to:

⇒ Effectively collect and analyze program data

⇒ Use tools (such as the IMS Activity Report, the Learner Satisfaction Survey, the Program Monitoring Report and the Self-Assessment Tool) for agency self-assessment

⇒ Identify two areas to develop/improve as part of the upcoming 2008/2009 business planning process

⇒ Understand key concepts related to CIPMS

In a nutshell, CIPMS will enable literacy agencies to reliably and validly report on the results learners achieve in our programs and it will allow MTCU to clearly report on the broader LBS program achievements as a whole. This will be of great benefit when it comes to marketing our programs or when seeking out sources of funding or when working with our partner agencies in the Employment Ontario system.

Definition of CIPMS

MTCU defines CIPMS as

> *A systematic approach for continuous improvement that will allow all delivery sites to provide a high quality standard of service for different communities and clients, while maintaining consistency across Ontario.*

CIPMS provides a framework for program measurement and management that incorporates a number of day-to-day operations including data collection, client satisfaction, agency self-assessment and outcomes-based program evaluation. Core measures and performance indicators are used to provide an overall picture of what a program aims to achieve, what it actually achieves and how well it meets its goals. CIPMS is an ongoing cycle of implementation, monitoring, reacting and measuring.

CIPMS shifts the focus away from the processes we use to the results we achieve. Data gathered and analyzed as part of CIPMS can be used in the community by agencies to promote the results we achieve, for learner recruitment, for fundraising and so on. The same data can be used on a provincial level by MTCU to promote the LBS program within government and to the public at large. Together, we can use CIPMS to definitively and confidently showcase our successes.

Within Ontario literacy agencies, CIPMS is about continuously striving to provide the best quality services possible for our learners and for our communities. We can do this by building on the good practices we already have in place and by adapting or changing those practices as needed to achieve the best results possible.

Continuous Improvement Performance Management is not unique to literacy, to MTCU or even to the Ontario government. It is used by businesses, government agencies and not-for-profit organizations around the world. It has proven to be effective in helping those agencies, organizations and businesses set manageable targets and monitor their achievements. It can help us showcase our successes and identify areas when we can make improvements to better serve our learners.

Implementing CIPMS is not a quick fix. It takes several years to achieve a fully functional system. This is because you need to spend some time to gather useful data and to measure and analyze data that can be used to help you set targets. As well, it takes time to successfully develop and incorporate new processes in an organization to the point that they become a part of the day-to-day operations. MTCU recognizes that literacy agencies are at different steps along the way and will continue to support agencies as we all work together towards implementing CIPMS.

Although CIPMS is, by its very nature, systematic, that does not mean that every literacy agency in Ontario will be required to use the same process. Different streams and sectors, and individual agencies, have different needs and resources, and a CIPMS should be implemented systematically in a way that best suits each agency. Some agencies already have many processes in place; others will have to determine what will work for them. It is important to note that CIPMS processes are not random or sporadic; rather, they are deliberate and purposeful activities that incorporate planning, action, revision and change as needed.

Elements of CIPMS

MTCU describes an LBS CIPMS as consisting of the following elements:

A performance measurement process that includes:

⇒ An LBS logic model that describes the business of the program. This has already been developed by MTCU and will be shared at training events.

⇒ Relationship between program's input, activities, outputs and outcomes (results).

⇒ Results-based measurement, focusing on measuring outcomes.

⇒ Core measures and indicators for performance in three key areas: efficiency, effectiveness and client satisfaction. MTCU has developed draft core measures; they will be shared at the training events.

⇒ Data collection and reporting on performance on the Information Management System in these three key areas. Eventually, the IMS as we know it will be changed to better fit in with similar systems used in Employment Ontario. MTCU has made mention on INFO-LBS on AlphaCom (in a posting dated September 19, 2007) of the future development of an integrated Employment Ontario Information System (EOIS). More information will be available from MTCU in the coming months.
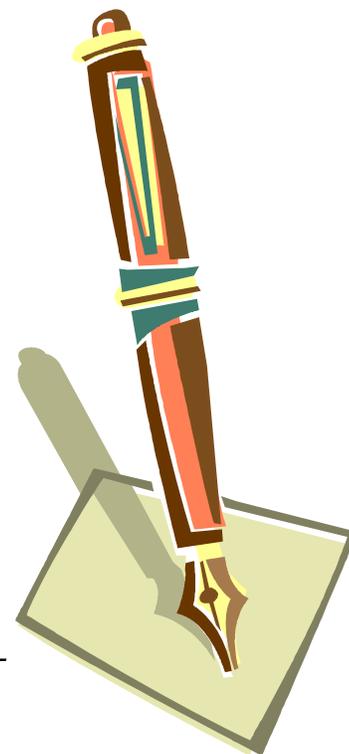
A system for managing performance, based on the measures that support:

⇒ Agency self-assessment to actively assess progress towards results, evaluate and adjust business practice to improve an organization's results and continuously improve. This will be explained more fully during the training events.

⇒ A framework for evaluation that outlines how agency performance is going to be measured by MTCU and decisions related to funding. MTCU will provide more information about this at a later date.

⇒ Benchmarking to the literacy systems of other jurisdictions to achieve improvements within LBS over time. MTCU will provide more information about this at a later date.

A model of continuous improvement that:

⇒ Integrates performance management into the daily operations of the LBS Program and delivery agencies in order to continuously seek improvements in the quality of services offered to learners. This will be addressed during the training events.

⇒ Supports innovation in literacy practice. MTCU will provide more information about this at a later date.

CIPMS and Literacy

Although CIPMS is valuable from both a government and key stakeholder perspective, it is also important to recognize the value it brings to literacy agencies. Once it is fully implemented, CIPMS will help us be both more efficient and more effective.

The process of implementing CIPMS in a literacy agency is similar to the steps we took to implement learning outcomes. From this perspective, it is a natural extension of what we already do. As literacy practitioners, we encourage our learners to set goals and together we measure their achievements towards meeting those goals. We offer opportunities for monitoring the goals learners have set through assessment at the beginning of the program, throughout the program and at the end. We encourage learners to assess their own progress. Learner success can be reported to funders, to other training providers, to employers, to family members and to the community. Since we set goals, monitor progress and report success for learners, it is also logical that we would do the same thing for our programs as a whole.

Moving towards a fully functional CIPMS will require some adjustment for literacy practitioners. Many agencies have already been incorporating some of the elements of CIPMS, including using data from both the IMS and the Learner Satisfaction Survey and the Program Monitoring Report for evaluation. However, now we need to be more deliberate and focused about how we set goals and targets, how we monitor our progress towards achieving those goals and targets and how we incorporate all of this into our day-to-day operational practices. As with any new undertaking, there will be a learning curve as we implement CIPMS. However, in the long run, continuous improvement should lead to increased efficiency and effectiveness, helping literacy agencies to provide the best possible service within the resources at their disposal.

Documenting and analyzing our results on an ongoing basis provides us with the proof that we need to know where we are making progress and where we need to make improvements. By being more efficient and effective, we can better help learners to meet their goals. This translates to success for both the agency and its learners.

Another reason MTCU is seeking to implement CIPMS is that is has been proven to work in other areas. Performance management has been embraced by industry, business, government and not-for-profit organizations around the world. It is a proven process that gives results. It makes good sense. Both the Literacy Basics module and CLO's CIPMS manual will provide examples of successful CIPMS implementation.

At this point in time (September 2007), all LBS-funded delivery agencies will be expected to identify two areas for development and/or improvement as part of the upcoming 2008/2009 business planning process. Upcoming training events and CIPMS resources will help practitioners with this requirement, and MTCU Field Consultants will also be able to provide guidance. For the past few years, agencies have been identifying areas for improvement through their program evaluation plans. The new business plan requirement formalizes this and requires agencies to document two specific areas. The self-assessment guide and tool will also help with this requirement.

Agency Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is another important component of CIPMS. In fact, research shows that it is a key element of best practices for CIPMS. Research conducted during the creation of CIPMS for JobConnect has demonstrated that agency self-assessment can and does improve the quality of services offered. A common self-assessment method can help establish a province-wide analysis and provide comparative data that can be used by agencies to promote literacy within our communities as well as by MTCU to report on overall LBS successes and achievements.

MTCU has been developing a self-assessment tool specific for LBS agencies. An accompanying guide is also being developed. These resources are not quite ready, but will be available at CLO's October conference. This self-assessment tool can help us identify areas of concern and initiate change in our own agencies when needed. It also provides a way to document our processes and procedures rather than just having a "sense" that it's time to make a change. It can help us to showcase our success to ourselves, our students, our communities and our funders.

According to MTCU, the purpose of the LBS Self-Assessment Tool is to:

⇒ support delivery agencies in their efforts to continuously improve the quality of services they offer
⇒ establish a consistent system-wide process of analysis
⇒ obtain a clear, unbiased view of an agency's performance

There are four steps to self-assessment. We will explore these in more detail at the CIPMS training events, in our CIPMS manual and in our Literacy Basics CIPMS module. The first step is to understand the results your agency is achieving. The second step is to understand what you steps you can take to improve those results. The third step is to create a plan for that improvement, and the final step is to monitor progress and make adjustments as needed.

Implementing self-assessment is part of the overall CIPMS cycle. There is no beginning and no end. Goal-setting, documentation and monitoring are continuous and part of everyday operations within the agency.
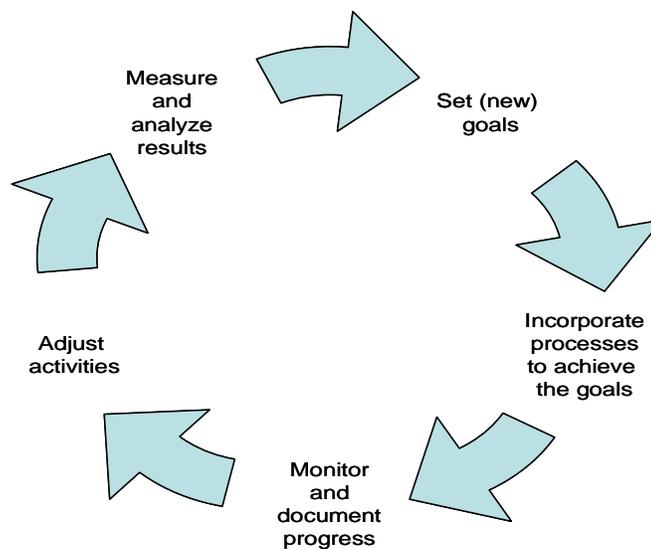
Learner Skill Attainment

Measuring learner skill attainment is an important component of the LBS CIPMS. In 2007/2008 MTCU funded 17 projects to look at learner skill attainment in literacy programs across Ontario.

The College Sector Committee has the lead project for developing the overarching Learner Skill Attainment Framework for assessing learner skill attainment. This framework will enable programs in all sectors and streams to track and report on the progress of learners in LBS and Academic Upgrading programs. The College Sector Committee is recommending a "pathway approach" to learner skill attainment and the following five learner transition paths have been identified:

⇒ Transition to Independence
⇒ Transition to Employment
⇒ Transition to Apprenticeship
⇒ Transition to Postsecondary
⇒ Transition to Credit

CLO was funded by MTCU for one of the 17 LSA projects. Our project is called: *Success Indicators for Independence Goals.* CLO's project focuses on the learner pathway of Foundational Skills for Lifelong Learning and involves researching success indicators and transition markers in the domain of independence.

In addition to conducting extensive Internet and print-based research, CLO conducted interviews with key informants from thirteen community literacy agencies to determine the most common learner goals related to independence and to identify core skills necessary to achieve those goals.

The resulting draft framework organizes independence goals along a continuum of personal focus from "home to community" into four broad areas: (1) Managing basic needs; (2) Managing health; (3) Managing personal issues and relationships; (4) Participating fully as a member of the community.

CLO's draft framework was presented at a focus group with our board in June 2007. It was further intensively piloted by four community literacy agencies from June-August 2007. Our draft independence framework will be first presented at our conference in October 2007. CLO's project results will be more broadly available in January 2008.

CIPMS and Employment Ontario

CIPMS is a critical component of the Employment Ontario Training and Employment System. It is part of an overarching strategy designed to create a cohesive set of policies and improved processes so that programs can better work together to address client needs. Employment Ontario intends to transform the way MTCU delivers training and employment programs to achieve more effective and efficient services and better results.

The Employment Ontario network exists to deliver quality programming and to obtain concrete, measurable results. LBS programs are part of that network and therefore are expected to achieve these goals. It is extremely important that our successes and results can be demonstrated to stakeholders outside of the relatively small world of Literacy and Basic Skills. MTCU will be looking at the performance results of all delivery agencies, and a functioning CIPMS will allow literacy programs to clearly demonstrate the successful results they have achieved.

For more information about Employment Ontario, please visit their website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/etlanding.html. As well, please visit the website of the Employment Ontario Partners Gateway at www.eopg.ca. This site provides support, resources and information to agencies delivering services under Employment Ontario.

In addition, CLO has written an overview for literacy agencies that you can find on CLO's website at www.nald.ca/clo.htm (just click on "MTCU Initiatives"). This overview includes such information as: What is *Employment Ontario*?; What does this mean for literacy agencies?; Where does literacy fit within the *Employment Ontario* system?