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Here to Help:

Research Report On Supporting Adult Learners From Under-Represented Groups In LBS Programs

Acknowledgements

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

In this report, CLO looks at the needs of under-represented groups across the province, and considers how Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs can best meet their needs.

To gather information about under-represented groups and how to serve them, we drew from:

- the results of a provincial survey of Literacy and Basic Skills programs executed in September of 2022
- a provincial focus group held in October 2022
- participation in four provincial Community of Practice sessions focused on serving under-represented groups, running from November 2022 through February 2023
- provincial demographic data collected by the Workforce Planning Board of Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford
- previously produced research papers and articles focused on serving people who are under-represented in the labour market

The ability for members of under-represented groups to gain the skills they need for meaningful employment has become a recent focus across the province, particularly as part of the Skills for Success initiative. Ensuring that everyone has equal access to skill-building opportunities that meet their needs can help improve their sense of wellbeing and belonging, and help them achieve their employment goals. In this way, providing effective support of people currently under-represented in the labour market can help overcome the labour shortage reported by employers across all sectors.

This report will outline information about under-represented groups, and share the challenges, successes, resources and strategies being used by LBS programs across the province to effectively work with them.

WHO IS UNDER-REPRESENTED?

The term "under-represented" has many definitions and can be interpreted differently depending on the audience. For CLO's purposes, under-represented groups are considered those demographic or social groups that are not represented in the labour market at the same rate as they are within the population of Ontario. They are frequently less represented in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs, employment services, apprenticeship training, and higher education as well.

Under-representation can be due to various factors, including historical discrimination, lack of access to opportunities, and systemic biases. Identifying and addressing under-representation is important for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In Ontario, some of the most underrepresented groups in the labour market include:

1. Indigenous peoples: Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, have historically faced systemic barriers to labour market participation. According to Statistics Canada 2021 Census results, labour force participation notably lags behind the indigenous population increases.

2. Women: Despite gains in recent decades, women still face barriers to equal participation in the labour market, including unequal pay, underrepresentation in leadership and high-paying industries, and unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities. This under-representation has been exacerbated in the last several years with women making up the majority of the workforce in several sectors hard-hit by COVID-19 (including "helping" roles in healthcare and service).

3. Persons with disabilities: People with disabilities often face significant barriers to labour market participation, including inaccessible workspaces and lack of accommodations, as well as stigma and discrimination. A lack of understanding among employers of how to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce can also play a role in their under-representation in the labour market.

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

4. Racialized persons: Racialized persons, including Black, Asian, and Middle Eastern individuals, continue to face barriers to labour market participation, including discrimination, wage gaps, and underrepresentation in leadership positions. According to Statistic Canada's 2021 Census, while still under-represented, labour market participation rates are beginning to increase among many racialized groups, with notable increases for Korean and West Asian Canadians.

5. Newcomers to Canada: Immigrants and refugees to Canada often face challenges in the labour market, including language barriers, lack of recognition of foreign credentials, a need for Canadian work experience, and challenges with integration. Many newcomers to Canada, particularly women, want to work but have family responsibilities that prevent them from doing so, especially during the settlement process.

While the five groups listed here are the most commonly identified under-represented groups, there are many others. Each of the following groups is also under-represented in the labour market:

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and those with other identities including asexual, intersex, and non-binary). Members of this community may face explicit discrimination, more subtle forms of bias, stigma and negative attitudes that create an unsafe environment and prevent them from actively participating in the labour market.

- People who have been incarcerated, who then face barriers to participation in the labour market due to their criminal record and potential lack of supported re-integration to society. Complicating their situation, they often enter the criminal justice system with a lower level of education and may not have opportunities to gain job skills and education while they were incarcerated.

- Homeless and street-involved people, who often face employment-related barriers related to a lack of permanent address for job applications. Members of this group often lack technology to view job postings and apply for employment, reliable transportation to get to and from work, access to hygiene products and appropriate clothing for employment, and have complicating health-related issues.

- People with mental health or addictions issues, who often face instability in their personal lives that impacts their ability to participate in employment. They may have an erratic work history, frequent medical appointments or incidents, housing instability, and encounter employers unwilling to provide accommodations.

- Youth, who may be overlooked for employment due to a lack of work history. They may not be able to meet educational requirements or requests for previous experience, and there may be a compounding need to develop key employability skills including communication, time management, problem solving skills and work ethic.

- Older adults, who may be less represented in the labour market because they are seeking only part-time employment, or are unable to perform certain duties due to physical limitations or health concerns. Older adults often face ageism, being seen as no longer vibrant, or too close to a retirement age to commit to a job long-term.

- People living in poverty, who often face compounding barriers that limit their ability to participate in the labour market, including transportation issues, caregiving responsibilities, lower levels of education, and poorer health.

As a result of their lack of representation within the labour force, particularly in decision-making roles or at higher levels of influence, the unique needs and perspectives of under-represented groups are not always considered. Recognizing that inequities in the labour market are closely linked to social and health inequities, the role of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) to support these individuals in a thoughtful, deliberate way is clear.

Determining which under-represented groups may already be served in LBS programs is a challenge on many levels. While learners are given the opportunity to self-identify in several demographic categories during program registration, the nature of self-identification continues to be a challenge. The categories for self-identification are also quite narrow, and do not include all of the under-represented groups identified above. To provide an example, looking at the learners served provincially in 2019-2020 (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), we see the following self-declared statistics.

Total learners served	Deaf or Deafblind	Indigenous	Visible minority	Newcomer	People with disabilities
41,868	642 (2%)	4,475 (11%)	6,109 (14%)	6,147 (14%)	11,635 (27%)

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Before looking at successes and challenges within Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs working with under-represented groups, CLO first asked practitioners for their feedback regarding which under-represented groups they believe they currently serve, and which seem to be "missing" from their LBS programs.

They reported a relatively even breakdown of male to female learners with roughly 54% presenting as female and 46% presenting as male. Reflecting the overall program data shared on the previous page which shows 27% of learners served by LBS programs provincially identified as having a disability, a large number of programs reported that people with disabilities were well represented in their programs.

While some programs reported serving members from other under-represented groups the reported numbers were very low. They included:

- People living in poverty
- Newcomers
- Seniors
- Visible minorities and racialized groups

Providing an interesting contrast, several of these under-represented groups were also reported as being those least served within the LBS programs that provided survey and focus group feedback. They included:

- Visible minorities and racialized groups
- Immigrants and English-second language speakers
- Youth
- Indigenous people
- People living in poverty/at risk of homelessness
- People with mental heath issues
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community

The categories both self-reported by learners and identified by LBS practitioners not only don't include all of the under-represented categories discussed thus far, they also don't take into account the numerous ways that a single person may be under-represented (referred to as "Intersectionality").

THE IMPACT OF INTERSECTIONALITY .

Intersectionality is a term used to acknowledge the complexity of the human condition – particularly as it relates to marginalized or under-represented groups. As a result of diverse backgrounds and experiences, along with both obvious and invisible identities, people may belong to multiple under-represented groups.

For example, a Black woman might experience a lack of representation based on both her race and her gender, which creates a unique experience that cannot be fully understood by looking at either on its own. Similarly, a person with a disability who is also LGBTQ+ might face unique challenges that arise from the intersection of those two elements of their identity.
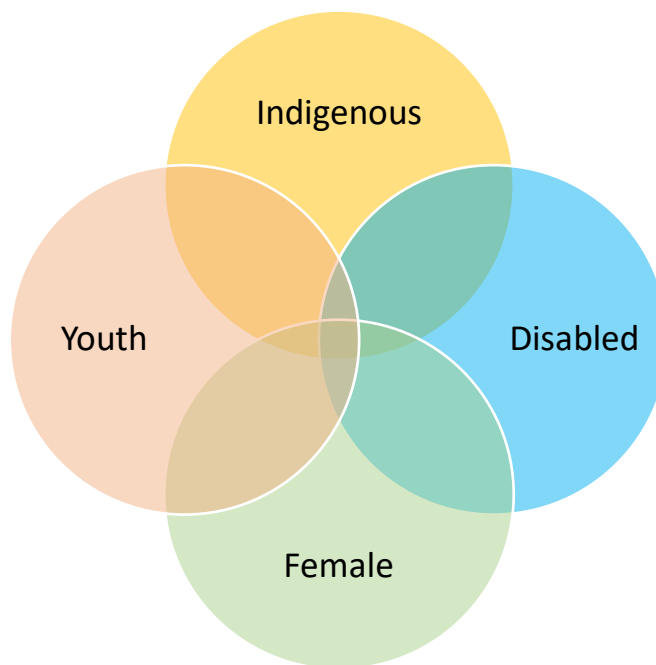
As shown above, someone who would be considered part of an under-represented group might actually be part of many different groups, each of which adds a layer of complexity or challenge to their experience in the labour market. To support them effectively, more than one element of their identity may need individualized attention.

FEEDBACK FROM THE FIELD

In the process of researching this report, CLO gathered input from Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs across the province through an online survey, a focus group, and participation in the Provincial Community of Practice focused on under-represented groups. Through these initiatives, CLO asked several key questions:

- Who is most represented in your program?

- Who is under-represented in your program?

- Why are these groups under-represented within your region, or your organization?

- Does your organization serve other under-represented groups not identified by the Ministry? Who are they?

- How are you currently serving your under-represented learners?

- What successes have you experienced serving under-represented learners?

- What challenges do you face in serving under-represented learners?

- What resources have you found helpful when serving under-represented learners?

- What promising strategies or practices have you already used or would like to try to serve these groups?

- How could you better serve your under-represented groups? What supports do you need?

Adding to this information gathering, during Community of Practice sessions representatives from Regional Literacy Networks across the province shared information about their successes and challenges as they work to enhance local planning and coordination related to under-represented groups. Their efforts are laying the groundwork for adult literacy programs across the province to pilot new ways of serving these groups through Skills for Success funding in 2023-2024.

Finally, a review of research reports and suggested resources for working with members of under-represented groups was reviewed and analyzed. Information from and about these resources is included both in the anecdotal commentary of this report, and in the "Resources" section.

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs that reported success in their support of under-represented groups shared their best practices through both CLO's provincial focus group and survey. Several key ideas were shared by programs, including:

Success: Focusing on the Learner as an Individual

"Programs are able to provide highly individuals support that suit each learner's specific needs."

"The relationship is more of a mentorship than teacher. This is a trusting relationship that takes the learner through the whole process and provides the familiarity and support these types of learners require."

Provincial focus group participants

LBS programs are committed to offering individualized programs that meet the specific needs of the learner. This is important for all learners, but by recognizing the exceptional needs that members of under-represented groups may bring to the table, flexible LBS programs offer unique learning opportunities that meets those needs.

This individualized attention, long a strength within the LBS system, has inspired practitioners to embed elements of language training into their programs, offer translation services, fluctuate schedules and delivery methods, and offer programming not normally embedded in LBS.

For example, newcomers have been offered relevant literacy-focused G1 drivers' preparation or exercises related to Canadian culture as part of their LBS program. This strategy offers opportunities to attract new learners who are motivated by the specific offer of support, and then find out what additional services LBS agencies have to offer that are of benefit to them.

Success: Considering Multifaceted Needs

Understanding the impact of intersectionality, staff have been able to better identify and address the unique experiences of members of under-represented communities – through appropriate referrals, modified schedules, and seeking out learning materials that reflect the community or communities the learner is a part of.

No learner comes to an LBS program with only a single need, and those that are most apparent may be helped or hindered by the learner's other barriers or challenges. To uncover those diverse and multi-layered needs, LBS programs need additional time to devote to these learners.

Success: Putting in the Time

A key element of successfully supporting members of under-represented groups is having the opportunity to work with the learner on a long-term basis, building a trusting relationship over time. Particularly if the staff of a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agency does not reflect the under-represented groups they are trying to serve, this is a necessary commitment – and one that pays off as learners from those under-represented groups share positive feedback about the program with others.

This element of success is challenging in an environment of measured learner gains, expectations of steady progress and required outcomes. Community-based LBS agencies have reported particular strength in this area given the more frequent use of one-to-one and tutoring style programming, which allows for greater flexibility and opportunities for trust and relationship-building.

Success: Adopting a Community Approach

LBS practitioners recognize the layered and complex needs that learners from under-represented groups may bring to the program with them. Wrap-around supports are required, and LBS programs aren't in a position to provide all the things that learners may need. Building relationships with other community organizations is critical, and through those relationships LBS practitioners become familiar with appropriate referrals and recommendations to get learners the additional supports they need.

An element of relationship-building for many programs is delivering presentations and information sessions with organizations that offer wrap-around supports, and those that serve under-represented groups. As a result, the understanding of what LBS programming can do for clients is increased and a reciprocal referral system often develops. It's an opportunity to create a community of support for clients and learners that benefits members of under-represented groups that may not learn about LBS programming otherwise.

Success: Partnerships and Co-delivery

LBS programs able to take the community approach to the next level and deliver programming at partner organizations have seen particular success. Particularly effective have been opportunities for LBS practitioners to co-deliver programming with representatives from organizations that regularly serve the populations we're trying to reach at locations such as shelters, mental health support groups, etc.

"We have been trying to set up a partnership with a local women's shelter to teach financial empowerment. They would set up the women with bank accounts and we would teach them all about banking, credit, budgeting et al."

Provincial Survey Respondent

Success: Reflecting the Learner's Community

Creating targeted programing or using training materials specific to the needs of under-represented groups provides an excellent opportunity for success in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs. When learners "see themselves" in the curriculum being delivered, it can spark a deeper level of interest and engagement. Learners who are not from under-represented groups benefit as well, as they are exposed to different cultures, values, and experiences within the context of their literacy upgrading. It provides LBS practitioners an opportunity to both teach foundational reading, writing, communication, digital and interpersonal skills and acceptance of diversity in the classroom.

Doing this successfully involves using or developing learning materials that represent diverse learners both in the language used and in the graphics or other visual elements included. Some helpful tips for identifying learning materials that reflect often under-represented groups include:

- ensure references to people from different cultures, genders, classes, sexualities, and abilities are included. Often in text, someone's cultural or racial background isn't clearly identified, but even people's names can bring visual images to mind, so look for a variety

- pay attention to skin colour, clothing, physical appearance, age, and obvious signs of ability or disability in photographs in learning materials. Choose those that offer a wide variety of different people, or avoid showing people altogether, relying on visual images related to the topic instead

- avoid using language that refers to a gender binary (ex. "ladies and gentlemen") when possible. Instead, use non-gendered group terms like learners, employers, and workers. When opportunities to include gender identification occur (ex. she went to the store), default to using non-gender identifying terms like "they" or "them" in their place (ex. they went to the store)

- continually review the material you've used in the past or want to use in the future through this lens. As mentioned in the APA Style Guide: "long-standing cultural practice can exert a powerful influence over even the most conscientious author. Just as you have learned to check what you write for spelling, grammar, and wordiness, practice rereading your work for bias."

For more information, be sure to review the "Resources" section of this report!

There are systemic barriers that make it more difficult for members of under-represented groups to participate in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and other training programs. Many are unintentional, and result from a system designed without the specific needs of these groups in mind. Adding to that challenge, some of these barriers can go unrecognized by those outside the under-represented groups in question.

Barrier: Lack of Representation

When a learner cannot "see themselves" within a program or the curriculum it delivers, they don't develop a sense of belonging. In many cases, they may feel ostracized or like an outsider when their experiences in life are not reflected. For example, if no one referred to in the curriculum they are using looks like them, has a name that sounds like theirs, uses the same pronouns they do, or reflects their identity and experiences in any other way, it feels less relevant to their lives.

A lack of representation within the organization offering service can create a significant trust issue as well. If members of under-represented groups are unable to see themselves reflected in the staff or programming they're offered, they may not feel welcome or that there is a place for them within the organization.

Barrier: Unrealistic Expectations

Attendance and progress expectations don't always take into consideration the complicated lives that members of some under-represented groups face.

From a program perspective, not being able to demonstrate learner progress reflects negatively on program statistics, even if the expected timeline to achieve that progress is unrealistic for their learner.

"The time needed to support their learning is very high – they need to be in the program for extended to time learn skills. It's difficult for the program to succeed with Ministry outcomes while serving those in dire need."

Provincial Survey Respondent

From a learner perspective, because negative consequences can occur for non-participation, clients may be driven away from the programs they need the most. With many prospective learners putting together full-time work from several part

time jobs, they may have limited hours to attend programming. While offering independent online programming can be helpful for some learners with complex schedules, not everyone has the digital literacy skills and access to technology and internet they need to take advantage of it.

Barrier: Lack of Awareness

"There's a misunderstanding of our mandate by the public who often think we work with emergent readers and writers only."

Provincial Survey Respondent

There is a greater need for awareness of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and how it can support the achievement of individual goals within under-represented groups. LBS programs need to market in order to broaden their reach, both directly to prospective learners and to the organizations that serve them. Without marketing and outreach budgets however, this task can only be done off the side of someone's desk when time allows, and rarely in a strategic manner with the support of marketing and outreach professionals.

Barrier: The Funding Doesn't Reflect the Complexity

It takes more time to develop the level of relationship with a learner that's required to uncover each of the elements of their story that may have labelled them part of an "under-represented group," and to devise a respectful, inclusive training plan to meet their unique needs. LBS programs with limited staff struggle to devote the individual time required to build these trusting relationships.

Once built however, life stabilization is often a need uncovered by LBS practitioners who work hard to provide referrals and wrap-around supports. Without additional funding for both the time it takes and the additional supports learners may need, many pay for

"Overall, under-represented groups in LBS are different than other sectors. These under-represented groups are all facing individual and systemic barriers. LBS is not supporting one single issue, unlike the ministry list of siloed groups, LBS is commonly supporting multiple barriers. Because of this it is difficult to receive only LBS funding while providing wraparound supports to these individuals."

Provincial focus group participant

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

things like food out-of-pocket, work far more hours than they are paid for, or need to rely on fundraising to provide additional support for these learners. Ultimately, additional funding is needed to provide support for complex clients, including those from under-represented groups.

Barrier: Not Reflecting the Audience

General programming doesn't necessarily meet the needs of under-represented groups. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) practitioners need access to relevant, culturally sensitive curriculum and programming that does. Many LBS practitioners report looking for resources online to reflect the needs of under-represented groups, but without a dedicated database of resources that meet the diverse needs of the intended audience, programs are offering inconsistent training that may not be aligned to the OALCF or developed specifically for adult learners.

Even programming developed for specific populations (ex. youth) doesn't always take intersectionality into account, painting the needs of the group broadly rather than considering the needs of the individual. Put simply, no-one is only one thing. To approach someone through the lens of what they need as a newcomer, indigenous learner or member of the LGBTQ+ community downplays the impact of the other intersecting barriers faced by the other under-represented groups they may be a part of. Programming created based on how someone else sees the learner vs. how the learner sees themselves and their needs may be very different.

Having identified successful practices and recognized several challenges, we have the opportunity to develop effective strategies to best serve members of under-represented groups.

"There's a lack of instructional resources for this demographic."

"Learning about other resources would help our organization better serve under-represented learners."
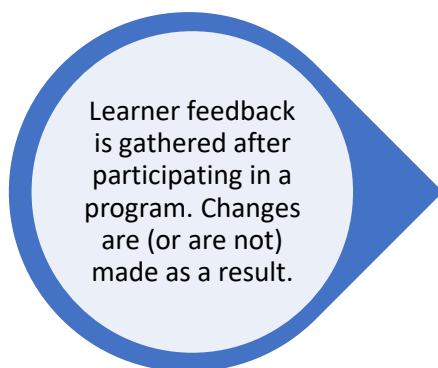
Provincial Survey Respondents

Strategy: Nothing About Us Without Us

To most effectively serve members of under-represented groups, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs must provide opportunities for these learners to share their perspective on what they need, and how they need it. Replacing the lens of privilege that says "let's create a program for you" with "let's create a program with you" gives us an opportunity for co-creation that will result in more authentic and appropriate learning opportunities for all involved.

Traditionally, we ask for feedback from learners after they have participated in a fully-designed learning program. While post-learning feedback is valuable, it is the least engaged way for members of under-represented groups to provide input into the learning experiences that would best serve them. What didn't work is identified after the program has already run, leaving practitioners to make changes to better support future learners, assuming time and funding allows for revisions. Co-creation brings the perspectives and needs of learners into the picture long before anyone attends the training.

Learning opportunities designed **for** a specific group

Learning opportunities designed **with** a specific group

Learner feedback is gathered after participating in a program. Changes are (or are not) made as a result.

The target audience is asked to support the development of learning opportunities. Their input is included from the start, and they have the opportuntity to provide continual feedback throughout the development.

The voices and experiences of those who we are trying to support must be included when making decisions about how to best serve them.

Strategy: Ask for Feedback

Members of non-marginalized groups offering services may not always recognize or understand what is needed to create an environment that's culturally welcoming and inclusive for others. If serving members of under-represented groups is our goal, seeking their feedback on what would make them feel as though they belonged in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs is critical. Ask questions about not only what sort of training we offer, but the environment we offer it in.

Asking for honest, and potentially challenging feedback from learners is an excellent step towards creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for members of under-represented groups. To generate the most authentic responses, providing opportunities for anonymous feedback may be helpful. Of course, what makes learner input valuable is what programs choose to do with it. It's important to not only gather learner feedback, but make an effort to respond to that feedback by making changes when possible.

Some questions you may ask to gather feedback from under-represented groups include:

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how welcoming is our environment to everyone – regardless of sexual orientation, race, age, nationality, or disability?

- Do you think everyone gets treated fairly in our program?

- What could we do to make people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and identities feel more welcome in our program?

If you have a paid SurveyMonkey account, they offer templates specific to belonging and inclusion. Visit: http://bit.ly/3IxDQAE

As mentioned in the "Challenges" section of this report, it's worth noting that having representatives from under-represented groups on staff is an excellent way to not only invite and learn from their perspective, it also creates an environment where prospective learners see themselves as belonging in the program.

Strategy: Provide Staff Training

To help overcome a potential lack of understanding of the experiences, realities and needs of under-represented groups, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) staff training and professional development is key.

Providing ongoing workshops on topics that include intersectionality, trauma-informed approaches, discrimination and unconscious bias, the use of inclusive, appropriate, and affirming language, and cultural awareness can ensure staff are well-informed and thoughtful in their approach when working with under-represented groups.

Ontario's colleges and universities often offer programs specific to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) through their continuing education or corporate training divisions. Local organizations across the province, including Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) often offer workshops focused on EDI and its impact on both programs and the clients or learners they serve.

On a broader level, the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) is a registered, not-for-profit organization that promotes diversity, inclusion, and equity in Canadian workplaces. They offer free toolkits focused on diversity, inclusion, and employment equity. Some of these toolkits are intended for businesses, and others offer ready-to-run workshops originally developed for high school students but appropriate for a much broader audience. Topics include:

- Making the case for diversity, equity, and inclusion (Toolkit)

- Responding to social issues – The 'when' and the 'how' of workplace responses (Toolkit)

- Exploring my power and privilege (Workshop)

- Prejudice, bias and discrimination (Workshop)

View these toolkits, workshops and more at: https://ccdi.ca/toolkits/

"One example where staff training is key to building program capacity is related to the use of inclusive, appropriate, and affirming language with participants. Using inclusive and appropriate language is one key practice of allyship, and also provides a common ground for conversations.

From the report "Barriers to employment and training for equity-seeking groups"

The Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Inclusion Learning Centre offers a series of tip sheets, discussion guides, diversity and inclusion videos, self-assessments, podcasts and research papers to help develop a deeper understanding of the role of equity and inclusion for both staff and clients. To learn more about RBC's free resources, visit: https://www.rbc.com/diversity-inclusion/inclusion-learning-center.html

Strategy: Hit the Road

When trying to reach a new demographic of prospective learners, going to them rather than expecting them to come to us is very effective. In the "Successes" section of this report we shared stories of co-delivery at locations including shelters and support groups. When layered with the issues around the availability of public transportation, particularly in rural areas, this is a very successful strategy. Consider also where people go when they aren't seeking learning opportunities – food banks, their children's schools, grocery stores – thinking outside the box may provide new and innovative opportunities to expand the reach of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS).

"Through grant funding, we have partnered with a community agency that provides transitional housing to Indigenous members of our community who were previously without stable housing. We offer 1-on-1 instruction on-site one afternoon per week."
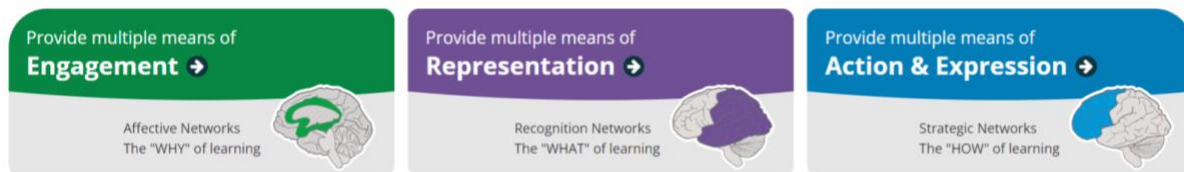
Provincial Survey Respondent

It is worth noting that funding is absolutely critical LBS practitioners leave programs and travel to locations where under-represented groups often gather. Without additional funding for both travel and replacement practitioners to free up a staff member to "hit the road" this effective strategy is difficult or impossible for smaller programs to execute.

Strategy: Create Inclusive and Accessible Content

Utilizing practices such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) makes learning more universally accessible and in some cases can be more effective than modifying curriculum to meet specific needs. UDL is an educational framework designed to help practitioners create inclusive learning environments that are accessible to all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

The goal of UDL is to provide multiple ways for learners to participate in their learning, so that each person can learn in ways that are most effective for them. Multiple means of engagement, representation and expressions of learning are the foundations of UDL.

Provide multiple means of **Engagement** →
Affective Networks
The "WHY" of learning

Provide multiple means of **Representation** →
Recognition Networks
The "WHAT" of learning

Provide multiple means of **Action & Expression** →
Strategic Networks
The "HOW" of learning

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from http://udlguidelines.cast.org

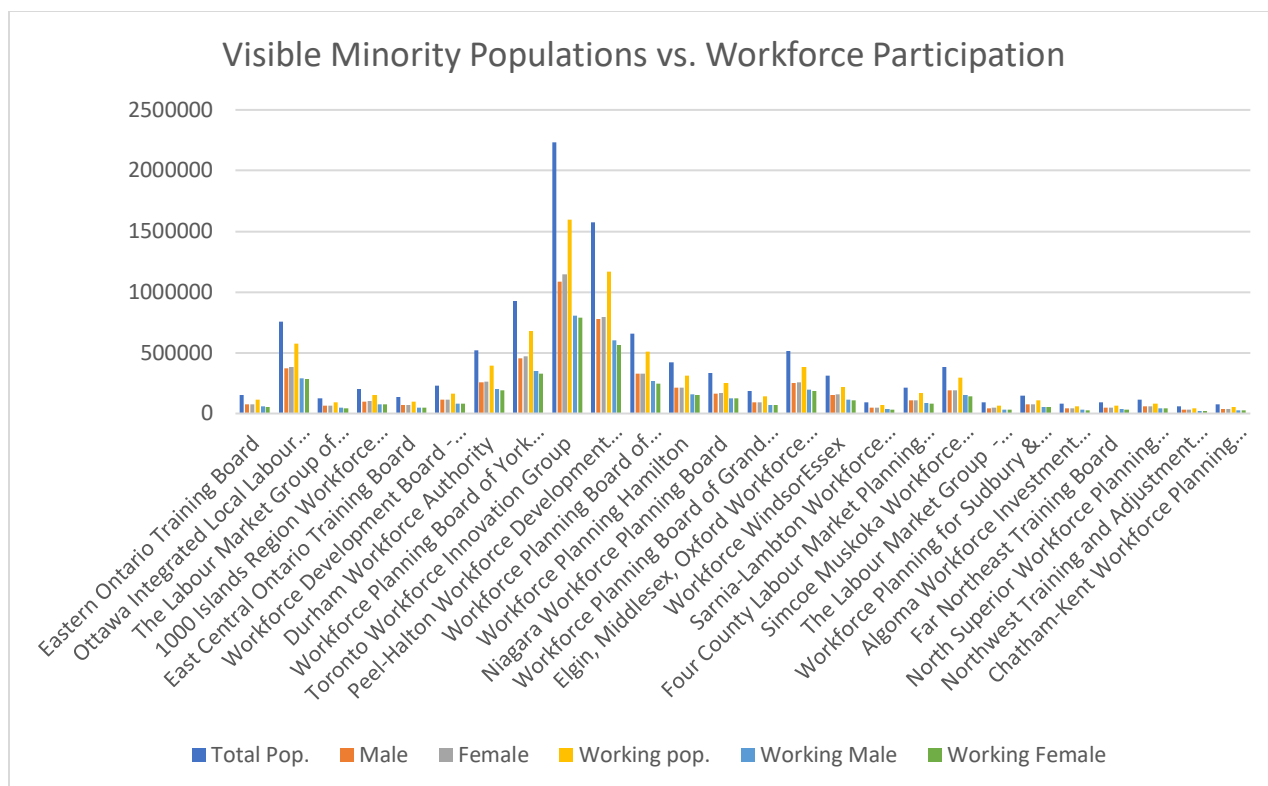For more information about Universal Design for Learning and how it can support learners of varied skills and experiences, visit https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

Strategy: Look at Demographics

Which groups are least represented in the labour market differs from community to community across the province. What we might expect to see in terms of representation within the Metro Toronto area is likely to differ from labour market representation in the District of Nipissing, for example.

For this reason, it's important that Regional Literacy Networks and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs work closely with their local Workforce Planning Boards to gather data about the groups least represented in their local labour market, and compare that to categories of under-represented groups within the local population. Creating and offering programming specific to an under-represented group is only effective if that population exists in the area and is going unserved.

Workforce Planning Boards can access and interpret demographical data from Statistics Canada and other sources, broken down by Planning Board region as shown in the chart below.

Visible Minority Populations vs. Workforce Participation

Legend: Total Pop. · Male · Female · Working pop. · Working Male · Working Female

Data courtesy of the Workforce Planning and Development Board of Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford

A network of 26 Workforce Planning Boards covers every region across the province. To find the Workforce Planning Board near you, visit: https://www.workforceplanningontario.ca/en/

Strategy: Get the Word Out

While marketing budgets are extremely limited (or nonexistent) within the broad Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program, there is incredible value in promoting the good work that adult literacy programs do and the difference that skill development can make in people's lives – both within and beyond under-represented groups.

"We have noted that we need support for grass roots marketing strategies, such as handing out pamphlets, business cards and other promotional materials at locations frequented by our key demographic. Enhanced partnership development and support for marketing would improve this greatly."

Provincial Survey Respondent

Marketing can be formal, through the development of pamphlets and flyers, newspaper and radio advertising, and online marketing campaigns. It can also be informal, through networking and attendance at events and meetings frequented by either the target audience of organizations that work closely with them already. Both of these efforts have costs associated with them – monetarily and in the time they take to execute.

While free or low-cost advertising may be possible for LBS programs with the time and money to devote, working in collaboration with a larger group of LBS programs – particularly through the system of regional literacy networks set up to support LBS – can help programs get the word out more effectively than they could on their own.

Strategy: Significant System-Wide Changes

As shared in the "Challenges" section of this report, because of the diverse needs of many under-represented groups, flexibility in programming is required. As a result, changes to the expectations for scheduling, attendance, how progress is measured, the use of training supports, and cost-per-learner funding need to be reconsidered.

"We need additional staffing – most importantly an instructor who can work a minimum of one night a week."

Provincial Survey Respondent

Scheduling: While traditional Monday to Friday daytime programming meets the needs of some learners, it doesn't meet the needs of everyone who could benefit from LBS programming. To provide training flexible enough to meet learners' schedules in a welcoming environment that fosters the development of trusting relationships, funding additional one-on-one tutoring-based programs to offer evening and weekend hours would be helpful.

Attendance: With competing priorities and responsibilities that can include life stabilization, settlement, legal concerns, and/or juggling multiple jobs, regular attendance is a commitment that some members of under-represented groups cannot meet. While measurable learning gains are easier to track with regular attendance, the benefit of welcoming flexible attendance can be significant. Keeping learners connected to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) even during

challenging times means they can and likely will return to work towards their goals, even if their progress is slower.

"There are issues with aligning goal paths and Milestones realistically for learners with multiple barriers. For many, it is difficult to align Milestones (ie. 200 series) because they simply don't match with the learner's life stabilization goal path."

Provincial focus group participant

How progress is measured: This flexibility should also be reflected in how learner success is defined and measured, so the outcomes being measured are relevant to members of under-represented groups. If the measurement of success is defined in a uniform way for all learners, and by decision-makers that themselves are not members of these under-represented groups, they hold little meaning to the learner and may push them away rather than making them feel respected and supported.

Training supports: Expanded training support dollars with more flexible interpretations of how those funds could be used would have a significant impact. Programs suggest that many members of under-represented groups cannot access the adequate food, transportation, and mental health supports they need to engage effectively in learning. Additional funding would allow programs to offer individualized financial support to learners, increasing their ability to learn and their sense of connectedness to the program.

Cost-per-learner funding: Clients with intersecting challenges often require additional flexibility and take longer to serve. Programs need to be resourced appropriately to ensure learners are not seen as "less desirable" as a result – particularly for programs whose success is measured by learner outcomes.

"The amount of time and partnerships required to serve learners with multiple barriers is very high and does not match the funding received. The cost per participant is much higher."

Provincial focus group participant

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

During our research, adult literacy practitioners shared several resources they've found useful when supporting members of various under-represented groups. These resources are categorized and shared below, along with several additional resources to support your work.

Workbooks and Other Physical Resources for Learners

The Breakthrough to Math series, which offers six different workbooks at four advancing levels. Each of the 24 workbooks focuses on one skill at a time to help adults overcome learning obstacles and develop math confidence. This series is available from New Reader Press:
https://www.newreaderspress.com/adult-education/mathematics/breakthrough-to-math

The eight-level Challenger series that develops reading, writing, and reasoning skills through high-interest fiction and nonfiction stories. This series is available from New Reader Press:
https://www.newreaderspress.com/adult-education/core-reading/challenger?page=1

LiteraSee Concepts Illustrated, which provides structured literacy resources and visual aids specifically for learners with dyslexia or learning disabilities. While developed for children in grades Kindergarten through Grade 8, these resources have been used in adult literacy programs as well. For more information, or to purchase concept cards, lesson plans or teaching tools, please visit:
https://literaseeconcepts.com/

Patterns in Spelling is a 4-book spelling program for adults reading at a low level and having trouble spelling which focuses on the patterns regularly found in English words. This series is available from New Reader Press:
https://www.newreaderspress.com/adult-education/phonics-grammar-spelling-vocab/patterns-in-spelling?page=1

Note: Older and out-of-print books including "A New Start - Canada: A Functional Course in Basic Spoken English and Survival Literacy" by Linda Mrowicki, and "Welcome to Canadian English: A Basic Handbook For Students Living In Ontario" published by the Government of Ontario in 1984 were also suggested. Some of these books may still be available through online stores including Amazon, AbeBooks, and the Book Depository.

Online Resources for Learners

ABC Life Literacy Canada offers a variety of free programs and resources for community learning organizations, including:

- The ABC Skills Hub, an online learning portal that offers at-home delivery of ABC Life Literacy Canada's many adult literacy programs.
- UP Skills for Work, which helps adult learners develop nine key employability skills needed through free workshops and downloadable workbooks.
- ABC Money Matters, a free introductory financial literacy program for adult learners, new Canadians, Indigenous Peoples and people with diverse abilities.
- ABC Internet Matters, which empowers Canadians who aren't comfortable using the internet with the knowledge they need to get started.

To learn about these ABC Life Literacy Canada programs and others, visit: https://abclifeliteracy.ca/programs-initiatives/

DigitalLearn.org is an online hub for digital literacy support and training offering a collection of self-directed tutorials on topics such as using a computer, navigating a web site, and searching online, all written in plain language. Visit: https://www.digitallearn.org/

Freerice is an online educational trivia game. Every question a learner answers correctly raises 10 grains of rice for the UN World Food Programme. Visit https://freerice.com/

GCFGlobal.org offers more than 300 learning topics, including more than 6,000 lessons, over 2,000 videos, and more than 50 interactives and learning games. Visit: https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/

Make Math Work provides answers to many basic math problems in the categories of basic arithmetic, algebra, finances, shapes and solids, time and money, conversion, and graphs. Visit: http://makemathwork.com/

Northstar Digital Literacy, offered by Literacy Minnesota, lets learners test their computer skills. They can then build skills in key areas, and demonstrate their knowledge by earning certificates and badges. Visit: https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/

Quill is a US-based nonprofit organization that has adapted research-based writing instruction into a free, open source digital platform. Visit: https://www.quill.org/

Reading Skills for Today's Adults is a12-level online literacy program that includes short stories, audio recordings, and pre- and post-learning questions for adult learners. Visit: https://www.readingskills4today.com/

ReadTheory.org offers personalized reading comprehension exercises for K-12 and ESL students using AI-driven software that responds to the learner's performance. Visit: https://readtheory.org/

ReadWorks is a US-based website offering free content, curriculum, and tools for teaching digitally, in print and using a projector. Originally designed for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, this online resource has also been used by LBS programs supporting under-represented groups. Visit https://www.readworks.org/

Looking for more learner resources? CLO has partnered with Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO) to gather many excellent resources specific to indigenous populations, racialized people, immigrants and newcomers, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities.

Click here to visit the Underrepresented Groups Resources page on the LLO/CLO Resources Forum: https://lbsresourcesandforum.contactnorth.ca/mod/data/view.php?id=54

Resources for Working with Under-represented Groups

For more information about the needs of under-represented groups, CLO encourages readers to deepen their understanding by reviewing the following research and reports:

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) report "Barriers to employment and training for equity-seeking groups" available at: https://www.srdc.org/media/553157/training-barriers-for-equity-seeking-groups-final-report.pdf

The Government of Canada Policy brief "Barriers to employment equity for equity groups under the federal jurisdiction" available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/labour/programs/employment-equity/reports/act-review-barriers-employment-equity-groups-annex-2.html

The Future Skills Centre report "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Responsive Career Pathways" available at: https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FSC-RCP-DEI-EN.pdf

The Diversity Style Guides available at: https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/resources/

APA Style Guide Supplemental Material called "Guidelines for Reducing Bias," available at: https://supp.apa.org/style/pubman-ch03.00.pdf

Statistic Canada's release of results from the 2021 Census, including "Jobs in Canada: Navigating changing local labour markets" available at: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221130/dq221130b-eng.htm

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada's "Pocket Guide to Employment Equity" available at: https://pipsc.ca/labour-relations/stewards/pocket-guides/pocket-guide-employment-equity

COMMUNITY LITERACY
OF ONTARIO

The Federation of Black Canadians report "Workplace Opportunities: Removing Barriers to Equity" available at:
https://fbcfcn.ca/fbcfcn.ca/uploads/2022/06/WORKPLACE-OPPORTUNITIES_-REMOVING-BARRIERS-TO-EQUITY.pdf

CONCLUSION

Providing adult literacy programming that meets the needs of under-represented groups is an important step to levelling the playing field and promoting diversity and inclusion in Ontario's labour market. CLO is pleased to have worked with adult literacy practitioners across the province to gather the successes, challenges, strategies and resources shared in this report. We look forward to continuing to work together to improve the outcomes of both these learners and the programs that serve them.

As outlined in this report, under-represented groups often face systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing the same opportunities for training and career advancement as those highly represented in the labour market already.

By involving them in the process, creating curriculum that reflects their experiences and realities, and providing flexible training with individualized attention and support, adult literacy programs can help to equip members of under-represented groups with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, ultimately creating a more diverse and equitable workforce.