

The background of the page features a photograph of a multi-story brick building. On the left side, a portion of a brick building with a fire escape is visible. On the right side, a prominent bay window is shown on a brick building. Below the bay window, a storefront for 'ROUND THE CLOCK MARKET' is visible, with a '7UP' logo to the right. The sky is clear and blue.

Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic 2021

March 2021

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We want to thank all who kindly contributed their time and the information to inform this research.

“Stay strong, we are all in this together! Keep safe!”
From one survey respondent



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The opinions expressed in this document are the opinions of QUILL Learning Network, and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.

Author note:

It was a pleasure to speak to so many in the literacy field who were willing to give of their time and expertise. I was most struck by the lengths that literacy directors, managers, practitioners, staff and volunteers are going to, how hard everyone is working to serve the learners. I heard not one complaint about things also being hard for you. This has been an extraordinarily challenging time and you all deserve a medal. The time and care you take is appreciated and makes an invaluable impact.

- Jennifer

The research contained in this report will be presented in webinar form in Spring of 2021.



2020 was a year of challenge and change. Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) organizations responded, adapted, and worked creatively to meet their clients' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Find out how as we share the results of a province-wide study, and learn about approaches your program can use today, and in the future.

Topics will include best practices in administration, marketing, intake, mode of delivery, safe re-opening and operating, learning resources, assessment, and professional development.

Register in advance to attend any of the following sessions:

Click [here](#) for Tuesday March 23, 10:00 am to noon

Click [here](#) for Wednesday March 24, noon to 2:00 pm

Click [here](#) for Thursday March 25, 2:00 to 4:00 pm

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with a personalized link to join the meeting.



Executive Summary

This report details research conducted by surveying and interviewing management and teaching staff at adult literacy agencies and networks across Ontario on best practices they have used to continue to serve learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Agencies reported on adaptations they made in every area of operation, including administration, marketing, intake, mode of delivery, safe re-opening and operating, learning resources, assessment, and professional development. As some agencies have been operating during pandemic conditions for almost a year and others have had to close, suggestions on moving forward will benefit each agency differently. However, agencies will no doubt find useful information for serving learners within the variety of tips offered. Tip sheets have been included for quick access to popular topics. Future planning was very much on the minds of those who provided information for this report, as innovations created during this time could help agencies serve learners in new ways moving forward.

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Introduction

This project was conceived as a means to share best practices – in other words, all the good ideas – between community-based literacy agencies in the Western Region of Ontario tasked with continuing to deliver literacy programming during the COVID-19 pandemic. These agencies set out to pivot to remote or online learning to continue to serve learners who were often at the lowest learning levels, with the increased challenges of reduced fundraising dollars, and the smallest numbers of staff to meet the new challenges.

However, it soon became clear that literacy service providers in general were facing similar challenges and working to find solutions, and that everyone could benefit from finding out how everyone else was creatively managing to continue to serve learners.

Therefore, the survey to gather best practices was sent out to literacy agencies across Ontario including community-based agencies, school-board based agencies, and college-based agencies. The survey generated 39 responses. In addition, 23 interviews or group interviews were conducted. Those offering information for this research included at least one in every category of volunteer tutor, practitioner, program coordinator, support staff, program manager, and executive director. This broad spectrum of experience has helped to inform this research from every available perspective.

The challenges reported were immeasurable and included

- the need to switch abruptly to working from home
- learners not having access to technology/internet
- learners and staff both needing to quickly learn new digital literacy skills
- the loss of contact with isolated learners in remote areas
- lack of direction on how to proceed within Ministry guidelines
- lack of learning resources, partly due to copyright restrictions which limited online sharing
- mental health challenges related to health concerns, abrupt changes in routine, and added responsibilities – for both staff and learners

Those agencies that could continue services during this time have provided a wealth of good ideas for everyone to share, detailed in this report. Although some tips will be familiar now that agencies have been dealing with pandemic-related restrictions for a year, these tips could save time and trial and error for other agencies who, due to local issues or building closures, have been less able to continue service to this point, or for those who are looking for additional resources to round out what they have started. So many ideas were generated that every agency will no doubt find something of use in this compendium of best practices.

General Tips

The pandemic has caused a shift in every function agencies enact. These general administrative tips provided by agencies stood out as useful ideas.

Staff management

- When possible within health recommendations and physical space availability, offer staff options on working from home versus working in the office or school.

Not every staff member may have an optimal home environment for working/teaching, or reliable access to the internet. Getting out of the home to work may support mental health.

- Offer staff the training and tools they need to work from home successfully.

Do an “audit” of needs/challenges and work with staff to ensure their needs are addressed.

- Re-visit staff expenses as some changes may come from working from home.

Staff may incur new work-related expenses on home devices such as use of personal cell phones, upgraded software, printer ink, or device repair.

- Check staff internet connectivity at home

Staff in rural or remote areas may not have reliable internet access or their provider may not allow for unlimited plans. Consider finding a way to pay overage fees.

- Re-visit sick day policies and pay.

These can represent additional costs for some agencies, but can affect whether staff can take appropriate (recommended) time off due to illness.

- Weekly individual staff reports or sharing meetings can keep everyone connected and provide necessary solutions to challenges.

Encourage brainstorming. Brainstorming solutions together can solve issues, create a sense of oneness, and help staff feel supported.

- Conduct wellness checks.

Staff will need support as they support learners, in this time more than ever. Be prepared for some to be experiencing struggles, and have self-care or mental health resources at the ready. Grant breaks/sick days as needed.

- Consider hiring an IT person on a contract basis to help staff with providing online learning

There are many laid off at this time and their skills could be utilized in short term contracts. This shift, if financially in reach, can take the stress off existing staff, as long as staff are well informed of the new person's role and how they can access their help.

- Provide information or training for teaching staff on maintaining professional boundaries.

Online live classes can create a more intimate setting as practitioners, tutors, and learners are joining from the privacy of their home. A policy with guidelines can help to ensure that boundaries remain professional.

Action Read Guelph has provided their Boundaries Policy Guidelines for other agencies to review, available in Appendix.

Administration

- Hold sector meetings with network partners to share best practices and resources.

Consider partnering to share forms you have created rather than each agency having to produce their own (then tailor them to suit your agency's needs).

- Consider hiring help on a short-term contract basis to digitalize physical materials (scan, or create docs/fillable forms)

There are many laid off at this time and their skills could be utilized in short term contracts. If physical resources have not already been digitalized and there is no

admin time to apply to this task, this shift can ease stress on teaching staff who are already adapting to many new challenges.

- Follow or put in place policies and procedures for working from home including
 - use of personal computers/devices
 - internet security and device security issues: security programs/firewalls up to date
- Do training or use another method to
 - inform staff of work-from-home policies and procedures
 - ensure understanding of privacy/security issues
- Consider having an encrypted server created that can be accessed remotely, for storing, using, and sharing learner plans and other confidential learner data.

This option can include phone and internet, plus device repair either in-person or through Team Viewer, which, when these existing operating costs are taken into account, can make it affordable. Please contact report author for more information.

- Set up a remote phone system to re-direct office calls and voice mail such as Zulz VOIP service

This system can also be used to connect with staff using office extension numbers, and can be used when some staff are at home and others are working from the office.

- Set up voicemail to alert office staff to messages via email.
- Set up a TextNow or similar account to communicate with learners.

Many learners prefer texting to calling and this type of service can translate to more registrants and more learners served.

- Consider having mail re-directed or enlist one staff to pick up office mail.
- Use Google calendar to schedule the use of Zoom rooms or other platforms

The “rooms” feature can be set up so staff can see when virtual or rooms are booked or when physical office spaces are filled for a time frame.

- Review and update both emergency and succession plans.

These plans are critical to

- possible upcoming lockdowns
 - emergent global crises
 - illness in senior staff
- Review or put in place security systems and insurance for equipment taken from office/classroom for working at home
 - Review insurance regarding who is responsible for equipment at home in case of breakage, or decide how this issue will be dealt with.

Health and Safety/Human Resources

The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development has offered remote info sessions for free to show employers and employees what they need to know about employment standards and health and safety as they relate to COVID-19.

This service is for Employment Ontario service providers. There is an online request form. Your organization will host and the MLTSD presenters will join and deliver the session remotely.

Agencies also suggested these considerations.

- Be sure office equipment/furniture taken home for at-home work meets with health and safety regulations.
- Consider/review ergonomics of home work spaces and help staff set up their space for optimal health and safety (for example, allow for office chairs to be taken home).

Engaging Volunteers

- Consider that there may be some loss of volunteers due to infection concerns, unfamiliarity with online communication in for online tutoring, and capacity restrictions for in-person tutoring.

Staff may have to be re-allocated to cover both teaching and 1:1 tutoring.

- Recruit new volunteers who are interested and/or have the skills to work with learners online.
- Create a tutor coordinator position or a position to support the coordinator, if needed/possible.
- Provide volunteer training for using digital platforms and online communications.
- Have a staff member set up and open tutor-learner sessions.

Having a staff member open each online tutor session to the tutor and learner can allow staff to monitor volunteer-learner relationships and answer questions/trouble-shoot challenges on the spot.

- Provide information or training for volunteers on maintaining professional boundaries in online tutoring.

Online meetings can create a more intimate setting as tutors and learners are joining from the privacy of their home. A policy with guidelines and a tutor agreement form can help to ensure that boundaries remain professional.

Action Read Guelph has provided their Boundaries Policy Guidelines and Boundaries Agreement for other agencies to review, available in Appendix.

Fundraising

COVID-19 restrictions have severely limited in-person fundraising opportunities, such as walking events, dinners, etc. Agencies have reported experiencing less donations especially in light of so many needs in the community and therefore so many worthy causes during this time.

One agency suggested hosting creative online fundraising such as an online cooking class with a chef who would donate their time.

More ideas and supports are needed in this area as agencies are understandably concerned about this loss of funding dollars especially as they need revenue to cover extra expenses such as PPE and barriers for safe face-to-face learning.

“Breathe in the calm, breathe out the conflict :-)”
From one survey respondent

Marketing

Many agencies reported that their promotion or marketing strategies had to change during the pandemic. For example, traditional sources of learner referrals might no longer be available due to program closures or office shut-downs. Also, marketing budgets and pre-existing campaigns varied greatly from agency to agency. It was shared that not every agency has the means or capacity to adopt a new marketing strategy.

Agencies shared these tips for continuing program promotion during this time.

- Reach out to community partners to let them know you are still providing services.

Where possible, attend county-wide agency meetings with partnering services.

Leverage personal relationships with partner agency staff and other community contacts to spread the word. Reach out to other services in shared building spaces.

One agency reported that with reduced learner numbers it was difficult to get enough learners signed up for a group program. This suggestion was offered

- Partner with other agencies to gather enough learners to launch a structured (group) program – transportation/location is not an issue for online classes.

-
- Make your office phone numbers accessible to learner intake texts in order to reach more potential clients.

Consider using a TextNow or similar account, as many learners prefer texting to calling.

- Follow up with previous learners who may have friends to refer.
- Explore and think outside the box to see how you can reach a new audience in the virtual community who may prefer online learning.

Meet with groups from other programs, such as college entrance programs, employment readiness programs to offer your services.

- Offer targeted training for a specific client group.
- Hold pop-up classes such as for increasing digital literacy skills.
- Create, or partner with, a new project or event.

For example, a One Book One Community project/series of events could generate positive public relations for the agencies involved and drive attention to their websites/programs.

- Use social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to promote programs and services.

Some agencies reported that their community is very active on social media and that these platforms are already an effective way to promote programs. Others have developed their social media presence to promote more effectively. It was pointed out that younger learners look to social media/texting/apps to connect.

- Create social-media-ready advertisements to share with colleagues and partnering agencies.

If you do the work to make advertisements ready for posting on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, including ready-made post scripts, others are more likely to post and share on your behalf.

- Use your website to promote.
- Change signage/website to reflect service changes such as new or reduced hours, new methods of contact, or COVID procedures.
- Make use of local radio spots, community event pages, or newspaper ads if possible.
- Consider hosting a virtual or physically distanced “grand re-opening” as a way to generate interest.

This item was shared by an agency that had to re-locate but could be a strategy for others as some agencies had to close completely during the pandemic.

- Offer childcare to learners for their learning time.

During the pandemic childcare may be more difficult to access, but having the learner choose the childcare provider and paying that provider directly via cheque may help make it do-able (for example, perhaps there is a family member in their bubble who could help).

- Add a promotional poster to your email signature.

You can promote a program with every email. Make the poster into a photo file and add it to your existing signature.

- Offer digital literacy training.

New clients drawn in by the need to learn new digital skills may then choose to attend other training/learning.

- Buy a window space at the grocery store as an advertisement space.

The grocery store is the one place almost everyone in the community will visit. Attract attention by offering digital literacy learning, including helping clients understand how to navigate online grocery shopping.

- Host a webinar.

Partner with other community services to host a webinar on choices for using increased “free time.”

- Place advertisements on the street level of your building for those walking/driving past to see.
- Create outdoor advertising – signs, banners, feather flags.
- Create a contest to win a free literacy assessment as well as any other prizes available (perhaps from donations).
- Start an online book club to generate interest in programs.
- Invest in a line of sweatshirts with your logo, for sale.

“Don't be afraid to try new things!”

From one survey respondent

Intake

Agencies reported both challenges with intake and increases in intake during 2020. In general, agencies serving a rural population were more likely to experience decreases in both enrolment and attendance due to learners not having internet access at home or being less motivated to switch to online learning.

Not every agency was able to continue services due to localized program and facility closures, but for those that moved to online learning during lockdowns, intake challenges included how to

- safely collect personal information at intake, such as SINS
- securely complete learner consent forms (such as privacy agreements)
- obtain learner signatures on consent and intake forms
- assess learner levels at intake remotely or online

Agencies offered these tips.

Intake Strategies

To safely collect personal information at intake

- purchase an encrypted server to house documents – see more on this suggestion under General Tips: Administration
 - use Google forms to collect information, first names and last initials only
 - collate the information from the Google forms into the learner’s digital file which is stored on the encrypted server
- use a phone meeting to collect information verbally and enter information directly into CAMS

To securely complete learner consent forms

- send the information in an email and have the learner reply with a “Yes”
- create a fillable form or Google form, review with learner via a virtual meeting, and/or use the submit button to “click here if you agree”
- set up a virtual meeting, show the consent information on the meeting screen, and
 - verbally ask for consent while recording the meeting
 - have learner type “yes” into the chat if they can access it, and take a screenshot of the consent information with the chat box open to show the learner’s response.

To obtain learner signatures

- sign on behalf of remote learners
- note in their file that the signature will be collected later but confirmation was verbal
- mail with a pre-addressed stamped envelope or drop off and pick up materials needing signatures
- fill out forms virtually together with the learner and send forms to them for signature and date via an encrypted email
- have learners type their name or initials into the signature space of the PDF fillable form, with a note that “By typing your full name/initials below you are consenting to...”
- use a check-box as a stand-in for a physical signature
- use e-sign within a Learning Management System (LMS) platform such as Litmos
- meet outside following health unit guidelines
 - if possible, take a device with the form on it, or paper copy

Other tips:

- Create a Google Site for one-stop learner access to all consent forms required.
- Hire a part-time contractor to do intake over the phone.
- Take note of body language and other cues as much as possible (if you can meet virtually), to help with understanding where the learner is at in their journey

-
- While completing a virtual intake assessment consider that learners may not have privacy in their home so you may not get the whole story.
 - Offer a trial spot in an online class so the learner can test it out.

Changes in demographics

Agencies reported that due to pandemic restrictions and challenges, the demographic seeking adult literacy programs and services is undergoing changes which are apparent at the point of intake.

Changes in demographics seeking literacy services included

- an increase in learners wanting to improve digital literacy skills
- an increase in those with higher digital skills seeking programs
- a decrease in learners with lower skill levels (many reported these learners are not comfortable to try online learning or experience multiple barriers to online learning)
- an increase in seniors seeking online programs
- a decrease in learners seeking to gain employment skills during the CERB period
- an increase in learners who have been laid off seeking to re-train or gain employability skills, after the CERB period
- an increase in those needing childcare while learning (due to children learning from home during lockdowns)

To meet the demands of these changes in demographics, agencies changed their menu of options to offer

- digital literacy training, if possible – see suggestions in Mode of Delivery – Changes to Programs section
- shorter-length programs or condensed programs
- childcare – see suggestions in Marketing section
- specific, targeted employment skills programs such as food handling

Some agencies also reported considering serving learners from areas other than their own, as the barrier of physical distance is eliminated by online learning. They suggested partnering with agencies in other areas to allow learners to access one another's programs/courses.

Intake assessments

Agencies expressed concerns around intake assessments, specifically

- the loss of wrap-around information you gather when you meet a new learner face to face
- the challenges related to accurately assessing levels remotely to ensure a learner is placed properly within a program that fits their needs
- the chance that assessments mailed or digitally sent to the learner could be completed by someone else
- the difficulty in adequately assessing writing level remotely
- the fact that CAMERA assessment is copyrighted so you cannot email it to a learner

To assess learner levels at intake during this period, agencies suggested these strategies.

- Conduct an in-depth phone or virtual face to face interview to gather as much helpful information as you can.
- Ask questions about how they use their skills, such as whether they regularly write lists or messages.
- Email the assessments and have the learner complete them and email them back.
- Meet with the learner virtually and watch as they complete the assessments you have mailed or sent.
- Have the learner give answers to comprehension questions verbally, in a virtual meeting.
- Have the learner do writing assessments within a virtual meeting and display their work to the facilitator to see on camera, or have them take a photo of it and send it – allows for immediate feedback. See information on the Genius Scan app in **Mode of Delivery – Delivering Direct Teaching Remotely** section
- Use the [SkillsMarker](#) (ESEE) online assessment tool (free to college-based LBS only)

“Online learning is here to stay. Embrace it.”

From one survey respondent

Mode of Delivery

Provincial and local health restrictions due to the virus have created a shifting landscape in which agencies have worked tirelessly to continue to serve learners.

This section will provide a wealth of tips from agencies across Ontario related to delivering programming under a variety of changes and challenges.

A note on terms used:

Virtual or screen-based learning will be referred to as “**online**” learning.

Phone-based or distance learning using delivered, mailed or emailed materials, will be referred to as “**remote**” learning.

In-person learning in the learning centre/classroom will be referred to as “**face to face**” learning.

Communicating with learners

Most agencies responding to the survey reported that their typical operations in serving learners before COVID-19 took place face to face. Learner communication was not usually an issue as learners would arrive at the classroom in person daily or weekly. The need and mode for communicating with learners changed dramatically with the first lockdown. Agencies needed to let learners know how their services would change and how to access learning materials/classes/meetings.

Several agencies reported that once learner communication had been established, they found that learners needed reliable and accurate information about the pandemic,

reassurance, and wellness checks or tips for coping with changes, isolation, and anxiety. These needs sometimes had to take precedence over learning, or at least had to come first in the conversation.

Agencies reported these general tips for communicating with learners.

- Conduct a digital audit to determine what devices/resources the learner has access to at home.
- Create a spreadsheet or tracking system to record each learner's
 - preferred method of communication
 - devices/resources available
 - best times for communicating, related to learners' work schedules or childcare/family care responsibilities
- Set up office phone lines to function remotely and/or to accept texts – see suggestions in General – Administration section
- Set up a Facebook business account and use it to contact them (especially if learners use Facebook for much of their communication), eliminating the use of staff personal phone numbers.
- Contact learners by other methods as needed including Google phone, email, texting.
- Send the online meeting link (if an online virtual meeting platform is being used) to the learner in an email or text rather than through the platform invitation system, to reduce confusion.
- Use clear writing on all written documents shared with learners.
- Hire clear writing services as needed.
- Create a newsletter including learner and volunteer stories on how they are coping and staying busy or motivated.

-
- Contact learners daily to help keep learners motivated.
 - Help reduce isolation with phone calls.

Hearing a familiar voice can mean a lot to someone who is isolated.

- Consider creating an online learning portal if possible, where learners can access resources and assignments.

Help learners access devices/internet

Agencies offered these tips.

- Conduct a “digital audit” to determine what devices/resources the learner has access to at home and the status of their internet connectivity.
- Consider providing internet sticks, or helping pay internet bills where possible, for example via gift cards.
- Use travel supports to help fund internet for learners.
- Apply to local charities/social service agencies/OW for support/funds to help learners get devices and pay for internet fees.
- Research other avenues for funding.

For example, one agency accessed the Emergency Community Support Fund, which was made available through local foundations for charities and non-profits serving vulnerable populations during the pandemic.

- Encourage learners to apply to programs that help with internet connectivity.

For example, one agency suggested the Connecting Families program.

- Loan devices such as laptops, chrome books, or Playaway tablets to learners, using
 - a loan agreement
 - a privacy/security checklist

(samples available in Appendix)

- Download all needed programs/materials onto loaner computers, and create desktop icons so they are easy to find
- Include materials that can be accessed offline when loading loaner computers.
- Create short video showing learners how to sign in, open programs, or hook up to Wi-Fi, and load them onto the loaner computers.
- Consider hiring a contract IT person to help learners with questions and troubleshoot issues.
- Have learners access internet from the parking lot or local library where possible.
- Create independent learning stations where learners can access a device and internet without coming into contact with others.
- Look into satellite internet and when it will become available in your area.

Provide learning tasks and assignments for learners without devices or internet access

Agencies shared these tips.

- Encourage journal writing and reading for those without devices or internet connection at home.
- Create duplicate workbooks for the learner and tutor/facilitator and work together over the phone.

It was noted that many learners at the lower levels chose to “take a break” from their learning path, and that lack of devices or internet were not always the main barrier. Some learners were unable to continue without face to face help. Others were not able to continue with their learning plan when they were struggling to maintain basic needs for their family.

Isolation was noted as a significant factor and these tips were provided for helping with learner isolation.

- Create a virtual homework club or meeting space to help learners struggling with the school work their children are needing help with at home.
- Have learners check on one another, which may alleviate some of the burden on staff.

There are studies that suggest if we have someone for which we are responsible we are less apt to focus inward.

- Talk on the phone with each learner to provide ideas for further community supports.

Many survey respondents stated that they need more supports and strategies to serve learners who are learning at lower levels, isolated, and/or have barriers due to lack of devices or internet.

“We contacted all students at the beginning of the pandemic and asked how many learners had devices and service. Over 75% didn’t have what they would need to do online learning.”

From one survey respondent

Delivering assignments for remote learning

Agencies reported that in some cases staff delivered work for learners or had them pick it up. Suggestions for safe and effective handling of materials for remote learning included the following.

- Mail materials including a pre-addressed stamped envelope.
- Leave paper-based assignments in an envelope at the learner’s front door/porch, preferably at a pre-scheduled time, to maintain physical distancing.

-
- Meet at a public parking lot, open the car trunk, and have learner retrieve materials from the trunk, to maintain physical distancing.
 - Keep a copy of the materials you deliver so the facilitator or tutor can go through it together with the learner over the phone or by email.
 - Create a secure physical dropbox at the learning centre/classroom entry for learner drop-offs of completed work during phases where such trips are within health guidelines.

For those who have devices but do not have reliable internet access or skills to navigate online learning.

- Drop off USB drives to learners containing assignments.
- Drop off loaner devices to learners with pre-loaded assignments, programs, or apps that can be accessed offline.

Delivering direct teaching remotely

Many agencies reported teaching learners over the phone or using texts or email if the learner can access the internet. They suggested the following.

- Schedule one on one lesson times to go over assignments on the phone.
- Hold “office hours” each week for phone calls to take questions related to remote learning assignments.
- Have learners take photos or videos of their (paper-based) work and text photos to their facilitator to get help with a problem or to show completed work.
- Have learners download the “Genius scan” app on their phones if possible which
 - allows learners to take a photo of their work
 - converts the jpeg to a PDF

-
- emails PDF to choice of recipient

The facilitator can then mark, save, and/or send back the PDF.

A related app, “Genius sign,” allows the learner to create an online signature and sign the document before sending.

- Have learners copy and paste their digital written work into an email and send to their facilitator.

Delivering online direct teaching, learning assignments, and programs

Agencies provided an extensive list of suggestions and strategies to facilitate online learning.

Also below you will find a list of platforms and a comparative analysis of the most popular platforms mentioned.

However, agencies also often stressed that what worked best was not one platform or method but more than one platform and method used in combination. Those creative solutions included the following.

- Develop a “toolbox” of methods that can be used in combination: phone, chat space, virtual platform, and online learning resources.
- Take a photo or create a video of the login method or the use of the features in an online learning tool you are asking the learner to try.
- Connect by phone or on a virtual meeting platform such as Zoom or a Facebook messenger video call as you work with the learner on an online assignment, using more than one device (computer, phone).
- Have assignments, programs, or videos ready on a tablet or iPad as you work with the learner in a virtual space, especially if staff are not comfortable yet with presenting a tab or screen.

-
- Use a multi-functioned communication app such as Google Hangouts or WhatsApp to connect with learners as they work online.
 - Use Team Viewer to access what the learner can see on their screen and help them navigate online assignments.
 - Use the collaborative features within a virtual meeting platform or Learning Management System (LMS), such as a virtual whiteboard, to work together with the learner.
 - Use online resources from learning websites such as thatquiz.org not as lessons or homework but as tools to create interactive lessons within a virtual learning platform – take a question from the site, put on the virtual whiteboard or Jam board, solve together, then go back to the site to check your answer.
 - Paste a number line onto the virtual whiteboard to help learners when solving math equations together.

Tips for choosing and preparing to use a virtual meeting platform included

- Choose the platform staff are most comfortable working within.
- Offer or make available staff training on how to use the preferred platform.

The following list of virtual meeting platforms/learning management systems were in use to facilitate direct teaching online.

Top 5 most popular platforms

(across community-based, school board-based, and college-based agencies) included

Zoom

Google Meet

Google Classroom

Microsoft Teams

Blackboard Collaborate

Other platforms/apps mentioned included

Facebook Messenger video conference call

Face Time

Google Hangouts

Skype

Webex

Clickshare

Go To Meeting

Litmos

Showbie

Brightspace

Easy Class

Agencies surveyed offered feedback on the top 5 choices of virtual meeting platforms. This table shows a comparative analysis of that specific user feedback. No information shown is meant as a recommendation. If an agency is shopping for a platform this information is for quick comparison only. Agencies can make a more detailed comparison of specific features to determine the platform that best fits for their needs and their learners' needs.

Platform	Cost	Features	Capacity (# of participants)	Disadvantages	Advantages
Zoom	Free and upgraded versions available.	It is a virtual meeting platform including a whiteboard collaborative feature, reaction panel, chat feature.	100	Free version has 40-minute meeting cap.	Learners recognize the name and so understand the purpose. You can record a session. Settings allow you to set up a pre-meeting waiting room and admit learners when ready. There are breakout rooms available.

Platform	Cost	Features	Capacity (# of participants)	Disadvantages	Advantages
Google Meet	Free and upgraded versions available.	It is a meeting platform including a "Jamboard" collaborative feature, reaction panel, chat feature.	100	Free version has no record function. Breakout rooms are not available.	Its user-friendliness is similar to Zoom and the free version is adequate to most needs.
Google Classroom	Free and upgraded versions available.	It is a learning management system (LMS) which combines a virtual meeting space with a place to house and complete assignments. . If your agency has an account you will log in to access shared materials.	1000	Security questions were cited.	It is a one-stop learning platform available to anyone.
Microsoft Teams	Free and upgraded versions available.	It is a virtual meeting platform and collaboration app. Features include chat and file creation/sharing.	250	No specific disadvantages reported but some suggestion that it might be too complex for lower level learners.	Useful for large staff teams/multiple classes and for sharing assignments and resources.

It was noted that learners may express concerns about safety and privacy in using a shared virtual space, for example, the concern of possibly being recorded. Agencies created or adapted privacy/confidentiality consent to include the use of the virtual space and had learners agree not to record one another.

Safety concerns cited by survey respondents included the out-of-country location where the servers were housed and the transfer of information through other countries. One

survey respondent reported that within the Zoom platform you have the option of turning off the transfer of information through certain channels.

Literacy Link South Central created webinars for learning how to use Zoom and its features. *From A to Z(oom)* webinars are available here

<https://www.llsc.on.ca/literacy-program-support>

Tips for supporting learners to try online learning

- Develop a “toolbox” of methods that can be used in combination to onboard learners: phone number where they can call you, email with a link to join you, chat space, virtual platform, all ready to go – and keep trying until one works.
- Make it as simple as possible – one click to find what they need.
- Create a short booklet for computer trouble-shooting information.
- Create short videos showing learners how to sign in or open programs, step by step.
- Check in frequently, at least weekly.
- Give one or two tasks at a time, not the whole curriculum – start small and grow.
- Allow multiple ways to access materials – for example, send the link in an email, text, and chat forum – so the learner can choose one that is familiar and comfortable to them.
- “Talk them off the edge” with lots of encouragement to build confidence in their abilities.
- Get tech-savvy family members to help where possible.

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- On-board volunteers who can work one-to-one with trouble-shooting tech issues prior to a learner entering a class.
 - Gain remote access to all computers in your network. For example, agencies reported that they
 - use Windows 10-Quick Access to download folders or install programs
 - use Team Viewer to access learner screens to resolve tech issues
 - Balance conflicting needs – empathize with frustrations but encourage the need to try new things.
 - Praise for trying.
 - Remind and model that you too are learning and things don't always go perfectly.

Tips for effective direct teaching of group classes online

- Have learners turn off microphones for best sound quality, then take turns using mics.
- Have learners turn off cameras to boost internet connection.
- Have two staff members facilitate, one to teach and one to help learners enter the space and watch the chat/learners for questions and needs.
- Use a “background” if needed to maintain privacy or mimic a learning space.

Tips for getting learners engaged in learning sessions

- Use unique backgrounds, PowerPoints, digital timers, and other features to make your presentation visually interesting – try slidesmania.com
- Set up predictable routines such as an agenda, opening exercises or message, journal time, etc., to get learners participating.

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- Play an online game together such as hangman – try coolmathgames.com

The Goodman Center compiled a resource on tips for effective direct teaching online:

Unmuted (2020) available at

[file:///C:/Users/jenni/Downloads/Unmuted_GoodmanCenter%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/jenni/Downloads/Unmuted_GoodmanCenter%20(2).pdf)

Pop Up PD featuring AlphaPlus: *Working Together to support learners during a pandemic – the good, the bad and the unexpected ...* (2020) containing many useful tips.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6Jvpuf_fo

Adaptations to lessons and classes

As the pandemic changed how and where learning was delivered, adaptations were also made to learning content to better suit new circumstances.

Agencies offered these suggestions for adaptations that could help make program delivery more manageable.

- Reduce the selection of courses offered.

Some agencies significantly reduced the variety of classes they had previously offered and honed in on generalized programming to make remote and online delivery possible.

- Pick one offering you are good at and find a way do it really well.

Market it strongly, teach it creatively, cater to an observed need (such as specific employment skills re-training) and keep the course schedule short and flexible to make it attractive to learners.

- Offer digital literacy training.

If you have the capacity to offer digital literacy training at this time you may increase sign-ups as many need to learn new skills to navigate life during the pandemic. For example, there is a need for understanding how to join virtual meeting spaces, find reliable news and health information, or do online banking, or online grocery shopping.

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- Use the stay-at-home situation to build assignments.
 - Have learners virtually connect with family members who live far away or who they can't currently see in person due to health guidelines and have them read with/to them or interview them online.
 - Create special interest classes such as a book club, creative writing group, or financial literacy class.
 - Start a family literacy class, as more children are home with parent learners.
 - Incorporate family members into lessons; for example, help learners to help children with homework.

Safe re-opening and operating face to face

When the first lockdown eased some agencies resumed face to face services at a reduced capacity. Some were not able to re-open, or re-opened later. Reasons for not re-opening included

- the building the program is housed in did not re-open
- cost of equipment for safe re-opening was prohibitive
- procurement of equipment was difficult or delayed
- the choice was made to continue with online and remote learning only, following the health recommendation to work from home if you are able to.

Most agencies reported that learners at the lowest levels could not be adequately served remotely or online and needed face to face learning to continue with their learning path. Agencies also reported that at the end of the first lockdown most of these learners were ready to get back to the classroom, but a small minority were not, citing concerns about safety.

Some feedback maintained that there is no completely risk-free way to serve learners face to face.

Another comment was that it is difficult to teach lower level learners with a mask on, as they need to see your mouth to participate, for example in a phonics lesson.

Many agencies cited the cost of equipment needed to maintain health and safety regulations was, and continues to be, a primary concern.

Among those who resumed face to face operations at reduced capacity, recommendations for best practices included the following.

Set up the space to allow for physical distancing and reduced surface contact

- Measure the physical space to plan for everyone to be physically distanced.
- Do a walk through with staff to determine how to lay out the space for physical distancing seating and movement.
- Cover supplies to reduce surface touching (for example, bookshelves) with clear shower curtains or other barriers, and mark them with signs to explain (“for staff use only”).
- Reduce the number of computer stations, desks, work stations, and space apart within health guidelines.
- Install plexiglass shields between stations and in staff offices between staff and learner seats, and/or create plexiglass shield stands that can be moved as needed.
- Ensure that signs directing traffic or giving safety instructions are written in clear language so learners can read them (safety measures should also be communicated verbally).
- Prop open doors where needed to avoid contact with surfaces as much as possible.

Purchase materials needed to meet health regulations

- Check health regulation standards for the required DIN numbers of any cleaning or sanitizing products considered for purchase.

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- Check for funding sources that could be accessed to obtain the many materials needed, such as wage subsidies for small employers.
 - Purchase as required
 - hand sanitizer and dispensers
 - PPE for staff including masks, and face shields or protective eyewear
 - masks for learners as needed
 - gloves if needed
 - sanitizing spray and/or wipes
 - floor stickers
 - plexiglass barriers
 - Consider purchasing items in bulk along with other partnering agencies.

For example, during the first lockdown, The Ontario Non-Profit Network, which is an umbrella organization, set up a bulk buying process to ease some of the cost/difficulties.

Make a plan for reduced capacity and physical distancing

- Make a safety plan, including who, and how many at one time, can enter the physical space, and include all protocols required.
- Consider how you will maintain physical distancing and still be welcoming to learners.
- Use a shared calendar to book times for staff to enter and exit if needed to maintain capacity requirements.
- Maintain a maximum capacity limit by
 - reducing the number of staff on site at a time
 - reducing the number of visits per learner per week
 - serving one learner at a time
 - offering drop-in learning at the convenience of the learner, to a maximum limit

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- Consider creating cohorts to reduce learners' physical interaction – the same learners will always share the space at the same time.

Follow health and safety guidelines for sanitizing surfaces

- Check requirements with the building/organization in which the program space is housed, including the safe/recommended use of the elevators.
- Create and follow a timetable or plan for sanitizing all surfaces and work stations regularly or between learners.
- Hire additional cleaning staff as needed.
- Follow a plan for keeping washrooms sanitized.
- Reduce number of washrooms in use to reduce the need for sanitizing.

Maintain health and safety regulations at entry

- Create a self-screening protocol that is easy enough for learners to understand and use before they come to the class/building.
- Have staff also complete a self-screening protocol before leaving home.
- Use a hand-held digital thermometer to check temperature at entry.
- Keep digital records of self-screening protocols and temperature checks to demonstrate due diligence as required.
- Have an entry strategy and staff to greet and monitor: locked entry door, ring or knock at entry, go over rules.

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- Have learners use hand sanitizer at entry.
 - Have learners sign in and out for contact tracing, using their own pen or a sanitized pen.

Maintain health and safety recommendations while in class

- Have a designated chair and storage bin for each learner.
- Create a package of materials for each learner to avoid sharing physical items: pen, pencil, paper, books, clips, sharpener, sanitizer.
- Have learners bring their own headsets or earphones as needed.
- Encourage frequent handwashing.
- “Quarantine” completed work or assessments for a period of at least 48 hours before staff touches them.

“Tell the learners that you are just doing the best you can and they must have patience.”

“Be flexible, be curious, be patient. There are ways to make this work...and it will most likely impact your numbers...but there is always a way to move forward.”

From survey respondents

Learning Resources

As the pandemic caused agencies to shift to online learning where possible, finding appropriate user-friendly online learning content became a priority.

Fortunately there are many sources to choose from, and many more were created or made available for a reduced cost during this time.

This section includes best practices for the use of online learning resources, and using learning resources remotely, and a list of the resources that survey respondents and interviewees reported finding most useful.

General tips for using learning resources online or remotely

- Actively teach learners about discernment and finding resources from reliable sources.
- Create a system for managing/finding/keeping track of online resources your agency is using such as a spreadsheet or playlist, including links to each activity.
- Sort through the online resources your support organizations have put together to determine which will be useful and how.
- Digitalize your existing learning physical resources to offer them to learners remotely or online.
 - pick one course, subject, or type of resource to digitalize and test out how to use it with the learners – start small and grow
 - create or convert assignments and quizzes in fillable forms (Word, Google forms)
 - scan and catalogue existing physical resources
 - enlist volunteers or students on placement to create fillable forms or scan resources
 - partner with other agencies and share materials that have been digitalized
 - apply to publishers for copyright access to use/post resources online

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- Use Team Viewer or a shared screen in a virtual meeting platform to give learners access to materials that can't be shared in other ways.
 - Create a portal (for example, using a Google Site) to house resources and give learners access to resources

Online courses

Agencies reported having learners with adequate digital literacy skills access user-ready online courses at e-channel including

- The LearningHUB
- Good Learning Anywhere
- Contact North
- F@D
- Deaf Learn Now

The following sources of online courses and resources were also reported in use by survey respondents. Agencies must assess for themselves the specific features and levels of each resource to determine the platform that best fits for their needs and their learners' needs.

Other sources of online courses included

- Northstar
- GCF Learn Free
- SkillsAdvance Ontario
- [Lynda.com](https://www.lynda.com) or LinkedIn Learning
- Money Matters through ABC Life Literacy Canada
- ACE Distance

It was noted that some learners are not comfortable with the registration process required to join online courses from a separate agency, such as with giving personal information, or because of negative past associations with government agencies and administrations requesting personal information.

Online and remote learning resource/materials list

This extensive list of resources was shared by our survey responders.

- YouTube videos
- [Wiki How](#)
- [khanacademy.org](#)
- [Aztec](#)
- [skillsbox.com](#)
- [wakelet.com](#)
- [voxy.com](#)
- [learningupgrade.com](#)
- [mathantics.com](#)
- [math-drills.com](#)
- [math-aids.com](#)
- [coolmathgames.com](#)
- [edx.org](#)
- [nglife.com](#)
- [adulteracyleague.org](#)
- [townsendpress.net](#)
- [thatquiz.org](#)
- [quizzlet.com](#)
- [audible.ca](#)
- [getepic.com](#)
- [readworks.org](#)
- [kahoot.com](#)
- [typingclub.com](#)
- [superteacher.com](#)
- [k5learning.com](#)
- [edhelper.com](#)
- [spellzone.com](#)
- [slidesmania.com](#)

Many Literacy Agencies or Networks in Ontario have created their own resources, and/or housed resources on their websites, and these are open to other agencies to use. Survey respondents reported using resources from

- Laubach Literacy Ontario – <http://www.laubach-on.ca/links>
- AlphaPlus – <https://alphaplus.ca/content-type/resources/>
- The Literacy Group – <https://sites.google.com/view/tllearnerresources/home>
- Learning Networks of Ontario – <https://learningnetworks.ca/resources-publications/instructional-resources/>
- Action Read Guelph – <http://www.actionread.com/learner-links/>
- Contact north – <https://lbsresourcesandforum.contactnorth.ca/mod/data/view.php?id=51>

“There are so many programs out there and websites that can be used to help teach etc. However, I think that patience has been a big part of helping us all through.”

From one survey respondent

Assessment

Assessment strategies during remote or online learning were a primary concern to agencies responding to the survey. They cited challenges such as

- lack of direction from the Ministry on how to deliver milestones while keeping milestone content confidential
- lack of proof that the learner working remotely or online is completing the assessment themselves
- inability to use CAMERA assessments
- difficulty with administering more complex culminating tasks to assess whether the learner is ready to move forward

Some agencies reported having learners come in to the learning/classroom space to do assessments even as they learned at home most of the time. These face to face assessments

- were arranged by scheduled appointment

-
- followed health and safety protocols – see suggestions in **Safe re-opening and operating face to face** section

General tips for assessments

- Do the assessment over the phone if possible.
- Mail, email, or deliver the assessment, and have the learner send/bring it back or scan and send a photo of their completed assessment – see suggestions for the Genius scan app under the Mode of Delivery – Delivering direct teaching remotely section.
- Have the learner complete the assessment while meeting with the facilitator on a virtual platform, so the facilitator can monitor.
- Have the learner create a video on their cell phone to verbally demonstrate knowledge.
- Create remote/online assessments as needed using fillable forms, and in clear language.

Google forms offers these advantages.

- a link to the form is made available for sending (check settings to ensure access is unrestricted)
 - responses migrate to a spreadsheet
 - responses can be viewed in the spreadsheet format OR viewed/saved/printed individually
- Partner with other agencies to share created assessments.

For milestones specifically

- Partner with LearningHUB to have the learner course content shared between your agencies, and have LearningHUB administer the milestone.
- Choose/use milestones that can easily be dictated over the phone e.g. #14.

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- Create Google forms or fillable forms for milestones, removing identifying titles and the word “milestone”
 - create a password-protected document
 - refer to the milestone as a quiz
 - use “Photo Snip” app to cut and paste authentic items from milestones into forms
 - Have the learner complete the milestone while meeting with the facilitator on a virtual platform, so the facilitator can monitor.
 - use the milestone in the Google form as a shared screen assessment OR
 - give the link to the milestone form during a virtual class where learners complete the assessment while the facilitator oversees the class
 - refer to the milestone as a quiz
 - Record the learner completing the milestone within a lockdown browser (in some cases it is one of the functions in the LMS system)

Online assessment tools

Agencies reported using the following out-sourced assessment tools during online learning.

- thatquiz.org – you can create your own quizzes
- k5learning.com
- edhelper.com
- spellzone.com
- coolmathgames.com
- Genius scan app – see suggestion in **Mode of Delivery – Delivering Direct Teaching Remotely** section
- [SkillsMarker](https://skillsmarker.com) (ESEE) assessments (free to college-based LBS only)

“Flexibility is key here. The goal is to assess learner knowledge, so think of various ways that this can be done.”

“Be creative. Take notes. Be prepared for it to take time while you observe how someone performs a task rather than just marking the finished product.”

From survey respondents

Professional Development

Agencies reported a lot of trial and error in finding new ways of communication and work routines, and developing new teaching strategies and technology skills. Being willing to try new things and “click and see” resulted in many critical learning moments.

Agencies reported seeking and accessing professional development, over the course of the pandemic so far, topics to assist staff to

- develop online teaching skills and strategies
- keep learners engaged
- find online teaching tools and virtual meeting platforms
- use digital tools such as online databases
- maintain mental health

And also in understanding

- how to support staff and connect remotely
- COVID directives and how to communicate information to learners

Timing and finding the time for professional development were cited as factors. Many agencies reported accessing professional development at the time of the first lockdown to help staff navigate remote and online program delivery. Some agencies reported that since that time less of this type of learning has been needed as they found methods that worked best for them and became comfortable using those. Other agencies did not have as many opportunities to serve learners online and could benefit from those initial resources. For this reason all suggestions have been included here.

Professional Development Opportunities

Opportunities for accessing individualized professional learning included

- Create your own learning opportunities by having staff/board members/volunteers/partnering agencies share their expertise/methods/discoveries
- Check with your learning network to suggest topics needed for upcoming webinars.
- Apply to AlphaPlus for individualized technology coaching such as on the use of Google Suite apps.
<https://alphaplus.ca/support-services/coaching/>

PD suggestions included

- Pre-recorded webinars from your learning network
- YouTube videos for learning the ins and outs of learning platforms
- Contact North's webinars
<https://teachonline.ca/webinars>
- LinkedIn's technology skills training
<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/building-your-technology-skills>
- Mid North Network webinars
<https://northernliteracynetworks.ca/resources/>
- Pop Up PD webinar featuring AlphaPlus, *Working Together to support learners during a pandemic – the good, the bag and the unexpected ...* (2020).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6JVpuf_fo

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- Literacy Link South Central created webinars for learning how to use Zoom and its features. *From A to Z(oom)* webinars are available here <https://www.llsc.on.ca/literacy-program-support>
 - Contact North Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum <https://lbsresourcesandforum.contactnorth.ca/>
 - Sara Delicate Training <https://www.sarahdelicate.ca/>
 - Silver Lining Café <https://www.mtml.ca/resources/for-practitioners/the-silver-lining-cafe-and-zoom-tools>

“Finding the time for PD for front line staff, historically has meant closing classes but we have revamped our tutor engagement and responsibilities and have provided more opportunities for PD for them and staff as a result.”

“I do caution you, however, not to burn yourself out on PD. It’s easy to become overwhelmed with all of the options for online learning platforms, videos, teaching tools, etc., so find one that works and then take a break. Don’t go searching for more tools until you feel you need to to meet your student demands.”

“The ultimate goal is to help our learners.”

From survey respondents

Support Mental Health

Agencies recognized that both learners and staff needed extra mental health supports during this time. For staff, the burden of new responsibilities, extra working hours, supporting children’s learning at home or caring for other family members, and supporting vulnerable populations as they meet once-in-a-lifetime challenges were all

reported to be taking a toll. For learners, not being able to meet basic needs, isolation, anxiety over changes to routine, supporting children learning at home or other family members, and interruptions in their goal path (GED preparation, college entrance, job opportunities) were cited as the biggest impacts to mental wellness. Suggestions included the following.

- Hold informal staff team check-ins on life (not work) matters – humans taking care of humans.
- Incorporate check-ins in one to one sessions with learners – although this may not be different than pre-pandemic routines, it is more than ever needed.
- A phone call can mean a lot to someone who is isolated, so agencies mentioned including phone calls in learner communication, if the learner was comfortable with it.
- Encourage selective use of social media messaging to prevent unnecessary anxiety/spread of misinformation.
- Give learners accurate information about COVID-19.
- Create a mediation group with learners.
- Write/share inspirational quotes – can also be a learning opportunity.
- Work with a consultant to incorporate mental wellness into the workplace.
- Make sure everyone on staff has access to mental health supports including
 - where to access mental health supports
 - how to listen/talk to learners to find out if they need help
 - how to help learners find and access mental health services
 - what to do if faced with a mental health crisis
- Engage a placement student in the area of social work to provide peer mentor supports to learners/programs.

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- Recognize where mental health improves – for some, it will be working from home; for others, working in person will provide improvement – and act on those findings where possible.
 - Have your local network or community of practice create/deliver a webinar on mental health supports and aids for supporting learners.
 - Encourage open sharing so colleagues can support each other.
 - Allow/take time for mental health breaks.
 - Address compassion fatigue amongst staff – access an in-service session/recorded webinar.

Literacy Link South Central created a list of mental health resources and sources of information in their Reach Out 4 Mental Health campaign.

<http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Mental-Health-Campaign-Resources-Oct-2020.pdf>

This campaign also included messaging on social media platforms. Look for this additional content at #ReachOut4MentalHealth on Twitter and Facebook.

“We have taken professional development on fatigue and re-imagining how workplaces function with the current restrictions. We found it helpful in recognizing we are not alone and that there are tips and tricks to be able to ensure we can regulate our emotions and coping skills in order to still effectively serve and take care of ourselves.”

From one survey respondent

Future Planning

Agencies surveyed stressed the need for planning to

- be proactively prepared for future lockdowns or office closures
- be prepared for future changes in
 - demographic served
 - learner needs
- continue practices that are working that developed during the pandemic, or changes in practices that could stick
- understand what the changes that have taken place mean to how we understand learning

The suggestion was, now is the time to start thinking about these issues, not when there is another emergency to contend with.

Be proactively prepared for future lockdowns or office closures

Agencies suggested increased preparedness would involve creating

- a “grab-it-kit” of essential paperwork/USBs/digital resources and items to take home if the office is suddenly shuttered, and a plan for who will take them
- a list of resources from the office, currently in use, that would be deployed to at-home work (computers etc.)
- policies with emergency contingency plans including
 - a detailed plan for switching to remote/online learning
 - a detailed sickness policy regarding when to stay home
 - a succession plan in case of illness in senior staff

Agencies also suggested being ready with

- a tested virtual meeting platform
- a repository of online resources
- a digital copy of all critical documents, securely stored but accessible
- a record of staff and learner screening from face to face learning in the event of an outbreak (for contact tracing)

Note: Literacy Link South Central is in the process of creating a pandemic preparedness manual for non-profits to help agencies sort through what tasks are needed for future planning – available soon.

Requests to the Ministry

The majority of those surveyed indicated that more direction from the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development was needed to ensure best practices were being followed within the Ministry’s requirements. There was widespread concern that existing targets would be unreachable in the midst of the upheaval and barriers the pandemic has created. For example, even if agencies were able to deliver face to face programs for part of the year, to meet physical distancing guidelines they could serve fewer learners at a time, reducing contact hours. Agencies pointed out that additional supports are needed to keep literacy programs functioning in the same way schools have required additional supports. The general consensus was that there is need for a deep conversation on how the Ministry can support agencies moving forward.

Suggestions for requests to the Ministry included

- a “playbook” or set of directions for the pandemic to give agencies an approved plan from which to pivot or adapt in their programs and working conditions
- recognition of the increased challenges/changed circumstances of learners including
 - increased struggles with meeting basic needs and poverty
 - lack of devices
 - lack of internet access
 - lack of childcare options
 - need to care/for support children/family at home
 - lack of digital literacy skills
 - increased mental health issues
- more funds for PPE and health and safety equipment, and individual sets of learner materials, for safe face to face learning
- funds for devices for learner use and the regulations on how purchasing/loaning devices should ideally be conducted
- more specific details on how training supports can be used

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- assistance with marketing programs and incentives/promotion to learners to re-train
 - a provincial marketing strategy for LBS
 - an LBS option for referral in the new common assessment
 - information on how Ministry monitoring will occur moving forward and what will need to be demonstrated to meet targets
 - recognition of the many challenges with switching to remote/online learning and the ways setting up new systems takes time, which impacts target numbers served
 - an explanation on how funding will be calculated based on the change in face to face vs online learner numbers
 - lowering of target numbers to reflect the experience of not being able to reach/serve learners due to multiple barriers created by the pandemic
 - guidance on the preferred method for delivering milestones, or alternatives to milestones that meet requirements
 - more resources for low level learners
 - a way to deal with SINs/signatures/confidentiality remotely
 - universal protocols on how to re-open safely

It was suggested that agencies could keep track of their concerns and form a compendium of requests in partnership together.

Changes in future demographic served

Agencies suggested that the literacy field needs to

- find more support/strategies to reach clients remotely, especially those in lower learning levels with limited access to devices and internet
- find ways to reach those who can only learn remotely
 - new learners enrolling know that their program will be online – which means those who can't learn online are not reaching out
- examine the factors that influence whether a learner wants to learn online so we can work within and around this knowledge
- examine program access and how the pandemic has changed some variables: for example
 - learners who depended on rides from others may not be able to get that help now
 - some learners are wary of the health risks of taking public transportation

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- acknowledge/affirm that many learners want face-to-face learning because it holds the opportunity to build social connections and self-esteem in a way online learning does not
 - address the digital divide by investigating and exposing more thoroughly the effects of privilege/lack of privilege on literacy
 - for example, in a pandemic we have seen more than ever that the lack of digital resources/internet has deeper ramifications than the interruption of a learning path: for example, it affects the ability to understand
 - what is happening in the world
 - how to maintain health
 - how to access help with basic needs
 - find opportunities for “hybrid” learning and asynchronous (such as recorded) classes, to serve more learners in more ways
 - study which learners are most likely to need or want access to face to face learning
 - find more techniques to address learner low motivation within a global crisis (outside of learners needing time away from learning to address basic needs)
 - examine the effect of “not knowing when this will end” on the learner and on program planning, to develop strategies related to learner motivation
 - consider the risk of increasing privatization of education with online learning and create points/plans to address this possibility
 - prepare for learners with higher digital skills to enter programs

Changes in learner needs

With the changes to the economic landscape wrought by the pandemic, learners may present with different needs.

Specifically the suggestion came up that the current level of unemployment points to a potential onslaught of learners who will require new skills.

Continuing practices that are working, or changes in practices that could stick

Many of those surveyed suggested that the pandemic has caused changes which might be beneficial ongoing, or that new practices may change how services operate into the future. The feeling was that although potential benefits don't erase the barriers the

pandemic has caused, at the same time once new methods are developed, they will carry forward and continue to be used, and that it would be wasteful not to leverage innovations to serve learners best.

They considered the following.

- The pandemic has caused us to rethink when people physically come in to the office and when they do not.

Now that there is infrastructure to work from home, sickness may be viewed differently, with folks reliably staying home/working from home if they are ill or if someone in their household is ill.

- Working from home can reduce costs.

Where possible and effective, and where the home resources and environment are in place, having staff work from home can decrease operating costs.

- The ability to meet virtually is now being embraced widely, making attendance at meetings more do-able for some.

The option to attend virtually may allow for better communication due to increased attendance at meetings, and can allow those at a great distance to attend where they wouldn't otherwise have been able.

- Working from home reduces or eliminates commuting time, and saves staff the cost of commuting, which can be a plus.
- Remote/online learning can save learners time as well, and eliminate transportation issues.

Some learners are content with remote/online learning as it allows them to avoid travel time and alleviates travel issues such as having to take more than one mode of transportation, or lack of public transportation or cab service in remote areas.

- A “hybrid” or blended learning model may serve some learners best.

Having options can increase productivity and engagement. For example, some learners may prefer to learn part-time from home due to caring for children, or due to social anxiety or other disorders. Evening classes online may be a more do-able option for those who are employed during the day.

- Communication with learners could continue to extend to home learning time.

The pandemic has in some cases increased the quantity of communication between learners and practitioners, and increased the methods of communication being used. Learners and practitioners may continue to reach out to extend learning outside the classroom walls by reporting progress, asking questions, or assigning homework.

- Increased marketing strategies will be useful in any case.
- Since our society is increasingly digitalized, learning digital skills through online literacy programs
 - benefits the learner – teaches them the skills they need
 - shows (some of) them that they can learn new things, be independent
 - shows the learner that they could work remotely
- Pandemic preparedness planning will benefit agencies in the event of another similar situation.

Now that agencies have adapted to the current challenges, they are better placed to continue to deliver services in any future situation.

Understanding what the changes mean to how we understand learning

The pandemic has shown literacy agencies new facets of what learning can be or look like. There is support for the idea that this new perspective needs further thought and development.

For example, respondents suggested the following.

-
- We can't assume that people we work with are going to be comfortable working remotely, and also have access and digital skills.

It is imperative to think outside the box and develop creative alternatives.

- It's valuable to look at "how we learn online" through a pedagogy lens.

More important than a particular strategy or app, it would be useful to construct a remote learning framework for LBS, so that the learner can conceptualize what we are doing or trying to do, and understand that there are specific skills needed that they can learn.

For example, no matter the subject or platform, learning online may include

- virtual meetings
- a virtual meeting space or LMS
- a portal or hub containing links/materials
- files of materials and a method for finding/organizing them
- ways to complete and submit assignments
- information about why and when you work together/meet, and why, when, and how you work independently – what that looks like

When we assume that learners already know what the features of online learning are, we may inhibit their progress. They may need to be taught in a more direct way.

- A "bootcamp" for learning how to be an online learner was suggested, so that each agency, from scratch, does not have to teach each learner
 - the skills they need to navigate any type of online learning
 - the choices or menu of items they may encounter
 - how to search for what they need in a virtual learning environment
 - the vocabulary used to describe online learning activities (for example, we may assume that learners understand what a "virtual meeting" is but they may not know that means you will see others on a screen and if using your camera, they can see you)
- A need was also noted for examining a broader concept of what it means to be a practitioner online including
 - the structure of online learning
 - the changes/best practices in methods of delivery

-
- the skills required and how to gain them
 - the LMS, platforms, or online resources available
 - the need/opportunity for a different kind of communication with learners

Conclusion

In conclusion, the feeling conveyed by survey participants and interviewees was that starting now, proactive planning for future challenges is critical, including ways to

- find more support for literacy agencies
- help learners understand what it means to be a remote/online learner
- help learners attain the skills to navigate online learning
- find ways to support learner motivation during systemic changes
- reach those learners for whom online learning is out of reach

would be time well spent.

Appendix

Additional Resources

Fostering organizational resilience and innovation in times of crisis: Literacy Ontario Central South, January 2021

<https://theonn.ca/fostering-organizational-resilience-and-innovation-in-times-of-crisis-literacy-ontario-central-south/>

The Sudden Shift to Remote Delivery in LBS by AlphaPlus, October 2021

<https://alphaplus.ca/download/shift-remote-delivery-report/>

Three ways to attract more learners to your adult literacy program by ABC Life Literacy Canada, February 2020

<https://abclifeliteracy.ca/blog-posts/three-ways-to-attract-more-learners-to-your-adult-literacy-program/>

Displaced Workers & LBS Programs: Strategies and Resources by Community Literacy of Ontario, Laubach Literacy Ontario, CESBA and the College Sector Committee, February 2021

<http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Displaced-Workers-LBS-Report-Promotion.pdf>

Delivering LBS Programming during the COVID-19 Pandemic – CLO's Community-based Snapshot, by Community Literacy of Ontario, April 2020

<http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Delivering-LBS-Programming-during-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-CLOs-Community-based-Snapshot.pdf>

Facebook tip sheet for COVID-19 by Community Literacy of Ontario, April 2020

<http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Facebook-During-COVID-19-2.pdf>

Helpful Resources: Planning for Re-Opening, by Community Literacy of Ontario, July 2020

<http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/July-2020-CLO-E-Communique.pdf>

Working Together to support learners during a pandemic – the good, the bag and the unexpected ... by Alphaplus, 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6JVpuf_fo

Building Trust and Engagement Online, August 2020, hosted by Charity Village

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1yXyOiXjLObrSSLGgo4rZxOVKa5le0tG9x6SErefF1YNk/edit?ts=60341e15#slide=id.p>

Community-Based LBS Agencies: Covid-19 Survey Results, by Community Literacy of Ontario and Laubach Literacy Ontario, April 2020

<http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Covid-19-Survey-Results-LBS-Agencies-April-30-2020.pdf>

Sample agreements and forms



Action Read Laptop Borrower Agreement

Learner copy

Action Read purchased this laptop to be able to deliver programs to learners. They are a limited resource, and therefore we may request their return at any time.

In signing below, I _____ agree to the following:

- I understand that laptop computer #**AR Mobile 2020 #___** is property of Action Read.
- I understand that it is **my responsibility to remove my personal data** on the when I return this computer. Action Read takes no responsibility for information left on borrowed computers.
- I will **not save passwords** on this computer, and **will not 'synch'** my email to this computer. I acknowledge that doing this makes me vulnerable to identity theft.
- I will not add, delete, or change any programs, applications, files, screen savers, or bookmarks on the borrowed computer.
- I will not eat or drink near the computer.
- I will not open pornographic, disrespectful or hateful websites on the borrowed computer, nor will I use this computer to create the same.
- I will not leave the computer unattended in public places.
- I will not allow others to use the Action Read laptop.
- I will return the computer when requested and / or will pay to replace the computer if it is lost, stolen or damaged.

Learner/Volunteer Signature

Staff Signature

Date Borrowed

Date Returned

Thank you for your commitment to learning and / or tutoring.

Staff files on server/My files/ Forms/ Computer/Laptop Usage Agreement.docx



Action Read Laptop Borrower Agreement

Action Read copy

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Learner/Volunteer Signature

Staff Signature

Date Borrowed

Date Returned

Thank you for your commitment to learning and / or tutoring.

Staff files on server/My files/ Forms/ Computer/Laptop Usage Agreement.docx



Laptop Privacy / Security Checklist

Please complete before lending out laptop.

Laptop # _____ **Model #** _____

- Check that all emails and other programs logged out.
- Ensure no personal files saved to computer.
- Clear internet history, delete cookies.
- Make sure operating system and anti-virus programs are up to date.
- Change name in Zoom to Action Read.
- Sanitize computer.
- Enclose Action Read Computer and Internet Safety Training Booklet.
- Share information with borrower about internet security; phishing schemes; logging in and out of emails; not “synching” on these computers; and the importance of strong passwords.
- Remind borrower to log out of email and all programs prior to returning computer.

Checked by AR staff member _____ (initials) Date _____



Laptop Privacy / Security Checklist

Please complete before lending out laptop.

Laptop # _____ **Model #** _____

- Check that all emails and other programs logged out.
- Ensure no personal files saved to computer.
- Clear internet history, delete cookies.
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- Remind borrower to log out of email and all programs prior to returning computer.

Checked by AR staff member _____ (initials) Date _____

Healthy Boundaries Policy and Guidelines

Policy

Action Read will set, uphold and model clear and appropriate boundaries in order to maintain a healthy and productive environment for learners, clients, volunteers and staff. Action Read will provide a healthy boundaries policy and guidelines, information and training, and will be an ongoing resource for resolving issues that may emerge. Upholding clear and appropriate boundaries as laid out in this document applies to all members of Action Read.

We recognize that we all must be flexible and open to learning from others, and that we all at times need support to understand and clarify boundaries. That said, a serious error in judgment around boundaries, or a flagrant lack of interest in understanding or maintaining healthy boundaries may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including, expulsion from Action Read.

Why Boundaries Are Important

- They establish a comfortable and supportive environment centred upon learning.
- They set clear expectations for all parties. People want and need clear boundaries.
- They keep relationships appropriately warm, supportive and professional.
- They provide consistency for individuals who may have multiple learning partners over the course of their time at Action Read.
- They protect people. We work with vulnerable adults who may not have the cognitive or developmental skills, or the mental health resources to set, recognize or maintain appropriate boundaries.
- We work with people who may be emotionally vulnerable, and/or isolated. As such, they may confuse what is simply meant as an act of kindness and support, for other intentions.
- Learners may be at Action Read to improve their Essential Skills, which often includes working with others and learning how to set healthy boundaries.
- They protect the organization. Action Read has brought people together and therefore has a professional, legal and moral responsibility to maintain a safe and healthy environment.

Staff files on server/my files/policies/ policies being developed/ healthy boundaries policy and guidelines.docx

Definitions

‘Learning partner’ designates any tutor, learner, client, volunteer or staff member who are in a helping learning relationship with another individual. It does not apply to fellow learners, co-workers or co-volunteers etc.

‘Appropriate’ boundaries are those that create healthy and supportive long-term learning relationships at Action Read.

‘Inappropriate’ boundaries are those that do not support healthy and long-term learning relationships at Action Read. They may not be inherently “bad” or “incorrect” but in the context of Action Read, they may simply be too loose, too rigid, unsafe, concerning, indicative of a more serious problem, or simply inadvisable for various reasons, based on our many years experience delivering programs.

When to speak to staff

- Whenever you have concerns, questions, want help problem solving, or need information. It is our job to help you with these matters!
- When you know that your learning partner has lost housing, has no food or another unsettling, unsafe or uncertain situation has arisen. Many times, staff have the background information, community connections and referral information to connect people to food, shelter, counselling and other supports.
- Any time you think your learning partner has crossed a significant line. We may not need to get involved if you have successfully addressed your concerns to them, but it helps us anticipate and mitigate future problems.
- When your learning partner makes jokes or uses language this is offensive or uncomfortable for you.
- When your learning partner is constantly pushing boundaries in a way that you find distracting, annoying or unproductive.
- When your learning partner reveals something that you believe is illegal.

Guidelines

Tutors, staff and learners can have very personal, supportive and caring relationships. Affection and concern for each other is common, and something we strive to create. However, it is important to distinguish healthy and supportive learning relationships from a familial type relationship, a romantic relationship, a commercial relationship, or any other type of relationship that is incompatible with or that could negatively affect our mission of **learning** at Action Read.

These guidelines outline behaviours, attitudes, and practical arrangements specific to the Action Read learning environment, and reflect Action Read’s philosophy of community-based education.

Transportation

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Learning partners come to and from the centre and / or special events on their own.	Driving your learning partner to and from the centre and / or special events, even if they live in the same neighborhood or on route to you.

Occasionally there may be an exceptional situation where driving your learning partner is allowed. Please speak to staff before making such arrangements.

Note: Many learners in our adult program qualify for a Training Support Allowance (TSA) for transportation and childcare expenses.

Service Location

Action Read learners, clients, volunteers, and staff will work at the Action Read office unless a serious and unusual circumstance makes this impossible, or requires closure of the office for an extended duration. Examples of such a circumstance include, but are not limited to; a pandemic, a localized infectious disease; a hospital stay; an elevator shut down; an office fire or flood, and so on. Such a circumstance will be well publicized, alternative arrangements will be made and additional guidance given as appropriate.

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Meeting at the Action Read office or at officially designated alternative locations (e.g. Dublin St. United Church for the Holiday Party, etc.).	Meeting at each other's home, local coffee shops, going on field trips etc. Meeting anywhere when Action Read is closed. Meeting your learning partner outside the centre to try to resolve a problem they are experiencing.

Punctuality and Reliability

Action Read sets clear expectations around scheduling in the **Tutor Learner Agreement**. However, we know that people's lives are complex and stressful, and therefore we hope that learning partners will be flexible around the occasional lateness. If lateness or unreliability become a regular occurrence, speaking to your learning partner, or asking staff to speak to your learning partner is important. Your learning partner may be unaware of the impact of their behaviour, they may need support with time management, or it might indicate another issue going on in their life. Letting the situation go unaddressed may result in the reason for the lateness going unresolved, and the loss of learners or tutors who are frustrated, or who have not reached their learning or volunteer goals.

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Showing up on time.	Not being punctual or mindful of time.
Whenever possible, giving notice if running late.	Expecting your learning partner to stay late if you had a slow start.
Giving at least 2 hours notice of absences.	Cancelling meetings without 2 hours notice.

Physical Contact

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Limiting physical contact to handshakes and/or high-fives, and only if both parties are comfortable with it (and if appropriate from a public health perspective).	Hugging, touching your learning partner when talking to them, and any other kind of physical contact. These actions, however well intentioned, may lead to misunderstandings.
Demonstrate concern and warmth through active and engaged listening and appropriate body language.	Not using safe coughing and sneezing practices. Not washing hands.*

** Several of these guidelines may not apply during the Covid-19 pandemic when we are practicing social distancing, and / or are limiting all in person contact with others.*

Language

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>Clear, respectful, warm, positive, professional and encouraging communication and language.</p>	<p>Disrespectful or discriminatory treatment of, or manner towards, people based race, ability or their perceived or actual sexual orientation. Please see Action Read’s Anti-Discrimination Policy for more information.</p> <p>Conversations, questions, humour, “banter”, jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature.</p> <p>Obscene, inappropriate or triggering gestures and language, even when used as an example in teaching (e.g. rhyming - luck, duck, f*** etc.).</p> <p>Excessive comments about someone’s appearance or clothing, including excessive flattery or criticism.</p> <p>Overly familiar names or terms of endearment.</p>
<p>Listening to your learning partner when they share stories about personal problems and challenges that are affecting their learning, and getting the supports and referrals they need to move forward in a positive manner.</p>	<p>Overly familiar / personal storytelling, “venting” and sharing (e.g. finances, relationships, etc.), especially when there seems to be little interest in resolving to problem or in moving forward.</p>

Noise

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>Speaking quietly and confidentially when in earshot of others.</p>	<p>Speaking or socializing loudly or openly in the centre when others are trying to work.</p> <p>Not limiting noise and other distractions from others.</p>
<p>Politely and respectfully asking others to lower their voices, or asking staff to speak to them.</p>	<p>“Policing” the noise and other distractions of others at the learning centre. If you are frustrated, speak to staff.</p>

Confidentiality and Staff Support

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Keeping personal information about your learning partner confidential.	Sharing identifying or non-identifying private and confidential information about your learning partner with others, outside of staff.
Reaching out to Action Read staff to resolve larger problems that may affect ability to focus and learn, such as housing, food security, interpersonal conflict, and so on.	Trying to resolve your learning partner's problem on your own without consulting with staff; doing it for them.
Reaching out to staff to problem solve around learning challenges, or set new learning goals and strategies.	Struggling on your own with significant learning or teaching problems, roadblocks or challenges.
Speaking to staff if you require a new book or learning resource, or if the resources we have do not meet your needs.	Purchasing learning resources that Action Read should provide and which may be valuable for other learners. While we appreciate the generosity, we do not expect people to have to purchase books and resources needed for their tutoring.
Speaking to staff if you think the learning plan needs to be updated (e.g. goals change or new information on learning preferences emerges etc.)	Changing the learning plan without consulting staff.
For staff - reaching out to colleagues and / or the Executive Director to gain strategies, tools and back up to navigate challenging situations.	Struggling on your own to manage a problem or situation that may have legal or reputational implications for Action Read if not properly handled or resolved.

Gifts and Donations

Gifts can create expectations and feelings of obligation and pressure, and can lead to misinterpretation. However, we recognize that people want to show their appreciation for others, and small gestures may be part of how we create a warm and thoughtful environment.

Appropriate	Inappropriate
Occasional and very small tokens of appreciation (e.g. card, homemade craft, favourite book etc.).	<p>Giving or receiving gifts or loans (e.g. money, gift cards, grocery money, new or used clothing or other household items, etc.), even if both parties agree.</p> <p>Regular exchange of smaller gifts (e.g. bringing a latte for your learning partner every time you meet etc.).</p>

Note: Action Read sometimes gives learners gift cards and / or honorariums as an incentive for completing specific programs and tasks, or to break down a learning barrier. An example of this is asking learners to complete extra evaluations when we pilot a new program. This practice is distinct from gift giving as it is planned in advance, and forms part of our program offerings.

Advocacy

Action Read is not an advocacy organization; rather we try to give people the tools and skills to advocate for themselves. See the Action Read Advocacy Guidelines for more information.

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>With staff input, providing support to help a learner <i>self-advocate</i>. Appropriate support may include helping your learner to gain the skills to successfully resolve conflict, write letters, communicate more effectively, conduct background research, and locate helpful resources, and more.</p>	<p>Not consulting staff if you are initiating advocacy work not in the learning plan.</p> <p>Not consulting staff if you are using Action Read's name or letterhead to promote or advocate for a cause or issue.</p> <p>Taking over in advocating for your learning partner's cause. Making it your cause. Doing the work for them.</p>
<p>For staff - Supporting outside of work if it affects learning and after discussing and arranging it with the Executive Director.</p>	<p>Going out on a limb in any way, and /or providing supporting outside of work without discussing it first with the Executive Director.</p>

Teaching / Learning

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>Asking honestly what is wanted or needed</p> <p>Actively listening with an open mind.</p> <p>Being open to learning from your partner.</p>	<p>Feeling unable to express what is wanted or needed.</p> <p>Feeling scared to express dissatisfaction or lack of understanding (e.g. a word or a concept etc.).</p>
<p>Taking responsibility for your own teaching and learning.</p> <p>Being open to learning from your partner as an equal.</p>	<p>Feeling like you cannot learn, teach or fully function without your tutor / learner etc.</p> <p>The habit of “doing” for your learning partner (e.g. research / assignment etc.) instead of teaching them how to do it.</p>
<p>Respecting that your tutor or learner may process information and experiences very differently from you. Being flexible and open to new ideas and approaches.</p>	<p>Rigidly sticking to your own ideas, opinions, preferences, and style of teaching or learning.</p>

In the Community

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>Letting the learner determine if they wish to greet or acknowledge you when out in the community.</p>	<p>Identifying the learner as coming to Action Read without their consent.</p> <p>Assuming that because Action Read is a safe and comfortable place, that you should offer support and assistance when you run into a learner in the community.</p>

Note: It may be helpful to discuss this in advance with your learning partner if you anticipate running into them outside of Action Read on a regular basis.

Online¹

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>Maintaining a respectful, helpful, courteous and professional tone in all communications.</p> <p>Consistently modeling the professional behaviours that you would see in a regular office environment.</p> <p>Modeling the behaviour you expect to see online from your learning partner.</p> <p>Providing guidance to learners on appropriate online behaviour and the proper use of comments and images.</p> <p>Electronically communicating with your learning partner at appropriate times of day.</p> <p>Being mindful of the environment in which your learning session is taking place. Using Zoom backgrounds if there are privacy or security concerns, or if you do not want your home to be visible on camera.</p>	<p>Discussing personal lifestyle details of self, other staff or learners / volunteers unless directly relevant to the learning topic and with the individual's consent.</p> <p>Smoking, drinking and eating during meetings or learning sessions.</p> <p>Photographing, audio recording or filming your learning partner without written authorisation.</p> <p>Avoiding exchanging private texts, phone numbers, e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with your learning partner. Staff are always happy to relay messages.</p> <p>Declining learning-partner initiated "friend" requests and do not issue "friend" requests, on any social media platform.</p>
<p>For Staff - Using Action Read equipment, resources, computers, tools etc. to do your work. Speaking to the Executive Director if you require additional tools to do your job.</p>	<p>Using personal rather than Action Read equipment should only happen in exceptional circumstances, and in discussion with the Executive Director.</p>
<p>For staff - Create boundaries through online office hours, or regular working hours.</p>	<p>Posting learning materials, and responding to learners throughout the evening, on weekends etc. This could create unsustainable, possibly unprofessional expectations around availability and response times.</p>

¹ Parts of this section comes from The Ontario College of Teachers Professional Advisory on the Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media 2011.



Ending Relationships

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<p>Accepting endings</p> <p>Stopping a relationship that is uncomfortable or unhealthy for you.</p> <p>Listening to your gut.</p>	<p>Unable to let go</p> <p>Remaining in an uncomfortable situation because you do not want to hurt your learning partner's feelings.</p> <p>Not listening to your gut.</p> <p>Not speaking to staff and or your learning partner when you are done. This is a small courtesy that should be upheld whenever possible.</p>

Speak to staff, but know that if you feel the match is not working out, you may request a new learning partner at any time.

Tip sheets

The following tips sheets are also available at

<https://www.quillnetwork.com/resources/resources/>

Communicating with Learners



Agencies reported these general tips for communicating with learners through the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Conduct a digital audit to determine what devices/ resources the learner has access to at home.
- Create a spreadsheet or tracking system to record each learner's
 - preferred method of communication
 - devices/resources available
 - best times for communicating, related to learner's work schedules or childcare/family care responsibilities
- Set up office phone lines to function remotely and/or to accept texts.
- Set up a Facebook business account and use it to contact them, eliminating the use of staff personal phone numbers.
- Contact learners by other methods as needed including Google phone, email, texting.

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)



- Send the online meeting link (if an online virtual meeting platform is being used) to the learner in an email or text rather than through the platform invitation system.
- Use clear writing on all written documents shared with learners.
- Hire clear writing services as needed.
- Create a newsletter including learner and volunteer stories on how they are coping and staying busy or motivated.
- Contact learners daily to help keep learners motivated.
- Help reduce isolation with phone calls.
- Consider creating an online learning portal if possible, where learners can access resources and assignments.



This Employment Ontario project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario and through the Canada-Ontario Job Fund Agreement.



Engaging Volunteers



Agencies shared these tips for engaging volunteers during COVID-19.

- Consider that there may be some loss of volunteers due to infection concerns, unfamiliarity with online communication for online tutoring, and capacity restrictions for in-person tutoring.
- Create a tutor coordinator position or a position to support the coordinator, if needed/possible.
- Provide the tutor with specific materials appropriate for the mode they will be teaching in: over the phone, or online.
- Recruit new volunteers who are interested and/or have the skills to work with learners online.

Staff may have to be re-allocated to cover both teaching and 1:1 tutoring.

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)



- Provide volunteer training for digital platforms and online communications.
- Have a staff member set up and open tutor-learner sessions.
- Provide information or training for volunteers on maintaining professional boundaries in online tutoring.

Having a staff member open each online tutor session for the tutor and learner can allow staff to monitor volunteer-learner relationships and answer questions/trouble-shoot challenges on the spot.

Online meetings can create a more intimate setting as tutors and learners are joining from the privacy of their home. A policy with guidelines and a tutor agreement form can help to ensure that boundaries remain professional.



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Help Learners Access Devices and Internet



Agencies reported these general tips for helping learners access devices/internet.

- Conduct a “digital audit” to determine what devices/resources the learner has access to at home and the status of their internet connectivity.
- Consider providing internet sticks, or helping pay internet bills where possible, for example via gift cards.
- Use travel supports to help fund internet for learners.
- Apply to local charities/social service agencies/OW for support/funds to help learners get devices and pay for internet fees.
- Research other avenues for funding.
- Encourage learners to apply to programs that help with internet connectivity.

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)

- Loan devices such as laptops, chrome books, or Playaway tablets to learners, using
 - a loan agreement
 - a privacy/security checklist (samples available in Appendix)
- Download all needed programs/materials onto loaner computers, and create desktop icons so they are easy to find.
- Include materials that can be accessed offline when loading loaner computers.
- Create short videos showing learners how to sign in, open programs, or hook up to Wi-Fi, and load them onto the loaner computers.
- Consider hiring a contract IT person to help learners with questions and trouble-shoot issues.
- Have learners access internet from the parking lot or local library where possible.
- Create independent learning stations where learners can access a device and internet without coming into contact with others.
- Look into satellite internet and when it will become available in your area.



Ontario

Canada

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Learning Resources



LBS agencies found these resources particularly helpful during COVID-19.

Online courses

Agencies reported having learners with adequate digital literacy skills access user-ready online courses at e-channel including

- [The LearningHUB](#)
- [Good Learning Anywhere](#)
- [Contact North e-Channel](#)
- [F@D](#)
- [Deaf Learn Now](#)

Other sources of online courses included

- [Northstar](#)
- [GCF Learn Free](#)
- [Linked in Learning](#)
- Money Matters through [ABC Life Literacy Canada](#)
- [ACE Distance](#)

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)

Online and remote learning resource/materials list

This extensive list of resources was shared by our survey responders.

- YouTube videos
- Wiki How
- [khanacademy.org](https://www.khanacademy.org)
- Aztec
- [skillsbox.com](https://www.skillsbox.com)
- [wakelet.com](https://www.wakelet.com)
- [voxy.com](https://www.voxy.com)
- [learningupgrade.com](https://www.learningupgrade.com)
- [mathantics.com](https://www.mathantics.com)
- [math-drills.com](https://www.math-drills.com)
- [math-aids.com](https://www.math-aids.com)
- [coolmathgames.com](https://www.coolmathgames.com)
- [edx.org](https://www.edx.org)
- [nglife.com](https://www.nglife.com)
- [adultliteracyleague.org](https://www.adultliteracyleague.org)
- [townsendpress.net](https://www.townsendpress.net)
- [thatquiz.org](https://www.thatquiz.org)
- [quizlet.com](https://www.quizlet.com)
- [audible.ca](https://www.audible.ca)
- [getepic.com](https://www.getepic.com)
- [readworks.org](https://www.readworks.org)
- [kahoot.com](https://www.kahoot.com)
- [typingclub.com](https://www.typingclub.com)
- [superteacher.com](https://www.superteacher.com)
- [k5learning.com](https://www.k5learning.com)
- [edhelper.com](https://www.edhelper.com)
- [spellzone.com](https://www.spellzone.com)
- [slidesmania.com](https://www.slidesmania.com)

Many Literacy Agencies or Networks in Ontario have created their own resources, and/or housed resources on their websites, and these are open to other agencies to use.

Survey respondents reported using resources from

[Laubach Literacy Ontario](#)

[AlphaPlus](#)

[The Literacy Group](#)

[Learning Networks of Ontario](#)

[Action Read Guelph](#)

[Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum](#)



Ontario Canada

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Marketing



Agencies shared these tips for continuing program promotion during COVID-19.

- Reach out to community partners to let them know you are still providing services.
- Partner with other agencies to gather enough learners to launch a structured (group) program – transportation/ location is not an issue for online classes.
- Make your office phone numbers accessible to learner intake texts in order to reach more potential clients.
- Follow up with previous learners who may have friends to refer.
- Explore and think outside the box to see how you can reach a new audience in the virtual community who may prefer online learning.
- Offer targeted training for a specific client group.
- Hold pop-up classes such as for increasing digital literacy skills.
- Create, or partner with, a new project or event.
- Use social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) to promote programs and services.

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)



- Create social-media-ready advertisements to share with colleagues and partnering agencies.
- Use your website to promote.
- Change signage/website to reflect service changes such as new or reduced hours, new methods of contact, or COVID procedures.
- Make use of local radio spots, community event pages, or newspaper ads if possible.
- Consider hosting a virtual or physically distanced “grand re-opening” as a way to generate interest.
- Offer childcare to learners for their learning time.
- Add a promotional poster to your email signature.
- Offer digital literacy training.
- Buy a window space at the grocery store as an advertisement space.
- Host a webinar.
- Place advertisements on the street level of your building for those walking/driving past to see.
- Create outdoor advertising – signs, banners, feather flags.
- Create a contest to win a free literacy assessment as well as any other prizes available (perhaps from donations).
- Start an online book club to generate interest in programs.
- Invest in a line of sweatshirts with your logo, for sale.



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Mental Health



Agencies reported these ideas for supporting mental health – for both staff and learners – during COVID-19.

- Hold informal staff team check-ins on life (not work) matters – humans taking care of humans.
- Incorporate check-ins in one to one sessions with learners – although this may not be different than pre-pandemic routines, it is more than ever needed.
- Encourage selective use of social media messaging to prevent unnecessary anxiety/spread of misinformation.
- Call. A phone call can mean a lot to someone who is isolated, so agencies mentioned including phone calls in learner communication, if the learner was comfortable with it.
- Give learners accurate information about COVID-19.
- Create a mediation group with learners.
- Write/share inspirational quotes – can also be a learning opportunity.

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)

- Work with a consultant to incorporate mental wellness into the workplace.
- Make sure everyone on staff has access to mental health supports including
 - where to access mental health supports
 - how to listen/talk to learners to find out if they need help
 - how to help learners find and access mental health services
 - what to do if faced with a mental health crisis
- Engage a placement student in the area of social work to provide peer mentor supports to learners/programs.
- Recognize where mental health improves – for some, it will be working from home; for others, working in person will provide improvement – and act on those findings where possible.
- Have your local network or community of practice create/deliver a webinar on mental health supports and aids for supporting learners.
- Encourage open sharing so colleagues can support each other.
- Allow/take time for mental health breaks.
- Address compassion fatigue amongst staff – access an in-service

Literacy Link South Central created a list of mental health resources and sources of information in their [Reach Out 4 Mental Health](#) campaign.

This campaign also included messaging on social media platforms.

Look for this additional content at [#ReachOut4MentalHealth](#) on Twitter and Facebook.



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Professional Development



Agencies reported these ideas for professional development during COVID-19.

Professional development opportunities

Opportunities for accessing individualized professional learning included

- Create your own learning opportunities by having staff/board members/volunteers/partnering agencies share their expertise/methods/discoveries
- Check with your learning network to suggest topics needed for upcoming webinars.
- Apply to AlphaPlus for individualized technology coaching such as on the use of [Google Suite](#)

For more details, consult the complete report: *Best Practices in Adult Literacy Program Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021)* on the QUILL Learning Network website under [Resources](#)

WEBINAR

PD suggestions included

- Pre-recorded webinars from your learning network
- YouTube videos for learning the ins and outs of learning platforms
- [Contact North's webinars](#)
- [LinkedIn's technology skills training](#)
- [Mid North Network webinars](#)
- [Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum](#)
- [Pop Up PD webinar](#) featuring AlphaPlus, *Working Together to support learners during a pandemic – the good, the bad and the unexpected ... (2020)*
- Literacy Link South Central created webinars for learning how to use Zoom and its features. "From A to Z(oom)" [webinars are available here](#)
- [Sara Delicate Training](#)
- [Silver Lining Café](#)



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