

# Calgary's Adult Foundational Learning Needs Assessment 2019



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| WHO IS CALGARY LEARNS?.....  | 3  |
| WHAT ARE COMMUNITY ADULT LEARNING PROGRAMS?.....                   | 4  |
| WHAT IS ADULT LITERACY AND FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING? .....            | 5  |
| THE CALGARY CONTEXT .....  | 6  |
| THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE .....  | 6  |
| THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE.....  | 7  |
| SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....   | 8  |
| PHASE I – SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT .....                             | 8  |
| PHASE II – COMMUNITY INPUT.....                                    | 10 |
| CONSULTING WITH LEARNERS .....                                     | 10 |
| CONSULTING WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS .....                            | 11 |
| CONSULTING WITH FUNDERS .....                                      | 13 |
| OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE EXISTING SUCCESS.....                    | 14 |
| ESSENTIAL LEARNING NEEDS FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT .....               | 16 |
| LEARNING TO BRING FORWARD.....                                     | 17 |
| FINAL THOUGHTS: ADVANCING FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES..... | 18 |
| REFERENCES .....   | 19 |

All aspects of literacy make up an interrelated and interdependent reality in which every piece affects and is affected by every other piece.

(Lefebvre et al., 2006; Merrifield et al., 2001; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2011)<sup>1</sup>

## WHO IS CALGARY LEARNS?

Calgary Learns is dedicated to helping adult Calgarians acquire the necessary basic skills to thrive in life and fully participate in community. As a granting agency, we administer funding from Alberta Advanced Education for the Community Adult Learning Program (CALP) supporting foundational learning programs for adult (18+) Calgarians with financial barriers. Alberta Advanced Education sets the guidelines for CALP funding and Calgary Learns sets local priorities through community consultations, research and needs assessments.

In realization of Alberta Advanced Education's commitment to ensure that adult (18+) Albertans have access to affordable, part-time, non-formal literacy and foundational learning opportunities, Calgary Learns will grant almost \$2 million to Calgary based non-profit organizations for foundational learning programs in 2019/20. We also work to leverage additional funding sources to better meet the needs of foundational learners in our city. Through other government and foundation grants, Calgary Learns is building the capacity of these foundational learning service providers/organizations by providing professional development, enhancing programs serving Indigenous learners, and increasing collaboration among organizations serving foundational learners.

Calgary Learns helps service providers respond to current learning issues, make community-based learning accessible and increase awareness in the greater community about foundational learning needs. Calgary Learns funds adult foundational learning programs in the priority areas of literacy (reading and writing), numeracy, English language learning, basic digital skills, and foundational life skills.

### **Why conduct a needs assessment?**

In our 2014 Needs Assessment report, Calgary Learns identified trends and challenges in promoting foundational learning and discussed best or promising practices to guide future work.<sup>2</sup> Calgary Learns now seeks to update that work to help us, as well as other service providers, better understand and support the evolving foundational learning needs of adult Calgarians. This will also include an exploration of what is working well and spotlight existing adult foundational learning gaps.

## WHAT ARE COMMUNITY ADULT LEARNING PROGRAMS?

Community Adult Learning Programs (known as CALPs) aim to bridge the education gap for adult learners who have not achieved high school level skills. By providing a safe and welcoming environment, eligible non-profit organizations serve as the entry point for foundational learners to begin to see themselves as learners by gaining the confidence they need to continue their learning and reach their full potential. These community-based entry points could be the learners' path towards high school completion, employment opportunities, increased workplace training, and potentially future post-secondary education.<sup>3</sup>

### CALGARY LEARNS' COMMUNITY ADULTY LEARNING PROGRAM (CALP)

In 2018/19, Calgary Learns' CALP grant supported:

- 7,677 people participating in CALP programming
- 747 learning opportunities (including tutoring and classroom instruction)
- 30,484 hours of instruction from facilitators/practitioners to support adult literacy and foundational learning programs

### Framework

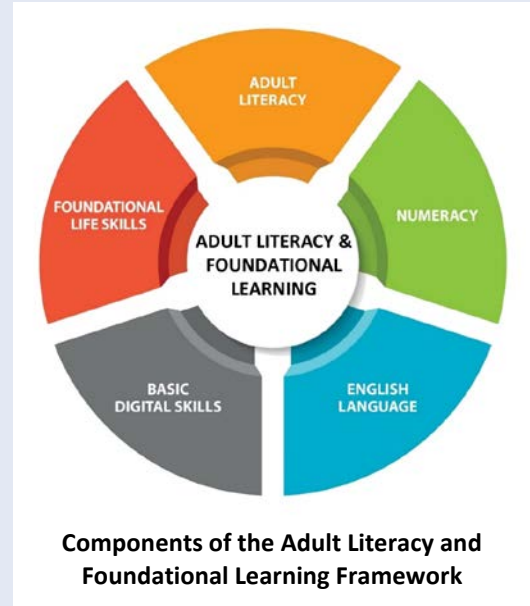
CALP takes a comprehensive approach to adult foundational learning needs. CALP prioritizes its support to **Literacy and Foundational Learning (LFL)** opportunities for adults (see Spotlight on Adult Literacy and Foundational Learning, p. 5).

**Community Capacity Building (CCB)** programs may also be supported. These programs complement, build upon, or supplement the literacy and foundational skills that adult learners are trying to achieve to navigate life. CCB programs are more focused on foundational content than foundational skill development and may include employment readiness, pre-GED (General Education Diploma), Indigenous languages/cultures, mental health, and parenting.

In addition to supporting LFL and CCB opportunities, Calgary Learns, through our CALP grant, also supports **Initiatives** (i.e., special projects). Initiatives are one-time project grants that provide an opportunity for innovation and/or to strengthen the ability of non-profit organizations to meet the foundational learning needs of financially barriered adult Calgarians. Initiatives may include new research, development of new training for program facilitators and volunteer tutors, curriculum development, and piloting of new learning opportunities.

## WHAT IS ADULT LITERACY AND FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING?

The CALP program takes a comprehensive approach to adult literacy and foundational learning needs. As stated by the CALP Guidelines, “Foundational learning enables individuals to pursue further learning, have satisfying and meaningful employment, and fully participate in community life. Literacy skills acquired through a solid educational foundation are retained only if used continually throughout the lifespan, at home, in the community, and in the workplace. Additionally, English language skills are essential for newcomers to Alberta to settle into local communities, reduce barriers to employment, and become full participants in society. Immigrants and newcomers to Alberta often require flexible learning environments to support their diverse learning needs.”<sup>4</sup>



**CALP defines each of the five components of their priority funding area of Adult Literacy and Foundational Learning as follows:**

| Component                        | Definition   |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Adult Literacy</b>            | the ability of adults to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts  |
| <b>Numeracy</b>                  | the ability to use, apply, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas   |
| <b>English Language Learning</b> | the study and practice of the English language by individuals whose first language is other than English and who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English                        |
| <b>Basic Digital Skills</b>      | the ability of individuals to appropriately use and understand digital systems, tools and applications, and to process digital information   |
| <b>Foundational Life Skills</b>  | learning opportunities that facilitate the development of the fundamental competencies that adults require to be able to participate in foundational learning and/or everyday life on an independent basis |

# THE CALGARY CONTEXT

## THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

### *Calgary is growing and diverse*

The 2016 Canadian Census Profile reported that 1,392,609 people lived in the metropolitan area of Calgary, with the population growing by 14.6% between 2011 and 2016.<sup>5</sup> Calgary was among the fastest growing cities in Canada, with its growth largely due to natural increases and a positive net migration.<sup>6</sup> While population growth slowed in 2016, it is expected that the city's population could double its current size within the next 50 years, with persons 65 years and over being the fastest growing proportion of the population.

Overall, Calgary has a young population<sup>7</sup>, is the third most diverse metropolitan area in Canada<sup>8</sup>, and is attractive to immigrants.<sup>9</sup> Indigenous peoples in Calgary make up 3% of the population.<sup>10</sup>

### *Education disparities exist*

Research reports that there are skills gaps in Calgarians' literacy, numeracy, as well as problem solving in technology-rich environments (PS-TRE).<sup>11</sup> Despite gradual increases in high school completion rates over the years, 22% of Calgary's students do not graduate in three years and 17% still have not finished in five years.<sup>12</sup> Additional barriers exist for immigrants who may not be literate in their native language and are attempting to learn English as a second language. Calgary Catholic Immigration Services reported that of the refugees arriving in Calgary between April 2018 and March 2019 about half of privately sponsored refugees and less than a quarter of government assisted refugees identified as having high school education.<sup>13</sup> This has implications for employability and overall work-force integration. Special attention to immigrant populations is necessary to address the complexity of foundational learning needs facing migrants.<sup>14</sup>

### *Calgarians' income is increasing, but the distribution remains uneven*

Total income of Calgarians has increased over the last 10 years, resulting in a small decrease in the percentage of individuals reporting low income.<sup>15</sup> Despite the gradual reduction between 2005 and 2015, the incidence of low income in Calgary remains high at 8.1% or 8.9%, depending on the measure (i.e., Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) or Low Income Measure (LIM)). There also continues to be critical income disparities. Vibrant Communities Calgary reports nearly 20,000 individuals are living on less than approximately \$9,000 per year and 3,010 lone-parent families with one child are living on roughly less than \$12,000.<sup>16</sup>

**Addressing literacy and adult foundational learning needs is a critical step to promoting equitable opportunities for Calgarians. Adult Literacy and Foundational Learning is named as one of the 10 key levers of change in Calgary's Enough for All Poverty Reduction Strategy 2.0.**<sup>17</sup>

## THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

Since Calgary Learns' 2014 Needs Assessment, the foundational learning landscape has shifted.

- The downturn in the Albertan economy has had a particular impact on Calgary. This has led to increasing unemployment and poverty rates, as well as growing income disparities.
- New awareness and commitment to the calls-to-action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have highlighted the need to work with Indigenous communities to address foundational learning needs with Indigenous peoples in our community.
- Calgary welcomed refugees predominately from Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Iraq. Upwards of 39% had education levels below high school.
- The decimation of the National Literacy Network and the absence of a National Literacy Strategy continues to fragment and negatively impact the adult literacy and foundational learning field.

The social return on investment alone for raising every Canadian adult to Level 3 literacy is estimated at **\$542 million** – and this does not account for the indirect benefits on the quality of life for individuals and populations.

*National Forum:  
Literacy and Policy  
Frontier College*

## LINKING FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING AND ALBERTANS' WELL-BEING

For adult foundational learners, their daily lives are continuously challenged by the detrimental effects of low literacy – their life experience often includes a lack of self-confidence, social isolation, poor communication skills, and a lack of knowledge of available resources.<sup>18</sup> **As the Calgary profile continues to diversify in age, immigration, and minority status, the socio-economic gap will widen with it. The gap in education and uneven distribution of income will lead to poorer health and social outcomes – all of which are intertwined with literacy proficiency.**<sup>19</sup>

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From February to July 2019 Calgary Learns collected information on the needs of adult foundational learning in Calgary. This process included two phases: a situational assessment of the current state of adult foundational learning, followed by consultations with adult foundational learning stakeholders in the community. A separate report, *Calgary's Adult Foundational Learning Needs Assessment 2019: Situational Analysis and Community Input*, that documents this in more detail is available.<sup>20</sup>

Key themes and learnings emerged from the analysis of data from both the situational assessment (Phase 1) and community input (Phase 2). Although this Adult Foundational Learning Needs Assessment directly informs Calgary Learns' work in supporting the adult foundational learning field, we welcome others to use it to inform their work with adult foundational level learners.

### PHASE I | SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment was first launched with a situational assessment in which we synthesized data relevant to Calgary's foundational learning context. In addition to a review of Calgary's demographic profile (see section The Calgary Context, p. 6), a review of the current state of evidence, knowledge, assessment tools, and services that impact Calgarians' foundational learning needs was completed. This included a review of funded proposals and final reports submitted to Calgary Learns, as well as a review of key literature/research in the field.

Overall, findings suggest that meeting adult foundational learning needs is a key determinant for **poverty reduction**, improving **economic development**, and reducing **socio-cultural disparities** amongst the most vulnerable populations (see the Spotlight, p.9). Adult foundational learning is a 'key' that can unlock the potential for adult Calgarians, with the potential impact going beyond the individual and into the economy and society itself.<sup>17,21</sup> In fact, no other investment has a larger payoff than improving an adult's foundational learning level.

### **Foundational learning is key for poverty reduction**

The 2018 Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy highlights the critical importance of improving literacy and numeracy skills as part of the effort to reduce poverty in Canada.<sup>21</sup> In Calgary specifically, adult literacy and foundational learning is identified as 1 of the 10 levers of change to advance the objective of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Strategy, Enough for All 2.0.<sup>17</sup>

Literacy and numeracy are acknowledged as essential skills given that they are critical for training and employment, as well as participating in life's basic activities. As such, literacy and numeracy skills are identified as a key indicator to help Canadians participate in society with equal opportunity. Investment in community-based programming is essential to support Canadians, especially those who are most vulnerable to lower literacy skills.<sup>22,23</sup> However, the challenge remains in ensuring equal opportunity and representation for foundational learning support, especially among adults.

### **Foundational learning is key to improving economic development**

Adult foundational learning is tied to employment and workplace skills.<sup>24</sup> The skills gaps in Canada, including Calgary, are growing. Continuously changing workplaces that require additional technical skills and literacy skills can further exacerbate literacy skill gaps of workers. Improving the foundational learning skills of Calgary's workforce is identified as a key component to begin to close the skills gap and improve productivity.<sup>25</sup>

To target the foundational learning levels of the Calgarian workforce and end skills shortages, foundational learning must be imbedded in all workforce education and training initiatives for working-aged adults. This includes investing in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills upgrading, as well as cognitive skills upgrading.<sup>25</sup>

Increasing literacy skills in the workforce by an average of 1% would lead to a 3% increase in GDP over time – that's \$54 billion per year, every year.

*Literacy Lost*  
*CanadaWest Foundation*

### **Foundational learning is key to targeting socio-cultural disparities**

In order for foundational learning to be an effective tool to fight against poverty and other socio-cultural disparities, an equity lens is needed to provide opportunities for those who need it most. This means extending foundational learning support beyond formal education and training programs as vulnerable populations may be limited in being able to access such programs.<sup>23</sup>

In Alberta, the Indigenous education gap is large and growing. Investment into closing this Indigenous education gap would benefit all Albertans, and existing evidence demonstrates that training in employment programs shows improvement in foundational learning and employment outcomes.<sup>26</sup>

## PHASE II | COMMUNITY INPUT

To validate the results of the data analyzed in Phase I of our process and identify additional perspectives and considerations for foundational learning priorities, stakeholder input was gathered from learners, service providers and funders in the community. This included surveys, focus groups and roundtables conducted to gather valued perspectives from these key stakeholders to ultimately identify the foundational learning needs of adult Calgarians.

### CONSULTING WITH LEARNERS

Calgary Learns consulted with a diversity of adult Calgarians who were completing, or had recently completed, a foundational learning opportunity. In a survey conducted from April to May 2019, we received feedback from a total of 263 learners. There were 227 learners who completed the survey, online or on-paper, either independently or with support of program facilitators to assist in the process. An additional 35 learners provided validation of the compiled results as well as additional feedback.

#### *What we learned*

| What helps learners learn best?  | What makes it challenging for learners to learn?   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Continuous encouragement</b> and support provided by teachers, facilitators, learning coaches and support workers</li><li>• <b>Access to learning tools</b> like books, interactive apps via iPads, computers, and art supplies</li><li>• Programs and courses <b>designed to meet diverse adult learning needs</b></li><li>• Having a <b>safe and discrimination-free learning environment</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Learning difficulties – losing focus and being distracted</b></li><li>• Taking care of <b>children or family members</b> limits ability to attend class</li><li>• <b>Aging and memory loss</b> can make it difficult to learn</li><li>• <b>Time commitment</b> of learning programs makes it difficult to stay engaged on an ongoing basis</li><li>• Limited access to <b>affordable and accessible child care</b> during the learning sessions</li><li>• <b>Limited program eligibility</b> once learners become Canadian Citizens</li></ul> |

#### **Overall, learners suggested that learning makes a difference in their daily lives by:**

- Helping improve **confidence** and **independence with daily activities** (e.g., making a shopping list, going to the grocery store and purchasing specific items)
- Enhancing ability **to communicate and interact** with others more easily – this includes navigating the Internet with **improved digital skills**
- Motivating learners to **keep learning**
- A few learners even suggested programming motivates them to reduce their likelihood of **reincarceration**.

## WHAT DO LEARNERS WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT?

- Strengthen reading/ writing/ numeracy **skills and strategies** for home, community and work
- Continue to improve their **English language learning skills** – reading, writing, listening and speaking
- Greater exposure to technology (e.g., computers, iPads) to improve their **computer and digital literacy skills**

## CONSULTING WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

The Service Provider Focus Group event took place in June 2019 with 24 people in attendance. The service providers included program coordinators and facilitators/practitioners who provide adult literacy and foundational learning opportunities in the City of Calgary. We asked service providers to consider the challenges for adult foundational learners.

### *What we learned*

| What limits learning:<br><b>Reflecting/Expanding on Learner Responses</b>  | What limits learning:<br><b>Adding the Service Provider Perspective</b>  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1. Learning difficulties</b> including information retention, the inability to remain focused/being easily distracted, memory loss, cognitive ability.</p> | <p><b>1. Learners’ limited self-perceived capacity and confidence in engaging in learning</b> can be a major barrier. This includes learners first identifying as learners themselves and entering a more formal learning environment. This can be challenging for many learners who have experienced shame or have a fear of learning based on previous lived experiences.</p> <p><b>Undiagnosed or unaddressed learning difficulties</b> including trauma and/or PTSD, learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, cognitive delay, etc. Learning programs cannot (or are not designed to) adequately address the complexity of learning needs and the underlying issues that may contribute to them.</p> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>2. The impact of poverty and meeting “<b>basic needs</b>” – this includes weighing the responsibilities of adequate housing and food with time to invest in learning opportunities.</p> | <p>2. <b>Inadequate housing, food insecurity, etc.</b> can bring complex challenges into the learning setting.</p>                |
| <p>3. Limited access to <b>affordable, accessible and reliable childcare</b> coupled with caregiving/familial responsibilities is the greatest challenge affecting learners.</p>           | <p>3. <b>Responsibility of caregiving</b> limits learner opportunities. This includes limited access to affordable childcare.</p> |

**SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE PROVIDERS**

**WHAT DO SERVICE PROVIDERS BELIEVE WILL ENHANCE THE DELIVERY OF FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING?**

1. Investing in **pre-learning** is a critical piece to enhance the overarching learning field. Learners are understood more holistically when they are assessed for their learning abilities and capacity. This includes consideration of the learner’s basic needs that need to be met to enable learning (e.g., providing referrals for food and shelter resources, providing childcare or including children in learning).
2. **Connecting with learners** prior to sessions is an important way to improve attendance and engagement. This can be done through telephone and to some extent social media platforms (as appropriate). Growing a **social network among learners** : Peer relationships are understood as a critical component that influences learners’ sense of belonging, offers consistent and empathetic encouragement and support, and builds rapport.
3. **Re-considering evaluation metrics** to exist beyond targets and quantitative outcomes, and focus on the holistic learner experience. Using continuous evaluation measures that focus on lived experience, learner strengths and engagement opportunities better reflects the impact on the learner. This is a ‘strengths-focused’ approach that uses learners’ language and experience to direct outcome monitoring and reporting.
4. **Investing in learning for facilitators and service providers.** This includes opportunities for professional development to be able to confidently help learners with complex needs and increased learner access to learning/psychological assessments. This may also include staff with specialized training joining a learning team to address any underlying learning limitations.
5. **Ongoing, continuous funding** that is not limited to learner outcomes is important. Funding supports for ‘basic needs’ such as transportation, food (on-site) and childcare would be helpful.

## CONSULTING WITH FUNDERS

The Funder Roundtable event took place in July 2019 with 10 people in attendance. Funders represented public and private organizations that fund or could potentially fund adult foundational learning programs. Funders were asked to engage in a discussion about the trends impacting foundational learning programs.

### *What we learned*

#### SPOTLIGHT ON FUNDERS

### WHAT TRENDS COULD IMPACT ADULT FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS?

1. Increase in Indigenous focused programming, and a slight increase in Indigenous led work
2. Enhanced awareness and desire to articulate impact through measurement, including flexible approaches (e.g., storytelling, oral applications)
3. Advanced understanding of the importance of data for planning and shaping future action
4. Rise in funder-driven capacity building events where funders act as collaboration catalysts
5. Emerging exploration of new ways of funding (e.g., impact investments)
6. Greater support for early investigation through incubation labs and pilot projects, and subsequent importance on scale and spread of the learning
7. Heightened appetite for collaboration and partnership between organizations within a sector, cross-sectoral, and multi-disciplinary
8. Emphasis on projects that bolster voice and agency, particularly in youth and refugee populations
9. Recognition that the funding process should help facilitate relationship building and not just generate outputs and outcomes

## OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE EXISTING SUCCESS

There are several actions Calgary Learns can take to broaden the reach and deepen the impact of its adult foundational learning programming. The following three opportunities are considered within the context of the 2014 Needs Assessment best practice themes.

The goals of the Alberta Living Literacy's Framework are also integrated to demonstrate the interconnection with the broader priorities of the province.

### ***1. Continue focusing on a learner-centered approach***

A learner-centered approach to program planning and service provision is essential in order to meet the specific needs of individual learners while also minimizing the unique barriers of different populations. For example, a learner-centered approach includes culturally safe programming for Indigenous learners who face the impact of intergenerational trauma due to Canada's history of colonial practices, including the residential school system. Refugees fleeing war and other forms of violence also require a learner-centered and trauma-informed approach to programming.

Ideally, Calgary Learns should consider a social justice lens to address not only foundational learning, but also the other issues that impact learners' ability to participate and succeed in Canadian society.

Employing an andragogy framework, adult foundational learning programs should be guided by key principles that consider learners' motivation, autonomy, and their orientation to learning. These are critical considerations in the planning of any programming that addresses adult foundational learning needs.

#### **LIVING LITERACY:**

- ✓ **GOAL 1:** Increase literacy
- ✓ **GOAL 2:** Build awareness

#### **CALGARY LEARNS 2014 NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOUR BEST PRACTICE THEMES**

1. Learner-centered programs
2. Competent well-trained staff
3. Holistic approaches
4. Establishing rapport with learners

#### **ADULTS NEED LEARNING THAT:**

- Is engaging and self-directed
- Builds on their rich store of past experience and knowledge
- Supports them in meeting their own goals
- Is relevant
- Is practical
- Ensures respect

***Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs  
Literacy Assistance Center***

**Andragogy** means the “the science and practice of adult learning” and is associated with learner-centered education.

## **2. Ensure content is continuously updated**

Calgary Learns should ensure that the programs it funds have rigorous and relevant content that is updated regularly, that said programs include meaningful lessons that are reflective of learners' everyday lives, and that learners can apply the key skills outside the classroom. Content should include clear learning goals and measurable outcomes to better illustrate the impact of the funds and enable comprehensive reporting to the funder.

### **LIVING LITERACY:**

✓ **GOAL 3:** *Enhance opportunities*

## **3. Nurture collaborative partnerships**

Lastly, Calgary Learns should continue to develop and enhance partnerships with and connections between community organizations in order to help adult foundational learners in Calgary access more programs, services and support. This is especially relevant given that programs funded by Calgary Learns likely have intersectoral needs (e.g., a refugee who also requires services for the deaf). This can be accomplished by bringing together relevant community members and representatives from other organizations that work together to continuously define and address community needs and to learn from and with each other.

“Literacy practitioners and decision-makers want to re-connect to share information and resources, to learn from each other, to collaborate on training and development, to conduct research to improve programming, and to move forward with a unified sense of purpose.”

***Adult Literacy in Canada.  
CUPE Literacy Program<sup>27</sup>***

### **LIVING LITERACY:**

✓ **GOAL 4:** *Facilitate partnerships*

# ESSENTIAL LEARNING NEEDS FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT

Based on our situational assessment, the following three priorities were identified as the essential adult foundational learning needs for future investment.

## **1. Promote digital skills**

While Calgary Learns has a demonstrated impact in funding programs that develop and deliver core foundational skills to Calgarians, increased emphasis is required on navigating various technologies (e.g., computer skills, smart phones, tablets). This is increasingly relevant given the demand on use of technology in the workplace. Furthermore, the complexity around digital literacy and foundational skills is compounded by our increasing digital world. For example, information and registration for many services occur online, which acts as a further barrier for foundational learners trying to access necessary programs and services.

**KEY ISSUES TARGETED:** ✓ *Aging population* ✓ *Changing workplace demands*  
✓ *Income disparity* ✓ *Marginalized populations*

## **2. Enhance investment in “higher order” essential skills**

While skills improvement in areas such as reading, writing and numeracy provide critical impact on an adult’s day-to-day life, it is important to also consider broader essential skills. These “higher order” skills include oral communication, thinking skills (decision-making, problem-solving, and critical-thinking), and working with others. These skills contribute to the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to better prepare for, get and keep a job, and adapt and succeed at work.<sup>28</sup>

**KEY ISSUES TARGETED:** ✓ *Changing workplace demands* ✓ *Education gap*  
✓ *Income disparity* ✓ *Marginalized populations*

## **3. Promote equity of services for marginalized populations**

Evidence is clear that lower socio-economic status and foundational learning are interconnected, often with compounding factors. Reflecting the current landscape in foundational learning needs, programs that target marginalized populations require continued priority attention. Careful consideration should be given to programs that support Indigenous peoples, refugees and newcomers given the shifts in Calgary’s demographic profile. Of evolving interest is programming that focuses on promoting foundational learning for people with learning difficulties to gain or improve foundational learning skills. Special attention must also be given to Calgary’s aging population, which is a population who may be less educated or may not have the necessary skills to navigate our increasing digital world.

**KEY ISSUES TARGETED:** ✓ *Aging population*  
✓ *Marginalized populations*

**WHERE POSSIBLE, CALGARY LEARNS SHOULD FOCUS ON  
FUNDING ADULT FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS THAT:**

- Are **welcoming to all persons**, no matter their previous experience with learning
- **Provide support** with transportation and childcare
- Screen for **learning difficulties** and provide classroom support for people with an identified learning disability
- Regularly **review and update course materials** and support for learners
- Are **culturally appropriate** for Indigenous peoples

## LEARNING TO BRING FORWARD

Based on what we learned in the situational assessment and community input phases, the following four cross-cutting areas emerged for consideration:

- 1. INVEST MORE IN REDUCING THE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS THAT IMPACT LEARNING.** This requires us to consider the ‘whole’ learner, knowledgeably addressing learning barriers such as learning difficulties and prior learning experiences and traumas that may impact learning ability.
- 2. INVEST IN SERVICE PROVIDERS.** Offer training and professional development to service providers so they are skilled and prepared to work with adults who have complex foundational learning needs.
- 3. INVEST IN DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE DATA COLLECTION, REPORTING AND SHARING.** Consider reporting measures that speak to learner success beyond measures that are limited to literacy and professional development skills. Create a Community of Practice with funded programs in order to share best practices and strategies to streamline data collection and enhance the ability to use that data to collectively identify gaps and trends.
- 4. INVEST IN INTERSECTORAL COLLABORATION.** Foundational learning gaps have impacts on people’s lives well beyond the classroom, and extends beyond reading and writing. To fully address adult foundational learning needs requires partnership, collaboration and commitment across all sectors. This is especially evident in cross-sectoral efforts to address poverty reduction.

## FINAL THOUGHTS: ADVANCING FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Foundational learning programs across Canada are challenged by both a lack of national leadership and limited funding. A long-term federal strategy is needed to support a range and continuum of learning and training opportunities for Canadians.<sup>23</sup>

Foundational learning should be part of “everything we do” as it connects to all relevant socio-political factors impacting Canadians, including socio-economic development, employment and health outcomes. Having the government recognize foundational learning as part of the continuum towards employability is considered a key mechanism for improving working-age population employment. Government employment strategies that integrated appropriate foundational learning skills in programming would help to address the employment skill gap in the economy.

Calgary Learns values the input that we have received throughout the needs assessment process. Consistent with the purpose of our organization, we will utilize the findings to make informed decisions to effectively support organizations and practitioners to provide valuable learning opportunities for adults in Calgary to build foundational skills.

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