

Transitions: FAQs About Community Networking

**A project of Enhancing Transitions for Adults to Further Education,
Employment and Training
and
The Manitoba Adult Literacy Strategy**

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FAQs About Community Networking will help answer questions about Community Networking and increase your awareness of the benefits of Community Networking for adult learners. What is it and how do I start a Community Network?

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Enhancing Transitions for Adults to Further Education, Employment and Training

In 2009, the federal government announced a two-year Strategic Training and Transition Fund to be administered in Manitoba by Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade through the existing Labour Market Agreement and Labour Market Development Agreement. Adult Learning and Literacy submitted a proposal and was approved for a two-year project that would support the Manitoba Adult Literacy Strategy.

The goals of the *Enhancing Transitions* project were to enhance adult learners’ transitions:

- from adult programming to meaningful, long-term employment
- to further education and training to support their lifelong career and personal goals.

Enhancing Transitions was administered by Adult Learning and Literacy in partnership with Workplace Education Manitoba. A collection of tools and resources was developed by a project team. The development and testing of transition related materials, structures, tools and lessons was based on research in four case study communities.

Community Networking - Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is meant by Community Networking?

- *Community Networking is the interaction of people, services, and agencies in order to add to the life of the community, and to the well-being of every individual. In the 21st century, Community Networking is significantly more commonplace, more deliberate and more computer-mediated to the point where being 'well-connected' is a source of strength economically and socially.*

2. Is Community Networking just about social agencies working with learners?

- *In most cases, that is not so. While it is true that agencies such as the Justice System, Employment Insurance, Income Assistance, or Workers' Compensation will refer clients to an adult education program. It is also true that when in a program, learners' needs for additional supports are often identified by the staff.*
- *In fact, a Community Network is made up of whoever can help an adult learner in need. From the local food bank to the Rotary or Kiwanis Clubs, from Employment Insurance to the local job finding club.*

3. What's the difference between a network and a partnership?

- *A network is established to refer adult learners in need to the appropriate agency or service for help. A partnership is an agreement between an educational program and a local business/industry to provide educational programming.*

4. How necessary is Community Networking?

- *The need for a community network program has been identified as a key component to enhancing transitions for adult learners to further education, employment, and training. A limited education limits income, which limits lifestyle, which impacts the need for security for self and family. For some adult learners, Community Networking is crucial in their lives.*

5. Why do adult learners need a community network?

- *The Adult Learning Centre (ALC) and the Adult Literacy Program (ALP) is the one place that sees the adult learner more than any other. You are really in the front lines for your adult learners.*
- *“It takes a village to raise a child” applies in more ways than one in the 21st century, especially when considering the disadvantaged in a community. There were reasons why adult learners did not complete their public school education, and the chances are that those reasons have been compounded by their life experiences since leaving school. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs really applies to adult education—people may be successful at the top of the pyramid (Esteem and Self-actualization) if the lower levels—physiological (food, for example) Safety (security of body and employment for example)—are not met first.*

6. How important is Community Networking to the adult learner?

- *For some learners, it is critical in order for them to be successful in their educational goals. For others, there may never be the need for Community Networking. It all depends on the needs of the adult learners.*

7. What are some of the reasons an adult learner would benefit from a Community Network?

- *There are 6 categories:*
 - i) Lack of basic needs, such as a job or affordable housing.*
 - ii) Socio-economic disadvantages, such as being a single parent, or living in poverty.*
 - iii) A lack of education, skills, and/or work experience, such as being a new immigrant to Canada, or returning to the workforce after being away for years.*
 - iv) A geographic isolation caused by a difficulty in accessing services, or a lack of reliable transportation.*
 - v) Mental health issues, such as depression, a lack of self-worth, or an illness requiring medication*
 - vi) Addictions issues, such as alcohol, illegal and prescriptive drugs*

8. Who should be responsible for initiating and maintaining Community Networking in an adult program?

- *Community Networking is indeed part of the job for the Education Director and/or Adult Literacy Coordinator. As the head of the program, the Education Director and/or Adult Literacy Coordinator has the responsibility to locate services for learners in need and make appropriate referrals.*

9. Where does the adult education teacher fit into Community Networking?

- *Right in the front lines, so to speak. You are usually the first contact with your learners. You are often the first person to discover a need, either by talking with a learner, or discovering the need shared by the learner in a written assignment.*
- *Because of that closeness, it is often your judgement that determines the next step, which is to take the issue to the program Education Director and/or Adult Literacy Coordinator.*

10. How much time does Community Networking need or take?

- *There is no easy answer to this question. For the classroom teacher, all that may be required is the referral of a learner to the administration. In other instances, a learner may require a time commitment from more than one professional in the building in the form of a meeting or more.*

11. What would Community Networking look like in an ALC or and ALP?

- *The first step is generally the hardest, as in all projects. There has to be one person, or a small group, with the interests of the learners at heart. From there, it is necessary to :*
 - Get the staff on board through professional development*
 - Identify local services and agencies*
 - Initiate and maintain contact*
 - Determine the type of reporting and recording in light of the Privacy Act of 2004*

- *While time for Community Networking is necessary, the odds are that you are already in an informal community network because of your job and your learners. All that is needed to make it a bit more recognizable as a network is some professional development to identify the local services and agencies that will be of help to the adult learner, and to create the internal referral process from teacher to administrator.*
- *At registration, most educational programs ask questions such as ‘Is there anything that will affect your attendance or successful completion of courses?’ Often, prompts such as day care, transportation, justice system demands, shift work are included in this section of the registration form. The early identification of potential barriers to success in the program is the first step in community networking.*
- *To handle the Canada Privacy Act of 2004, a waiver form discussed with the learner, likely at registration time, and then signed by the adult learner allows for a need-to-know process between the educational program and service agencies.*
- *Whoever spots the need on the part of the adult learner becomes the initiator of the referral. That could happen during the registration process, or it could be the classroom teacher.*
- *Referrals should be determined by the local educational program’s administration. The teacher may identify a need, and then complete the Centre’s referral form which is forwarded to the Education Director and/or Adult Literacy Coordinator for further action.*
- *Joining a “committee” depends on your definition of “committee”. Most community networking contacts in an educational program are in-house, among staff members. A “committee” is simply a name for meeting with someone about a topic: that meeting can be as small as you and one other staff or the entire staff setting aside part of a meeting to discuss needs of the learners in general.*
- *Sometimes, an assignment will suggest a need for a referral. As a teacher, first, use Post-it notes on the assignment, and ask for a one-on-one conference. If that meeting suggests the need for a referral, explain the process to the learner, and then complete the referral form to the administration. A follow-up with admin and the learner is recommended. Make sure the learner is aware of where the referral is.*
- *Learners have access to all services needed for success by the staff getting to know their learners, and their needs. Personally, you share information with other members of your staff. Make Community Networking a key part of your educational programming.*

12. What is the difference between formal and informal networking?

- *A formal network usually has established meeting dates, representatives of services and agencies, as well as rules of order and reporting. An informal network occurs when the need arises. Both networks require a willingness to work together in order to improve services through collaboration.*
- *Formal community networking is necessary when a network partnership is implemented, or when all educational agencies in an area meet to discuss disadvantaged learners.*
- *The necessity of a formal Community Network goes back to the “it takes a village to raise a child/adult learner” idea. Education is a key to community health and well-being. One educational program does not have all the answers for all adult learners, so the answer is YES. All levels of education in the community should be represented.*

13. Who benefits economically from Community Networking in an adult program?

- *For the adult learner who needs community networking, gets it, and is successful in reaching the next level in education, yes. For instance, a learner who has intervention by an agency in order to graduate with a Grade 12 Mature Student Diploma, the difference in income is significant both annually and over a career.*
- *Once the community gets on board with the idea of networking to help the adult learner, the benefits to the town/area can jump. Higher education usually results in either work, or an increase in income.*

14. How can I find out more about community networking in my adult program?

- *The recommendation of the Enhancing Transitions Project is that a professional development plan in Community Networking be established at the Centre level.*
- *As far as research on community networking in adult education, there is not as much as would be expected. However, research in Community Networking from the socio-economic and medical/addictions areas can be accessed and adapted to the education field.*

15. I live in a small community away from Winnipeg and I know just about everybody in town, so do I need a formal Community Network?

- *The recommendation of the Transitions Project team is that a formal committee only exist for the educational side of the network. This includes representatives from the Adult Literacy Program, the Adult Learning Centre, the local School Division, the local Work Education Program, any college or university satellite locations.*

16. How do I know which service agencies are involved in my town?

- *The first step will be during the registration process, when adult learners may indicate if they are being supported by a service agency. There is also word-of-mouth during a staff meeting, when a brainstorm session can produce names. The Chamber of Commerce will also be of assistance in identifying agencies. There are checklists and charts in the Appendices of this document that will help you identify your local service agencies.*

17. Is there a role for the local media in a Community Network?

- *The role of the local media can be huge in a Community Network. The local paper and radio station provide information about adult learning to a wide variety of people, businesses, and agencies. This publicity works in many ways: it highlights the role of the educational program in the community, promotes further education and training, and can provide the stimulus to other businesses and agencies to contact the Centre.*
- *Another role for local media is for the pipeline to get your messages out into the community. Write stories for the local paper, provide interviews for local reporters, use the radio to advertise upcoming events and registration dates. Create posters for the community. Create place cards for the local restaurants advertising your programs.*

18. What are the implications of “broken links” in networking—agencies not talking to each other?

- *This issue—the lack of communication among agencies—has been identified as one of the key barriers to successful collaboration among agencies. The adult learner in need is always the loser. The lack of communication leads to lack of support which leads to the adult learner dropping out of the program, and not achieving educational goals.*

19. What do I know about the community?

- *At a staff meeting, brainstorm what everyone knows, believes they know, about the community in which your educational program is located. Create an “assignment” for a week for each staff member: When you drive/walk around your community, look for things you have never seen before. Add them to the list.*

20. Is Community Networking a factor in dealing with diversity in a community?

- *Diversity is a term that goes beyond ethnicity. It also includes class and income differences. The reality of a vibrant community life is that there should always be growth. The component parts of the community—the political, business and the educational leaders, the service agencies—need networking to maintain and grow the vibrancy of where they live. It comes back to the disadvantaged in any community: strengthen that group, and everyone benefits.*