

LBS Digital Capacity Building Project

# Designing a Roadmap to Build Ontario's Capacity for Digital Learning

Highlights of consultations with LBS system stakeholders

March 2022

FINAL REPORT

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For:



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AlphaPlus

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# About

In recent years, digital learning and technology have undergone rapid transformation and growth. The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) asked Contact North and AlphaPlus to **consult stakeholders in Ontario’s LBS system about expanding the system’s capacity to deliver digital, online remote, and blended learning opportunities.**

Ultimately, this project is meant to identify how to enhance the LBS system’s capacity to serve more learners. This is aligned with a broader Ministry objective to develop a digital learning strategy that responds to the opportunities and challenges of the LBS system in Ontario.

## This report

This report presents **highlights** from consultations with stakeholders of Ontario’s literacy and basic skills (LBS) system. It is intended to support Contact North | Contact Nord and AlphaPlus in making recommendations for a digital and blended learning roadmap for LBS in Ontario.

## The consultations

Cathexis Consulting facilitated 16 online consultation sessions between January 2021 and March 2022 with the following stakeholders from across all LBS streams (Anglophone, Deaf, Francophone, Indigenous) and sectors (college, community, school board):

- 25 LBS program administrators (coordinators, managers, executive directors)
- 30 educators who deliver LBS programming
- 27 learners who have participated in LBS programming

Additional to these, 2 sessions were held with e-Channel providers and LBS Support Organizations: the first session in December 2021 with 17 attendees, the second session (co-facilitated with PurposeCo) in March 2022 with 19 attendees.

Recruitment was led by Contact North | Contact Nord and AlphaPlus. The project partners also invited written submission/feedback (not included in this report).

Further details about the consultations are provided in the appendix. Key takeaways for each stream are provided in Appendix A. Detailed findings for each stream were provided separately to Contact North and AlphaPlus.

## Limitations of these findings

Findings in this report are based on the viewpoints and perspectives of a limited number of LBS system stakeholders. The viewpoints expressed should not be taken to be representative of all LBS stakeholders.

In particular, we note that the viewpoints of educators, learners, and program administrators who are minimally involved in digital and online/remote learning are likely underrepresented. At the same time, the perspectives of e-Channel providers and learners with prior experience of digital and online/remote learning are likely overrepresented.

The sample of stakeholders we consulted could be thought of as the early adopters of digital and online/remote learning. We note that even among those we consulted, there was still a variety of system stakeholders and differences in experiences and views did emerge. Despite these difference, there was cohesion of views around several key themes.

# The current state of digital instruction in the LBS system

## 1. Most programs have adopted digital instruction

- Prior to the pandemic, most programs other than e-Channel offered in-person instruction exclusively, or blended learning (a combination of in-person and online; see [Appendix](#)).
- At the time we consulted LBS providers and learners, LBS programming was being delivered remotely because of COVID-19 restrictions. Many providers moved their instruction, materials, and interaction with students completely online when the pandemic began. Some programs in rural or corrections settings remain completely paper-based due to lack of access/equipment.
- Some providers have offered blended instruction when COVID restrictions eased.

## 2. Instructional approaches and tools are varied

- Online remote instruction is taking different forms depending on the program, instructor, and learners enrolled. Providers have turned in-person group classes into online classes by using video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Teams, and Meet. Keeping the real-time group component is important for many LBS programs. For learners who require more attention and support beyond group class time, instructors will hold 1:1 meetings.
- Learners in self-directed programs are doing more of their learning asynchronously, completing lessons on their own time. These learners appreciate digital lessons that offer real-time feedback (e.g., automated quiz scores) but sometimes struggle to get timely feedback from an instructor.
- Most providers outside of e-Channel and the college sector do not have access to a learning management system (LMS) or a repository of LBS resources. Educators without access to an LMS have pieced together multiple platforms, programs, apps, and digital resources to support their instruction. It has required a significant amount of work to tailor their lessons to online instruction and assemble the right platforms. Some organizations had internal supports (IT, educational platforms, curriculum developers; not funded through the LBS program).

## 3. The learner mix is changing

- Providers have noticed a change in the number and type of learners in their programs. More learners overall are accessing LBS programs, but the proportion of highly barriered individuals appears to be declining. These individuals face access barriers such as lack of internet, digital devices, and digital skills.
- Some providers are embracing this shift by learning how to meet the needs of new learners who hadn't previously accessed their programs. These new learners tend to be independent and have stronger digital literacy.
- Other providers are resisting this shift by seeking out their most barriered learners and providing them with extra support, such as supplying devices (ChromeBooks, mobile internet keys) and direct curbside instruction on how to use.

# Benefits of online/remote LBS programming

## Learners and LBS providers see the value of online/remote learning to enhance adult literacy development.

1. Learners are improving their digital literacy by developing digital skills. This is serving them well in life and employment contexts.
2. Learners appreciate the flexibility and convenience of online learning. It is easy to schedule their learning around other life commitments.
3. Transportation costs and travel time are lower for learners and educators. This is particularly advantageous in rural communities. This has allowed new learners and educators to take part in LBS programming.
4. Learning is no longer impacted by inclement weather (no snow day closures). Attendance, tardiness is less of an issue.
5. Educators are deepening their own digital skills and confidence to teach online.
6. Online instruction allows learners to learn in different ways (listening, watching, and reading), progress at their own pace, and receive real-time feedback.

*"I used to have a fear of technology, but now I know that the way they talk to each other is like a language. Once you understand that language, it's like having a pocket full of keys – you can open anything."*

-Learner, school board

*"I was always reluctant to deliver online because of the nature of their challenges. But for my student population, the pandemic has really forced us to improve our digital literacy and has also exponentially improved my students' skills in online literacy. It has really been a blessing."*

- Administrator, college provider

## Learners and providers shared examples of when online/remote learning works well:

1. Learners and educators have access to appropriate devices, equipment, software, and internet.
2. Educators are trained in how to use digital tools and programs to engage learners online.
3. Educators choose tools and activities that are appropriate to online delivery, that engage learners in a variety of ways (listening, watching, reading), and that provide opportunities for feedback (from the instructor or automated).
4. Learners receive basic digital and technical orientation and ongoing support and encouragement once independent online.
5. Educators and learners have access to a central learning platform for teaching/learning materials and for communication.
6. Deaf, Francophone, Indigenous, and newcomer learners have access to culturally appropriate content and instruction.
7. Instructors use digital communication tools and establish norms that encourage learners to reach out and establish connections.
8. Synchronous learning features small class sizes where interaction is encouraged to deepen connections and develop interpersonal communication skills.
9. Sessions for real-time instruction are kept briefer than in-person sessions, with opportunity for individual learning and 1:1 time with an instructor for support, referrals, and assessment.

# Challenges with online/remote LBS programming

## LBS providers and learners are struggling with the following.

- 1. Learners' lack of equipment/internet:** Inadequate equipment and slow/unreliable internet hugely impair learners' ability to participate and learn. This is especially problematic in remote and fly-in communities. It is also an issue for Deaf learners who need larger screens and fast internet for visual communication. Educators have taken on a support role in problem-solving technology issues for their learners, including finding the right equipment. It is challenging to make time for this in addition to providing their usual instruction and support to learners.
- 2. Programs' technical capacity:** Smaller community-based programs are struggling to deliver online instruction because they lack their own adequate internet/equipment. Most providers are very small organizations and lack in-house capacity to provide technical support.
- 3. Maintaining personal connections:** Interpersonal relationships are critical for providing learners with the full range of supports they may need. Meaningful interaction and community-building are often harder to do online, and some educators and learners are struggling with isolation.
- 4. Educator capacity:** Educators have varying degrees of comfort and skill with online/digital instruction and the various tools/platforms. The rate at which online tools and platforms change requires educators to engage in continuous learning and practice. Educators often do not have ready access to technical support or mentorship to help them grow their digital teaching skills.
- 5. Educational materials:** Learning materials need to be adapted or designed specifically for digital, and the time required for this has been a strain on educators. Educators sometimes create wholly new materials out of necessity, such as culturally relevant content for Deaf, Indigenous, Francophone, and newcomer learners.
- 6. Affordability:** There are fees associated with some LBS courses in the college system. Learners feel the cost for online courses should be lower than for in-person learning because they get less 1:1 time with instructors.
- 7. Measuring performance:** Performance measures for learners and for providers do not reflect the real circumstances of blended and fully online/remote learning. Reporting is a burden that detracts from providers' capacity to support learners.

*"A big change has been the resources. We had all kinds of face-to-face resources. Then suddenly, without warning, we were scrambling to look for online resources... Some of my materials are not the quality that I had in the textbook."*

- Educator, College provider (Anglophone stream)

*"We're not just teaching LBS skills; we've had to teach these students digital skills. We're being asked to do double duty right now. I'm not a computer teacher, but I'm a computer teacher now."*

- Educator, Community provider (Anglophone stream)

*"We have newcomers to Canada, who may not have had any formal education or access to any technology – so that takes us more time."*

-College sector LBS provider (Deaf stream)

*"Performance measures for service providers must be appropriate for F2F, hybrid, blended, fully online; or they need to be differentiated for various modes of delivery. Current performance measures aren't well-suited to any mode of delivery - duplicating existing ones for digital delivery is not sound."*

-e-Channel provider



## Vision for the future: **Blended LBS programming that advances digital literacy for all**

The pandemic revealed that digital literacy is an inseparable and indistinguishable part of adult literacy.

LBS programs can and are delivering instruction and support for learners to develop these essential skills. Blended and fully online digital learning experiences have now become part of adult literacy programming.

While most LBS providers intend to resume some in-person instruction and support when it is safe to do so, all the providers we consulted intend to combine this with remote/online instruction and support.

**The vision for the future is a LBS system where learners can access digital learning experiences that are appropriate to their needs and are delivered through a blend of in-person (on-site) and remote/online instruction and support.**

Support is needed at the program and system level to make this vision sustainable.

# Program-level supports to enable this vision

Over the past two years, LBS providers have made great strides with digital instruction. But there remains a “digital divide” between those with access to equipment and resources for digital learning, as well as the skills to be able to teach and learn digitally. Resources will be needed to help develop capacity within the system and ensure equitable access for learners across Ontario. Specifically, the following are needed at the program level:

- 1 Equipment and internet for learners:** All learners need access to reliable internet, suitable equipment (PCs that can run multiple programs simultaneously) and professional software (e.g., Microsoft Office). Learners should be able to keep the equipment after they leave the program.
- 2 Professional development for educators:** Paid professional development, peer-to-peer support and mentorship is needed to ensure educators:
  - Have basic digital skills
  - Know how to engage learners and teach online using effective practices
  - Are familiar with technology and learning materials that are relevant to their teaching (learning management systems and resources)
  - Can sustain their own mental health and well-being
- 3 Equipment, space and software for programs:** Programs also need adequate space, equipment and internet for online and blended instruction.
- 4 Technical support for learners and educators:** If learners don't have basic digital skills, they need in-person orientation to the tools (e.g., how to use a laptop, connect to internet, use videoconferencing, use learning platform, online etiquette). Both learners and educators need ongoing technical support, including real-time support during group sessions.
- 5 Relationship-building:** Programs should be designed to include interaction and relationship building (e.g., small group discussions, peer support, office hours for one-to-one support, responding quickly when learners ask for help).
- 6 Educational materials:** Educators need access to educational content, tools and materials that are relevant to their teaching, relevant to learners' goals, well-suited for online delivery, and culturally appropriate. Programs should be using a central learning platform for all materials and communications.

# System-level supports to enable this vision

The following are needed at the system level to develop the capacity of LBS providers to deliver online/digital learning.

- 1 A shared vision, with clear roles and coordination:** All stakeholders (LBS providers, support organizations, ETCs and the Ministry) will need to commit to a shared vision of blended learning for Ontario. The vision should articulate the respective roles of e-Channel providers, other LBS providers, and support organizations and how they will work together to deliver instruction, support learners, design programs/courses, develop and curate content.
- 2 Funding for capacity building:** Investment is needed for professional development and infrastructure that will address key gaps (identified on the previous page).
- 3 A funding model designed for blended learning** and that supports:
  - Continuously updated technology and software for providers, including a learning platform
  - Equipment, software and internet for learners who need them
  - Access to real-time technical support for learners and educators
  - Professional development and mentorship for educators (staff time and training fees)
  - Program delivery according to learner needs (delivery is more resource-intensive for Deaf learners, newcomers, and learners with high needs, such as poverty or emerging literacy)
  - Sharing of learners attending multiple programs
- 4 Performance measures designed for blended learning:** The performance measures for outcomes and learner trajectories (e.g., milestone assessments) need to be appropriate for face-to-face, blended and fully online/remote learning.
- 5 Online curriculum content and materials:** Relevant, culturally-appropriate materials suitable for online delivery are needed, particularly for Deaf, Indigenous, Francophone, and newcomer learners. Educators need cost-effective ways to share and access these materials.
- 6 One registration:** There needs to be one streamlined registration process for blended learners (who attend both in-person and online courses). It needs to be simplified: for example, not requiring a Social Insurance Number (which causes security issues and is a barrier to participation, especially for Indigenous learners).
- 7 Ongoing consultation:** Providers want to contribute to future decisions about online and blended learning so that the unique needs of diverse communities (rural and urban, Indigenous, Deaf, Francophone, newcomer) are taken into account.

# Appendix A

Summary of key takeaways by stream

## Anglophone stream

# Key takeaways

### Current state

- Prior to the pandemic, most programs other than e-Channel offered in-person instruction exclusively. In January 2022, most programming was being delivered remotely. Some rural programs and all corrections programs are doing remote instruction using paper-based materials, due to lack of access and equipment.
- There is no one standard learning platform; Moodle, Adobe Connect, Zoom, Blackboard are all used. Educators piece together different online tools to teach their courses.
- Instruction can be synchronous or asynchronous depending on the program and learner needs. There is more synchronous instruction for learners with emerging literacy levels; asynchronous is common in self-directed programs. Zoom, Teams, Adobe Connect, and Meet are used for synchronous learning and real-time meetings.
- Some learners have disappeared from LBS programs: those without internet access, equipment, digital skills or interest in remote learning. Some programs have mitigated this by providing extra support to learners.
- Some programs have gained new learners because online learning is more convenient for them.

### Key challenges

- Smaller community-based programs are struggling to deliver online instruction because they lack adequate internet/equipment, technical skill and support. In-person interaction is also critical for building relationships with learners and providing wraparound supports, which are core to their mandates.
- Online instruction requires different approaches and materials than in-person. Educators have varying degrees of comfort and skill with online/digital instruction. Many have had to learn new teaching tools and approaches and/or develop new materials that are suitable for online instruction.
- Inadequate equipment and slow/unreliable internet hugely impairs learners' ability to participate and learn. Educators are supporting learners with technology issues in addition to their usual instruction.
- There is a perception that fees are required in the college LBS system, but its LBS courses are provided at no cost. Learners with adequate assessment results who apply to college credit courses must pay tuition for these unless they apply in a tuition-free intake.

### What is working well

- Online learning has been beneficial in many ways. Learners' and educators' digital literacy skills and confidence have improved. Learners appreciate the flexibility and convenience of online learning and that their transportation costs are lower. Online instruction also allows learners to learn in different ways (listening, watching, and reading), progress at their own pace, and receive real-time feedback.
- Effective practices include:
  - Using a central learning platform for all materials and communications.
  - Using materials and approaches that are well-suited to online delivery.
  - Approachable, easy to reach, and responsive instructors.
  - Small groups in online classes.
  - Shorter instruction sessions with separate office hours for 1:1 support, referrals, and assessment.
  - Basic digital and technical orientation for learners at the outset (in-person, 1:1).
  - Ongoing support and encouragement once online.
- Some organizations had internal supports (IT, educational platforms, curriculum developers) that have been helpful. These supports are not funded through the LBS program and are not available to most providers.

## Anglophone stream

### Key takeaways (cont.)

#### What is the desired vision for the future?

- In-person instruction will remain a key feature of non-e-Channel programs.
- Providers that wish to offer blended options have the resources to do so in ways that allow for direct support and instruction, even when remote.
- As their capacity and demand for it expands, some providers will include remote-only online courses among their offerings.
- The “digital divide” between those with access to technology and reliable internet, and those without, will be addressed to meet the access needs of LBS providers and their learners.

#### What is needed right now?

- Once in-person learning is deemed safe, allow programs to decide whether or not they want to continue providing instruction online.
- Ensure learners have access to equipment/internet that is suitable for online learning (PCs that can run multiple programs simultaneously and that learners can keep after they leave the program).
- Provide training and mentorship to educators to develop their own digital skills and digital instructional skills in order to better support their learners.
- Ensure organizations have adequate space, equipment and internet for online and blended instruction. Ensure learners and teachers have access to real-time technical support.
- Provide initial supports (in-person) to help learners get started: How to use a laptop, connect to internet, use videoconferencing, use learning platform, online etiquette.
- Attend to learners’ needs for social & community connection.
- Increase supports so learners can fully engage in learning: ongoing technical support, tutoring, wraparound services.

#### What is needed longer term?

- Review the funding model to include budget lines for technology, technical support, and educator professional development.
- Develop and share online curriculum content and materials (prioritizing courses that had not previously been online and have potential for continued online delivery).
- Streamline registration for multiple programs.
- Access to reliable learning management systems for community and school board LBS providers (college providers have access to these).
- Promote online/blended programs so more potential learners are aware of them.
- Clarify catchment areas. Define who serves the students if they learn online but are also supported by a local agency.
- Adjust performance measures for outcomes and learner trajectories appropriate for online/remote learning.

## Francophone stream

# Key takeaways

### Current state

- Prior to the pandemic, about half of the providers offered in-person instruction exclusively, and half offered blended learning on occasion. In February 2022, most providers were offering both online and face-to-face programs, including hybrid models where learners could attend either in-person or by videoconference. One provider in a rural location is offering “curbside” learning (one-on-one instruction outdoors in front of the learner’s residence). Some LBS programs were cancelled outright due to the pandemic (e.g., programs that required educators to travel to remote communities to teach).
- Providers use Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, Messenger, and Facebook. They are offering both synchronous and asynchronous programming. Most have provided digital literacy training (including how to use the technology).
- Learners access online instruction from their own homes or through a local organization or friend’s house for more reliable internet access and a quieter learning environment. Some providers have given learners tablets, mobile internet sticks or cell phones with monthly data packages.

### Key challenges

- Challenges included getting educational content online, developing educators’ technical competencies, and teaching learners with emergent digital literacy skills.

### What is working well

- Online learning has been beneficial in many ways. Learners’ digital literacy skills have improved. Learners and educators both appreciate the flexibility and convenience of online learning, and enrolment has gone up.
- Some providers have found efficiencies in online programming: it is now possible to recruit from of a larger pool of educators, and it is easy to quickly change pedagogical materials when they are sourced and shared online.
- It is helpful when educators have strong technical skills, administrators are supportive of online instruction, and the organization has up-to-date equipment.
- Effective practices included:
  - Synchronous online classes (less social isolation)
  - Digital skills training for educators and management
  - Appropriate computer equipment and software.
  - Consultation with learners about their needs.
  - Encouraging and responsive instructors.
  - Basic digital and technical orientation for learners at the outset.
  - Partnerships with local organizations to reach potential learners
  - Inclusion of educators in developing/revising milestone assessment tasks.

## Key takeaways (cont.)

### What is the desired vision for the future?

- Most (but not all) learners were motivated and willing to continue learning online.
- Most providers intend to continue offering both online and in-person programs.

### What is needed right now?

- Fund organizations to keep their equipment and software up-to-date, and provide guidance about which upgrades are most important.
- Provide learners with access to computers that can run multiple programs, professional software (e.g., Microsoft Office) and reliable internet.
- Provide learning materials (e.g., textbooks, printed materials, downloadable documents) that learners can refer to after course completion.

### What is needed longer term?

- Revise the online registration process to facilitate completion by learners with emergent digital literacy.
- Revise the milestone assessment tasks so that they are applicable to online learning.
- Translate English learning resources into French in a timely manner.
- Introduce a reliable pedagogical platform that can be shared across organizations, modified to meet the needs of each course, and personalized to each learner's work. Preferred platforms include those used in secondary schools, D2L for universities, Brightspace, or the platform used by the e-Chanel F@D.
- Consult francophone providers when making provincial decisions about online learning and take into account the unique needs of diverse francophone communities, rural and urban.
- Promote collaboration among providers, including between French-speaking and English-speaking organizations.

## Deaf stream

# Key takeaways

### Current state

- The LBS Deaf stream is fairly small (9 organizations and about 400 learners [2018-19]).
- American Sign Language (ASL) is the main language of instruction, so learners and instructors must be able to see one another in real time.
- In January 2022, programming was being delivered remotely using a combination of couriered materials, online programming (workshops, e-Channel/Deaf Learn Now), and online classes.

### Key challenges

- Fully-remote instruction is challenging for Deaf learners who rely on visual communication. Inadequate equipment and slow/unreliable internet hugely impairs their ability to participate and learn.
- Remote instruction is also challenging for instructors. They find themselves supporting learners with technology issues in addition to their usual instruction.
- Online learning is also isolating: learners and providers miss the opportunities for social interaction that they experienced with in-person learning.

### What is working well

- Learners are developing digital skills more quickly and are more comfortable online.
- Being able to learn at home is convenient for many, especially during winter.
- Small class sizes (5-6 learners) allow everyone to be seen when they are signing.
- Deaf Learn Now (DLN) has developed online educational content specifically for Deaf learners and that also can be accessed through other programs.

### What is the desired vision for the future?

- Blended learning provides an ideal balance. The in-person elements make for easier communication and provide more opportunity for interaction, learning, and support.
- Much more educational content still needs to be developed for Deaf learners. This takes a lot of time. Providers want more sharing of resources and materials between programs.
- Providers hope to be able to deliver more targeted programming to learners at specific levels or with specific interests, since online programming allows for broader reach.

### What is needed right now?

- Return to blended learning when possible.
- Ensure learners have access to equipment/ internet sufficient for real-time video communication.
- Increase supports so learners can fully engage in learning: technical support, tutoring, ASL instruction, wraparound services.
- Provide training to educators to develop their own digital skills and digital instructional skills in order to better support their learners.

### What is needed longer term?

- Review the funding model with an eye to:
  - Removing geographic restrictions for online programming (for non-e-Channel).
  - Funding based on need rather than student numbers (program development and delivery is considerably more resource-intensive for Deaf learners).
  - Including budget lines for technology and professional development.
- Continue to develop high-quality, culturally-appropriate, accessible and inclusive online learning resources for Deaf learners in ASL.
- Facilitate more collaboration and sharing of resources and materials amongst program providers (e.g., through an online platform or hub).

# Indigenous stream

## Key takeaways

### Current state

- In February 2022, programming was being delivered remotely. Good Learning Anywhere (e-Channel) providers have been using Edmentum, Moodle, or SpellZone to deliver prebuilt courses or custom-built content, including culturally appropriate Indigenous content. Programs use Adobe Connect or Zoom for synchronous instruction.
- Good Learning Anywhere has partnered with other organizations to engage learners.

### Key challenges

- Online learning is isolating. Some learners need interaction with other people for both engagement and success.
- Many communities have poor internet connection, especially remote, fly-in communities.
- Many staff and learners needed training in the use of technology.

### What is working well

- Online learning has been beneficial in many ways. Learners' digital literacy skills have improved. Learners appreciate the flexibility of online learning, and it allows learners to learn in different ways (videos, tactile activities, peer to peer connections). Enrolment has gone up.
- Effective practices included:
  - Incorporating Indigenous cultural content into the learning experience has increased engagement among Indigenous learners.
  - Providing learners with laptops and internet connections.
  - Providing support to Indigenous learners when registering, troubleshooting technical issues, and assessments.
  - Peer-to-peer mentors have provided remote learning support and helped learners combat isolation and maintain social connection during COVID.
  - Meeting with Indigenous learners in person to show how the program can support them remotely in their communities.

### What is the desired vision for the future?

- Blended learning is conducive to a positive learning experience.

### What is needed right now?

- Return to blended learning when possible. Also incorporate more opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction.
- Ensure learners have access to equipment/ internet (stipends/budget).
- Reduce the amount of personal information Indigenous people must share to register for the program.
- Work with traditional knowledge keepers, elders, language holders to enhance learning content for Indigenous learners. Also engage harder-to-reach communities.
- Offer professional development and supports to providers on how to engage participants in the digital space, as well as mental health and self-care.

### What is needed longer term?

- Adapt assessment tools, goals and goal paths to reflect needs of Indigenous learners.
- Review the funding model with an eye to:
  - Widening geographic boundaries
  - Ensuring fair compensation for traditional knowledge holders and Elders (e.g., pay grid).

## e-Channel and support organizations

### Key takeaways

#### Addressing technology gaps

##### What is happening

- Funding for technology is piecemeal and inconsistent; some providers have individually negotiated funding
- Some providers have responded by:
  - Loaning devices, internet hubs/keys
  - Purchasing low-cost internet for learners (where available)
  - Advocating to policymakers for better technology infrastructure
- Some are providing initial orientation to online learning for all learners:
  - 8 Colleges collaborated to create a common orientation that they can customize
  - GLA supports on-site practitioners to help learners get online

##### What they would like

- Subsidized internet offered across Ontario
- Sufficient Ministry funding so learners have appropriate equipment (inappropriate: phone/tablet/ChromeBook)
- Foundational digital literacy courses, F2F support, and activities that consolidate digital skill building
- Policies and procedures to support learners online (e.g., safety considerations for online small group work)
- More time for 1:1 work with learners and for dealing with challenges created by slow internet and poor equipment

#### Support for educators

##### What is happening

- Lots of PD opportunities: Pop Up PD webinars, COFA info sessions, AlphaPlus webinars and coaching, Contact North digital design session, PD offered by support organizations, semi-annual PD sessions for e-Channel providers, myriad online resources
  - Colleges, school boards and larger community organizations provide more tech support, training and instructional design support than smaller organizations
  - More flexible timetables (due to Covid) allows time for PD
  - Orientation for instructors on digital instruction and the LBS system
- Community of Practice convened in Toronto with support of volunteer facilitator
- Weekly learner activity reports to educators on how students are progressing

##### What they would like

- Multi-year funding so organizations can train up providers for long-term
- Training in software, digital delivery skills
- Dedicated PD time (funding and flexible schedules)
- Manageable caseloads that recognize time required for remote delivery
- Face-to-face support for practitioners on-site at their programs, including support to help them set up new technology
- Sector and/or stream-based training, with opportunities to learn with providers from other similar programs

## e-Channel and support organizations

### Key takeaways

#### Curriculum & content

##### What is happening

- Some are using open-sourced resources like [Big Blue Button](#)
- A lot of resources already exist, but there is no one central place to access them. Support organizations are finding, creating and sharing useful resources
  - [LBS resources forum](#): a repository of curriculum & teaching materials
  - AlphaPlus is assembling open-source educational materials
  - COFA is adapting and translating materials
- Noteworthy practices:
  - Drop-in sharing circles (based on Indigenous sharing circle)
  - Online digital design session provided to instructors arranged by Contact North
  - Regular community of practice sessions for practitioners to share resources, networking and idea exchange and brainstorming
  - Lunch 'n learns for both practitioners and learners
  - LLO curated weekly themed learning activities for ~8 weeks
  - Support organizations and community, college LBS programs formed partnerships to develop digital literacy curriculum and resources for job seekers

##### What they would like

- Time for curriculum / resource development
- Curated central repository for online content and resources
- Modify existing curriculum materials for blended and online delivery
- Support for ongoing maintenance of online materials (to keep relevant and compatible with new releases of software)

#### Opportunities to strengthen collaboration

##### What is happening

- Still some sense of competition that undermines collaboration
- There is more administrative work for blended learners, with some duplication (e.g., follow-up)
- Collaboration between F2F and e-Channel:
  - Allowing F2F practitioners to audit e-Channel courses to help tailor learning plan to learner needs
  - e-Channel open houses for learners and educators to learn about course offerings
  - F2F and e-Channel practitioners meeting every 2 weeks (COFA)

##### What they would like

- Streamline Ministry requirements/expectations:
  - Clarify what the Ministry will support/fund in terms of F2F programs delivering remote or blended learning. Preference for fewer restrictions/greater flexibility
  - Streamline administrative requirements for sharing learners across e-Channel and F2F programs
  - Improve coordination across LBS sector, including LBS specific program referral staff at employment centres, OW and ODSP
  - Make performance management measures for service providers appropriate for F2F, hybrid, blended, and fully online; or differentiate them for various modes of delivery
  - Better coordination of program referrals from EO providers
- More opportunities for service providers and/or support orgs to come together
- Infrastructure to support bulk-buying (including management to support purchasing, distribution)

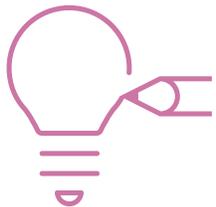
# Appendix B

Approach and methodology

# Overall approach

## Phase 1:

What are we creating?



### *Sketch the vision*

December 2021

Consultation with e-Channel and support organizations

1 session, ~20 participants

## Phase 2:

How do we make it happen?



### *Consult with stakeholders*

January-February 2022

Focus groups with:

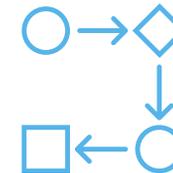
- Learners, educators, programs, administrators
- All streams
- All sectors

16 focus groups

2-9 participants each

## Phase 3:

What does the route look like?



### *Refine the roadmap*

March 2022

Consultation with e-Channel and support organizations

1 session, ~20 participants

# Summary of initial consultation with e-Channel & support organizations

A meeting was held December 8, 2021 with representatives from e-Channel providers and LBS Support Organizations. This meeting was the first step in the consultation process and helped to design the focus groups with other stakeholders.

Participants contemplated three questions:

- What do **learners** need to make the most of digital/blended learning?
- What do **educators** need to make digital/blended learning work for learners?
- What do **programs** need to make digital/blended learning work for learners?

Participants emphasized that there are significant differences between digital program delivery and program delivery that is largely face-to-face (F2F). Expanding digital learning opportunities is not merely a matter of putting resources online. To provide meaningful and quality programming that supports the needs and goals of learners, significant investment in infrastructure, resources, and capacity is needed.



## Learners need:

- Supports to make meaningful digital learning happen, including technical support and well-trained educators.
- Curriculum and content that is learner-centred, culturally relevant and tailored to meet their individual needs and lived experience.
- Tools and technology that are reliable, accessible and affordable.
- Processes that are seamless and information that is accessible throughout the learner journey.



## Educators need:

- Resources to deliver quality online learning which is not less expensive than face-to-face delivery.
- Time and supports for capacity building and professional development and training on best practices in high-quality online learning.
- Enhancements to the system to develop streamlined administrative processes that provide more time for teaching than reporting.



## Programs need:

- Resources to develop long term planning and investments in program infrastructure to deliver quality programming sustainably.
- Partnerships and stronger connections between e-Channel and in person providers and educators.
- Leadership and autonomy to plan for the future.
- Enhancements to the system to develop a proper integrated training delivery system.

## Topics of focus groups

Participants in focus groups with LBS providers and learners were asked to comment on these topics:

Topic	 <b>LBS providers</b> (administrators, executive directors, educators, trainers, coordinators, etc.)	 <b>LBS learners</b>
Current relationship and experience with online/digital/remote LBS delivery	●	
Experience with online/digital/remote learning (generally)		●
Impacts of COVID-19 on LBS program delivery	●	
What is working well in digital/online learning (general impressions)	●	●
Suggestions to make digital/online learning better	●	●
Advice to government for next steps to expand online/remote capacity	●	
Advice to program administrators / educators to make online/remote learning better	●	●
Advice to learners considering online learning		●

## Who participated in the consultations

16 small online focus groups were held with participants from the following stakeholder groups and sectors:

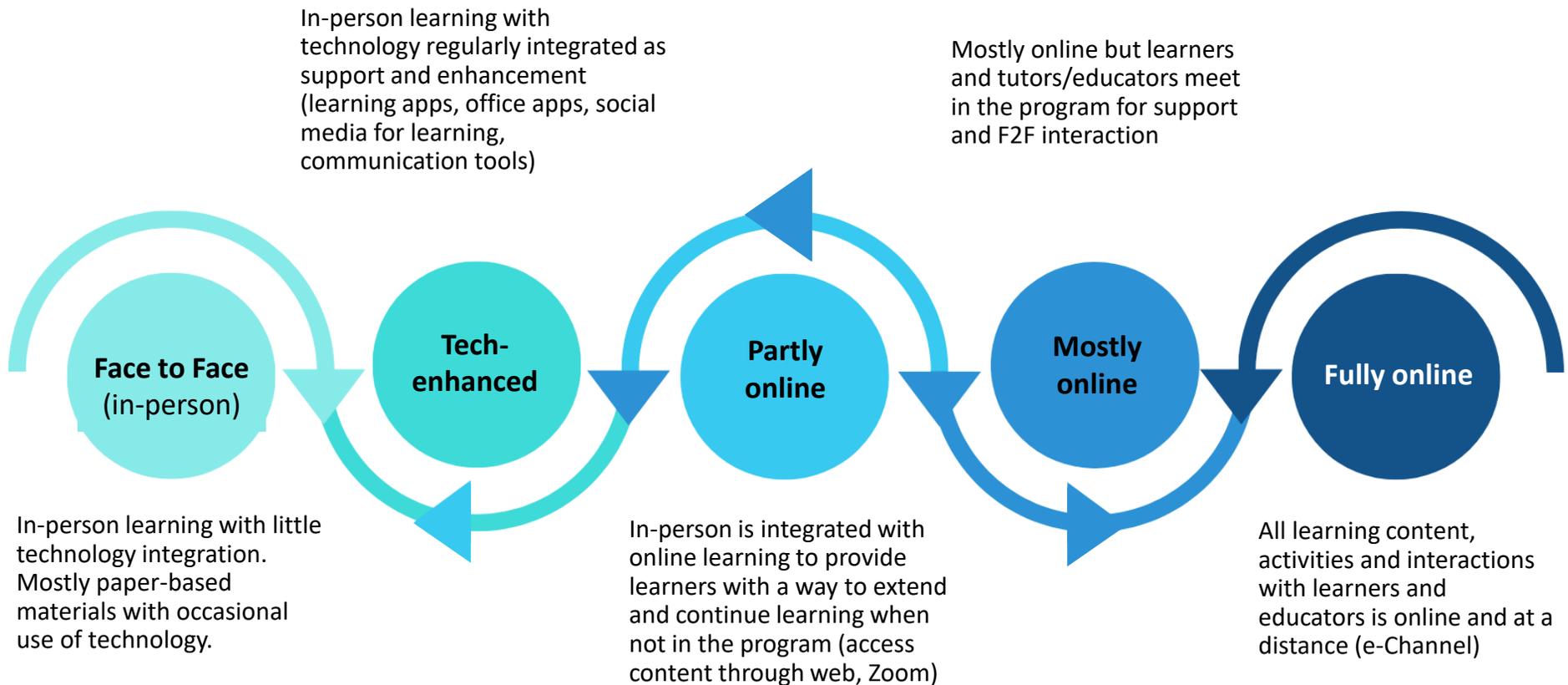
Stakeholder group	Total # of participants	Sector			Stream				Example Job titles
		College	Community	School Board	Anglophone	Deaf	Francophone	Indigenous	
Administrators & Executive Directors	25	11	10	4	16	7	2	-	Administrator, Chair, Coordinator, Director, Executive Director, Manager, Officer
Educators	30	9	17	4	17	2	5	6	Coordinator, Online Educator, Instructor, Lecturer, Practitioner, Professor
Learners	27	10	14	3	16	6	4	1	N/A
Total	99	30	41	11	49	15	11	7	

Representatives from 14 organizations participated in the two consultations with e-Channel and Support Organizations:

1. ACE Distance/Online, College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC)
2. AlphaPlus
3. Centre franco Ontarien de ressources en alphabétisation (Centre FORA)
4. Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes (COFA)
5. Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO)
6. Contact North | Contact Nord (Contact North)
7. Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA)
8. Deaf Learn Now
9. Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI)
10. Good Learning Anywhere (GLA)
11. Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO)
12. Le Programme de formation à distance (F@D)
13. The LearningHUB
14. Ontario Native Literacy Coalition

# Digital & blended learning

Blended teaching and learning approaches make use of a combination of face-to-face/in-person and digital learning experiences. At one end of the spectrum of blended learning options is LBS programs that are using digital technology minimally, with little integration that is obvious to learners. At the other end of the spectrum are programs that are fully digital and online: learners can participate in these programs completely remotely, without the need for on-site, face-to-face instruction (i.e., e-Channel). In between these two poles is a great variety of programming and approaches.



# Appendix C

Acronyms and key terms

# Acronyms and key terms

Acronym	Stands for	Context and more information
ACE Distance	Academic and Career Entrance/Access Carrières Études Distance	The ACE Program certificate is accepted as equivalent to an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), or Grade 12, by Ontario's community colleges and the Apprenticeship Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to enter a community college or be registered as an apprentice in Ontario. The ACE Program certificate is also recognized as equivalent to a grade 12 for the purposes of job application by a growing number of employers. ACE programming is available at all 24 community colleges and online.
ASL	American Sign Language	American Sign Language (ASL) is a complete, complex language that employs signs made with the hands and other movements, including facial expressions and postures of the body. ASL is a language completely separate from English. It contains all the fundamental features a language needs to function on its own. It has its own rules for grammar, punctuation, and sentence order.
Centre FORA	Centre franco-ontarien des ressources en alphabétisation	A support organization that publishes literacy resources in French.
CESBA	Continuing Education School Board Administrators	CESBA represents and supports the broad spectrum of adult and continuing education offered by public, Catholic, and francophone school boards in Ontario
CLO	Community Literacy of Ontario	CLO is a provincial literacy support organization with 100 member agencies. It exists to support, promote, and provide a united voice for anglophone community-based literacy programs in Ontario.
COFA	Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes	One of four provincial stream organizations funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. COFA promotes adult literacy for francophones in Ontario and provides coordination to its member agencies that include community-based, school board, and college-based adult literacy programs in Ontario.
CSC or CSCAU	College Sector Committee OR College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading	The CSC leads and supports the Ontario community college system to create provincial resources, procedures, and standards related to the development and delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of adult learners.
DLI	Deaf Literacy Initiative	One of four provincial stream organizations funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. DLI provides accessible and culturally relevant training, research, networking, and resources to the Deaf and Deaf-Blind literacy community in Ontario.
e-Channel	e-Channel	e-Channel is the online Literacy and Basic Skills program.
EO	Employment Ontario	A suite of employment-focused programs funded by the Government of Ontario and delivered by community partners.
EOIS-CaMS (or just CaMS)	Employment Ontario Information System-Case Management System	A web-based, real-time software solution that supports the administration and management of clients participating in Employment Ontario programs and services.
ESL	English as a Second Language	The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration provides English and French language training to adult immigrants whose first language is neither English nor French. For more information about the range of available courses, visit <a href="http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/adultlanguagetraining">www.ontarioimmigration.ca/adultlanguagetraining</a>

## Acronyms and key terms (cont.)

Acronym/Term	Stands for	Context and more information
F@D	Formation à distance aka, Le service de formation à distance pour adultes de l'Ontario	The e-Channel provider for the Francophone cultural stream.
FSL	French as a Second Language	The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration provides English and French language training to adult immigrants whose first language is neither English nor French. For more information about the range of available courses, visit <a href="http://www.ontarioimmigration.ca/adultlanguagetraining">www.ontarioimmigration.ca/adultlanguagetraining</a>
GLA	Good Learning Anywhere	The e-Channel provider for the Indigenous cultural stream.
In-person	Learning/instruction happening in the same physical space	In contrast to online learning. Also called face-to-face (F2F).
LNO	Learning Networks of Ontario	An ad hoc, unfunded umbrella organization for all 16 regional networks of LBS providers.
LBS	Literacy and Basic Skills	The Ontario LBS Program is funded by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and provides literacy, numeracy, and basic skills (e.g. digital technology, interpersonal skills, problem solving, critical thinking) services to help people achieve their education, training, and employment goals, as well as enjoy increased independence.
MLTSD	Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development	The Ontario ministry under which the LBS program is funded.
MTCU	Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities	Formerly the name of the ministry under which the LBS program was funded. Now, LBS falls under MLTSD.
OALCF	Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework	The framework refers to all the features of delivering a competency-based program, including competencies, assessment, learner transitions to work, further education and training, or independence, and learning materials
ODSP	Ontario Disability Support Program	Funder of support interventions to eligible clients.
ONLC	Ontario Native Literacy Coalition	One of four provincial stream organizations, the ONLC is funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to support Native literacy service providers. The ONLC provides information, support, and training to Native literacy practitioners in Ontario, and enhances the awareness of literacy issues.
PMF	Performance Management Framework	The PMF for the LBS program is intended to ensure the public accountability of the LBS program, drive quality service, ensure that services are available to all learners who need them, and incentivize service providers to help learners progress and achieve their goals (or refer out to other services). Issues with the PMF were discussed at length in the 2016 evaluation of the LBS program.