



**THE EASTERN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP  
FOR ADULT EDUCATION**  
(EASTERN RP/AE)

# A Framework for Optimizing Adult and Continuing Education

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## PART ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This Framework for Optimizing Adult and Continuing Education is based on the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education's (ERP/AE) collective work of implementing the Adult Education Strategy (AES) commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of the Education from 2016 to 2019. The three overarching objectives of the AES were as follows:

- Improve adult learner outcomes by promoting system innovation and accessibility through collaboration/ coordination and partnerships among school boards at the regional level.
- Better support the provision of Adult and Continuing Education (A & CE) programs and services that are flexible and responsive to learner needs.
- Improve the transitions for learners between adult credit programs and programs funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) and Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI).

The AES intended to provide an opportunity to explore innovative ways to re-engage adult learners and build district school board capacity to better assist learners in achieving their goals. The four key AES mandates were:

- 1) Regionally coordinated access to flexible delivery of A & CE programs and/or services (e.g., e-learning or hybrid delivery programs) that best meet adult learner needs.
- 2) Access to coordinated information, intake, assessment, and referrals at school boards to ensure learners are directed to the program or service that best meets their needs.
- 3) Regionally coordinated access to consistent Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students working towards a high school diploma.
- 4) Regional guidance, career counselling and pathway planning for mature students working towards a high school diploma or seeking prerequisites for post-secondary education.

As one of the seven regions participating in the AES, the role of the ERPAE was to provide leadership to promote a regional and more collaborative approach among member school boards in the provision of Ontario Ministry of Education adult education programs and services, that:

- fostered a shared responsibility for adult learning
- improved accountability for learner outcomes
- identified and addressed gaps and opportunities
- ensured availability of a wide range of accessible program delivery options and supports that addressed the needs of adult learners.

The ERPAE, consisting of eight district school boards<sup>1</sup> defined its mission and vision, and established a set of core values which served to provide an essential guiding structure for its collaborative activities as follows:

**OUR MISSION:** To empower and support adult learners in obtaining an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and/or successfully transitioning to a chosen pathway; post-secondary education, training, or the workplace.

**OUR VISION:** To be recognized as a local, provincial and global leader in the coordination and provision of flexible, innovative and responsive adult education programs and services.

**ERPAE Members Value:**

- 1) A culture of care, rooted within a holistic approach to learning
- 2) Diverse learners, with unique qualities
- 3) Flexible approaches, to support learning
- 4) Provision of service, within local communities
- 5) Community partnerships, that enhance service
- 6) Pathway planning to support the acquisition of an OSSD and/or successful transitions
- 7) Innovation and creativity, that facilitate continuous improvement.



## ERPAE PHASE ONE OF THE AES: SCOPING THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING AHEAD

During the first year (2016-2017) of the three-year project, the ERPAE completed the three deliverables outlined below.

**Part A:** Established a regional collaborative partnership table with senior school board representatives who provided direction regarding activities related to the Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy.

**Part B:** Conducted a regional environmental scan that identified opportunities for innovation and collaboration, as well as programming and service gaps, in the delivery of Adult Education programs and services. The results of this work are documented in the report *An Environmental Scan of Adult and Continuing Education in the Eastern Ontario Region* (Youmans, et al., 2017).

**Part C:** Developed a multi-year regional strategic plan based on the outcomes of the regional environmental scan, to direct activities that would promote progress in the four key mandates of the AES, with key milestones and provision for ongoing evaluation and monitoring. Full details are documented in the ERPAE Strategic Plan 2017-2019 (Youmans, et al., 2017b).

1 There are nine school boards in the Eastern Ontario Network; one board was not offering Adult or Continuing Education Programs during the AES period and while not an active ERPAE participant, was kept informed.

## THE ERP AE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Multi-Year Strategic Plan was referred to as ACE and it had three Phases:

**Phase 1, 2016-17 Awareness** – Creation of a regional partnership, completion of an environmental scan report and development of a multi-year strategic plan.

**Phase 2, 2017-18 Capacity Building** – Continuation of learning from within and outside the region. Sharing and developing innovative best practices.

**Phase 3, 2018-19 Execution** – Implementation of innovative best practices. Monitoring the impact of implementation.

Based on the results of the Environmental Scan from the first year of the project as well as feedback received from Board representatives and stakeholders who participated in group sessions and interviews, a fifth area of scope was added to the ERP AE Strategic Plan. The fifth area of scope focused on enhancing the positioning of adult education by building community and region wide awareness of A & CE programs (Godden, et al., 2018).

## ERP AE PHASE TWO OF THE AES: CAPACITY BUILDING

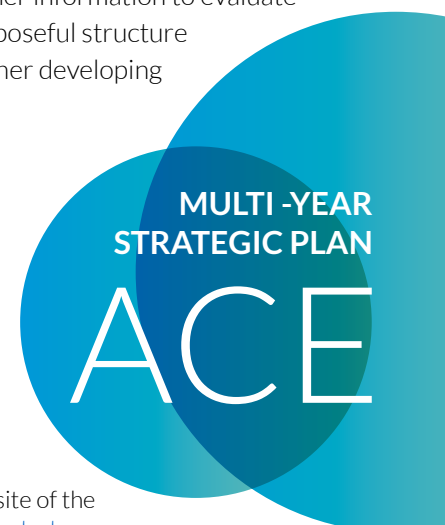
The Phase Two (2017-2018): Capacity Building stage of the AES was intentionally structured to build upon the collaboration that had been initiated in Phase One (2016-2017) of the project. The overarching goal of Phase Two was to provide a structure and series of facilitative processes and activities that would build ERP AE group members' capacity in preparation for Phase Three (2018-2019) of the project, the implementation of a series of innovative best practices. To achieve this goal, it was important to create an environment and shared purpose of working together that facilitated both capacity building and professional development activities for all ERP AE group members. The Working Table on Teacher Development (2007) in Ontario identified five characteristics of effective educator professional development, namely that it must be: coherent; attentive to adult learning styles; goal-oriented; sustainable; and evidence-informed. These principles were embedded into the planning and structure of the capacity building sessions throughout the project (Godden, et al., 2018).

## ERP AE PHASE THREE OF THE AES: EXECUTION

The Phase 3 (2018-2019) stage of the AES built upon the collaboration that had been so successful in Phase 2 (2017-2018) of the project. The overarching goal for the final year of the project was to provide a series of facilitative processes to support ERP AE group members as they executed and evaluated their innovative projects. The year's activities included:

- A memorandum detailing the process and timelines for the 2018-19 Innovative Best Practice Proposals was discussed with and agreed upon by ERP AE member board leaders.
- Boards created their Innovative Best Practice Proposals based upon the needs of their board and adult learners.
- Boards submitted their 2018-19 Innovative Best Practice Proposals and the ERP AE Table Representatives reviewed each proposal and provided feedback on each board proposal.
- Each of the ERP AE member boards' implementation teams received training on research questions and data collection methods from the project research team, and ongoing support through the third phase.
- The boards executed their Innovative Best Practice Projects, evaluating throughout.
- Each board shared its experiences of implementing the Innovative Best Practice Project during presentations to the ERP AE members towards the end of the implementation period.

Consequently, the execution phase was structured to provide the participating district school boards with an opportunity to reflect upon and hone their Innovative Best Practice Projects and gather information to evaluate their implementation. This purposeful structure was considered crucial for further developing capacity within the ERP AE.<sup>2</sup>



2 Publications, reports and monographs that describe the work of the ERP AE are available on the website of the Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network at <https://www.eosdn.on.ca/initiatives/adult-education-strategy>

## PART TWO: FRAMEWORK FOR OPTIMIZING A & CE

This framework is grounded in the work of the ERPAE as they enacted the AES. It highlights six key principles that are essential for optimizing adult and continuing education programs. These key principles are as follows: (1) raising awareness about A & CE, (2) being responsive to adult learner needs, (3) offering flexibility for adult learners, (4) creating a culture of care, (5) developing and sustaining community partnerships, and (6) fostering innovation. It is hoped that this

framework will assist school board and adult and continuing education program staff as they reflect upon ways to improve the quality of their programs to support the success of more adult learners. To this end, the framework includes a series of tips, promising practices, and prompts to help educators and administrators apply the framework across their A & CE settings.

### 1. RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

A & CE programs play a transformative role in the lives of adults by equipping them with essential skills needed for gainful employment and postsecondary education (Youmans, et al., 2017). This is consistent with research that outlines the wide-ranging benefits to adults that can be obtained through participating in A & CE programs. For example, the economic and social costs of not providing basic skills, and the significant gains for society when access to achieving these skills is provided have been discussed (e.g., Field, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, et al., 2003; Zhang & Palameta, 2006). A & CE can be viewed as a movement that promotes social change (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2015), having a positive impact in: activating citizens to volunteer, vote, and take functional roles in society, lead healthier lifestyles, create fairer societies, and create economic growth (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2015), and successful integration of newcomers (Hughes, et al., 2016). The European Association for the Education of Adults (2015), recognizing the contribution of adult education in transforming lives and societies, asserted that adult education must be *“a human right and a common good.”*

Certainly, ERPAE members provided numerous first-hand accounts of such successes, and the collaborative environment reinforced the power of their work across the region. However, a common concern voiced by staff

and students was the lack of public awareness about what A & CE is and where it was located. One student described how he regularly walked past an A & CE site being unaware of what it was: “For a long time I didn’t even know, I would drive by, or walk by, this school... and I just never really knew what it was.” Staff stressed the importance of raising awareness of A & CE to reach more students and gain more support from their school boards, *“It’s wonderful that we have great resources in A & CE, but what if nobody knows about them?”*

Raising awareness of A & CE to the general public and within ERPAE’s own school boards was identified as critical for program support and success. Board teams considered methods that could be effective in their more urban or rural settings. One ERPAE board team researched the impact of a community marketing campaign and presentations to all of the elementary and secondary schools within their board during staff meetings. The marketing campaign included radio ads, interior bus signs, magnetic road signs, a billboard, Facebook ads, Google Ads, website and school newsletters. Program presentations to schools were 15-20 minutes in length and a common PowerPoint was created to ensure the same message was delivered to all school communities. Baseline knowledge of school staff about the board’s continuing education programs was captured with a brief five question pre-survey prior

to the presentation and then the same five questions were administered after the presentations, along with three open-ended questions. At the conclusion of each presentation, continuing education program flyers were left at the school for reference and for staff to give to parents.

The A & CE staff tracked calls and emails with respect to the types of program inquiries made, where the person inquiring lived, and how the inquirer heard about adult education. The question, “How did you hear about us?” was added to all surveys and registrations. ERPAE members learned a number of valuable lessons with respect to raising awareness about A & CE programs from this project and the work in other boards. These key lessons were:

- It is worth taking time to go to all the schools in the board to promote program awareness and the positive things happening in continuing education; it allowed the team to develop a point of contact with the schools.
- School staff appreciated the brief introduction to the continuing education program learning how adult education is different from kindergarten to grade 12.
- The project was a beneficial team building exercise as members learned themselves about the other programs offered through continuing education (e.g., OYAP red seal trades, eLearning, PSW).
- Word of mouth, Facebook ads, website information, and school newsletters were the most successful marketing methods for encouraging enrollment in their programs.

## RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION REFLECTIVE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- Do educators and staff in schools across our school board know about A & CE?
- How can we inform educators and staff about the A & CE programs we offer?
- Does our community know about the A & CE programs we offer?
- How can we raise the profile of our A & CE programs in our communities?
- What information about our A & CE programs would be of benefit to senior leaders in our school board?
- What are some new ways we might try to raise the profile of A & CE in our communities, our schools and our school board?

To learn more about raising awareness of A & CE programs, read:

[ERPAE Phase Three Report](#)

[ERPAE Why Positioning Matters Monograph](#)

## 2. BEING RESPONSIVE TO ADULT LEARNER NEEDS

A & CE is often stigmatized by society when it perceives adult learners as failures for not previously completing their initial schooling (Deloitte, 2010; Youmans, et al., 2017). Blame is placed on the individual rather than on the systems within which these learners became unsuccessful in their attempts at learning. Many adult learners in A & CE programs are from vulnerable populations and have experienced challenging life circumstances that have negatively impacted their prior learning

attempts (Youmans, et al., 2017). For example, in the environmental scan of adult and continuing education programs completed by the ERPAE, adult learners reported dealing with past adverse/traumatic events, mental health issues, special education needs, financial struggles, and competing priorities associated with adult life (e.g., work, children, finances; Youmans, et al., 2017). Regardless of whether adult learners are from vulnerable populations, they all lead complex lives, which must be recog-

nized to provide them with appropriate programming (Wynne, 2005). The diversity of learners participating in A & CE includes: adults seeking new jobs or careers, newcomers to Canada trying to integrate in society, displaced workers seeking to upskill, adults seeking to complete high school credentialing, and youth attending alternative education. To be responsive to adult learner needs, A & CE must be marked by high-quality programs that provide access to flexible delivery, built-in support and



accountability, and adult-centred curriculum. Adult students also benefit from pathway planning that includes PLAR and access to guidance services.

**Access to Flexible Delivery with Built-in Support and Accountability:** The AES emphasized the importance of ensuring regionally coordinated access to flexible delivery of A & CE programs and/or services (e.g., e-learning or hybrid delivery programs). The shift to online delivery may help some learners access programs they normally would not be able to attend in-person, but some adults may lack resources and skills to be successful in an online environment. The work of the ERPAE highlighted the need to balance A & CE programs (e.g., eLearning and correspondence) that require a lot of independent work with accessibility to in-person teacher support and accountability measures (e.g., a program advisor, mentor). As A & CE programs shift to an online environment, a key consideration is how to support adults who lack equipment and knowledge to participate in online programs successfully.

The following findings were of particular note:

- Hybrid courses may be a good option for some adult learners who benefit from a balance of online learning and in-class teacher support.
- Adult learners are most successful when they are situated in a “culture of care” (i.e., caring staff, guidance counsellors, and availability of wrap around support).
- Adults do not “outgrow” their learning disability and would benefit from funding to provide special education support.
- Collaboration in A & CE could lead to innovative ways to ensure built-in support and accountability for adult learners.

**Adult-Centred Curriculum:**

Adult-centred curriculum addresses the unique needs of adult learners and respects their past experiences. During the AES, stakeholders identified the importance of adult-centred curriculum in A & CE. Specifically, staff and students noted the importance of real-life applications, and incorporating authentic tasks and experiences in facilitating learning. For example, one student noted she enjoys *“more of the hands-on learning stuff... like I retain more that way, like ‘see it and do it’ and that versus sitting and reading out of a book because you know some of it is pretty dry.”*



**ROLE OF PLAR AND PATHWAY PLANNING**

In addition to high-quality program delivery, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and ongoing pathway planning are important means of being responsive to adult learner needs. PLAR is the formal evaluation and credit-granting process whereby students may obtain credits for prior learning. Prior learning includes the knowledge and skills that students have acquired, in both formal and informal ways. PLAR is most effective when students are made aware of it early on in their program and when school boards actively engage students’ participation in it (Youmans, et al., 2017). Within ERPAE, there were different approaches to implementation. In one board, a single staff member was responsible for *“identifying the individuals that are eligible for PLAR... [and] identifying the ones that could be eligible and working with them to ensure their eligibility comes about as soon as possible”.*

In another school board, staff members drove to all of their sites to present information on PLAR and collect PLAR paperwork.

Guidance and career counselling provide for formal and informal life, career-related, and pathway planning discussions. Ideally, a qualified guidance counsellor would be available to discuss educational and career goals with every adult learner on an ongoing basis. Additionally, A & CE programs should use pathway planning tools to help adult learners make informed decisions about their future aspirations and have a plan of action in place. In regard to providing effective career and pathway planning, ERPAE members described their roles as twofold: creating pathways for adults and supporting students on a personal level *“We have the ability in A & CE to focus on the whole student, unlike the volume at mainstream school. We are involved in the whole plan for the student to be successful.”* The sometimes-informal role taken by staff within A & CE was also crucial, as adult learners have typically not benefitted from career advice and guidance in the past. The informal arena provided a trusting and safe environment for adults to begin to explore their options and form realistic goals for their learning and career development. Adult learners reported benefitting enormously from A & CE staff who supported their learning and career journeys.



## BEING RESPONSIVE TO ADULT LEARNER NEEDS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- What is the life and learning profile of each adult learner in our program/school/board?
- What is the evidence that we are meeting their specific needs? What are we doing well?
- What do our adult learners say about how well we are meeting their needs?
- How could we optimize our provision/programming to better meet the needs of the composite profile of adult learners? What resources might be needed to support this optimization?
- How effective are our current PLAR processes? Could they be further optimized? What do we need to do?
- What evidence do we have that shows effective pathway planning for adult learners in our program/school/ board? What improvements might we make? How will we measure the impact of such improvements?
- What are some new ways of introducing pathway and career planning for adult learners that our program/school/ board might want to consider?

For further reading about raising awareness and meeting adult learner needs, read:

- 🔗 [ERPAE Environmental Scan](#)
- 🔗 [ERPAE Phase Three Report](#)
- 🔗 [ERPAE Why Positioning Matters Monograph](#)

To learn more about optimizing PLAR and pathway planning, read:

- 🔗 [ERPAE Phase Three Report](#)

### 3. OFFERING FLEXIBILITY FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Flexibility enables adults to undertake their learning, while still attending to other responsibilities, for example, work and parenting commitments. Flexibility of A & CE programs can include the following: application of PLAR (prior learning) towards earning credits, the method of delivery (e.g., in-class, eLearning, correspondence), the duration of the course (e.g., 6-week, 9-week, 12-week), fast-track programs where students can earn certification and a high school degree simultaneously, and dual-credit programs that count towards a post-secondary degree. Additional innovative approaches to flexibility demonstrated in the ERPAE included: collaboration between credit and non-credit programs to help adult learners' transition from one program to the other, a fast-track (5 months) PSW program in which adult learners earn PSW certification and their high school diploma, working within existing school board parent programs to offer participants the opportunity to pursue a high school diploma, and partnerships with local community organizations to offer A & CE programs in shared spaces.

A & CE delivery modes are typically based on independent work (e.g., correspondence and eLearning), and though often viewed positively because they provide students with flexibility, the counter reliance on independent work in adult learning was viewed as problematic by some stakeholders. One staff explained:

*Many of these [students] are our most disengaged and disadvantaged not only youth, but adults as well, and yet we rely on them to be self-sufficient to go through booklets with minimal help and supervision. We require the most motivation from maybe the least able people...*

While flexibility in timing and delivery of courses can make A & CE programs more accessible for adult learners, inadequate structure and support can be problematic. As mentioned earlier, program flexibility must be balanced with built-in support and accountability.

### OFFERING FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT FOR ADULT LEARNERS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- How does the delivery of courses and programs in our program/school/board provide for the flexibility needed by adult learners?
- How does our school board balance flexibility with built-in support and accountability for adult learners?
- What innovative approaches to timing, delivery and supports might our program/school/ board consider?

## 4. CREATING A CULTURE OF CARE

In an educational setting, a culture of care refers to a holistic approach to student well-being that focuses on multiple components of health (e.g., academic, social, emotional, physical) to foster success. Creating a culture of care is particularly important for learners that have experienced adversities, like negative school experiences and lack of support networks, because it can help them to develop resilience and overcome obstacles (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Hansen, 2001; Rauner, 2000). Given that adults who participate in A & CE typically tend to experience hardships and come from vulnerable populations (Youmans, et al., 2017), they greatly benefit from a culture of care. For example, adult learners immersed in a culture of care would have access to mental health support to work through traumatic or adverse life events so they can attend more fully to their educational goals. Essentially, adult learners need more than teaching to equip them with academic skills; they need caring and committed A & CE staff to help remove barriers and promote positive outcomes.

By adopting a culture of care in A & CE, adult learners are given the support they require to be successful. There are four main practices needed to establish a culture of care: 1) model caring; 2) engage in meaningful dialogue with students; 3) confirm and applaud caring; and 4) provide opportunities to practice care (Noddings, 1992, 2002). Examples of how to implement each of these practices are identified below, based on information collected in the environmental scan of adult and continuing education in the Eastern Ontario region (Youmans, et al., 2017).

- 1) **Model Caring** – A & CE staff model caring to their students in various ways, from helping meet basic physical needs to being a champion of success. Meeting the basic needs of adult learners includes the provision of food (e.g., lunch programs, community meals, etc.), clothing (e.g., a school community clothing closet), transportation, and a safe space to complete their studies. A & CE staff champion adult learner success by affirming their strengths to build their confidence, providing one-on-one support when needed, checking in regularly to promote goal progression (e.g., phone calls when assignments are not completed, monthly check-ins about goals), and making referrals to other professional services (e.g., mental health support).

- 2) **Engage in Meaningful Dialogue with Students** – Adult learners feel valued and cared for when A & CE staff develop relationships with them through meaningful conversations. Adult learners appreciate engaging in discussions about their career aspirations and personal issues. In particular, guidance counsellors provide invaluable direction and support in their interactions with adult learners.
- 3) **Confirm and Applaud Caring** – A & CE programs that take place in physical locations often have the benefit of being a part of communities that reinforce caring through collaboration. Staff witness and celebrate how they support their students and students do the same with their peers.
- 4) **Provide Opportunities to Practice Care** – In addition to providing classroom opportunities to practice care, A & CE programs organize formal and informal gatherings that foster caring. Such gatherings include social clubs and shared meals. One A & CE program developed a community clothes closet that staff and students contribute to and use.

Determining how to promote and celebrate caring in an online environment is important as A & CE programs shift towards this mode of delivery.

### CULTURE OF CARE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- Why is a culture of care critical in an A & CE environment?
- What evidence do we have of a culture of care in our program/school/board?
- What effective culture of care practices have we implemented?
- What culture of care practices do we need to develop more fully? What support will we need to put these in place?
- How we will gather evidence that the new ways of caring that we implement are having the impact we are seeking?

To learn more about developing a culture of care in your school board/program, read:

[ERPAE Creating a Culture of Care Monograph](#)



## 5. DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are critical for supporting the diverse needs of adult learners and providing the wrap-around support necessary to help them overcome any barriers to lifelong learning. When school boards and community organizations understand each other’s mandates and available services, they are better able to meet their shared clients’ needs. When working together in partnership, program providers are equipped to support adult learners by:

- Accessing wrap-around services (e.g., food programs, mentorship, counselling, etc.)
- Making referrals to specific programs and services
- Offering flexible program delivery with community partners, including sharing of space, especially in rural communities
- Piloting new programs in partnership with community organizations
- Exploring common assessments
- Creating apprenticeships
- Exploring new funding sources.

The ERPAE was able to access one-time enhancement funds from the OME to develop cross-sector partnerships. The overarching goal was to facilitate connections between adult educators delivering programs in district school boards and service providers of labour market information and employment services. The project involved ERPAE hosting five local area initial meetings (Belleville, Kemptville, Ottawa, Pembroke, Kingston) where representatives shared information about their respective organizational mandates and collaborated to identify how they might collectively better support the journeys of adult learners and clients in the eastern Ontario region. In addition to the five local area meetings, follow up visit days/meeting days were encouraged so that partners could visit each other’s work location(s) to discover “firsthand” the services offered to support adult learners. These meetings reinforced how cross-sector partnerships are critical for promoting the success of adult learners. The ERPAE experience also showed that such collaboration is enhanced by funding specifically in support of developing and sustaining community partnerships.

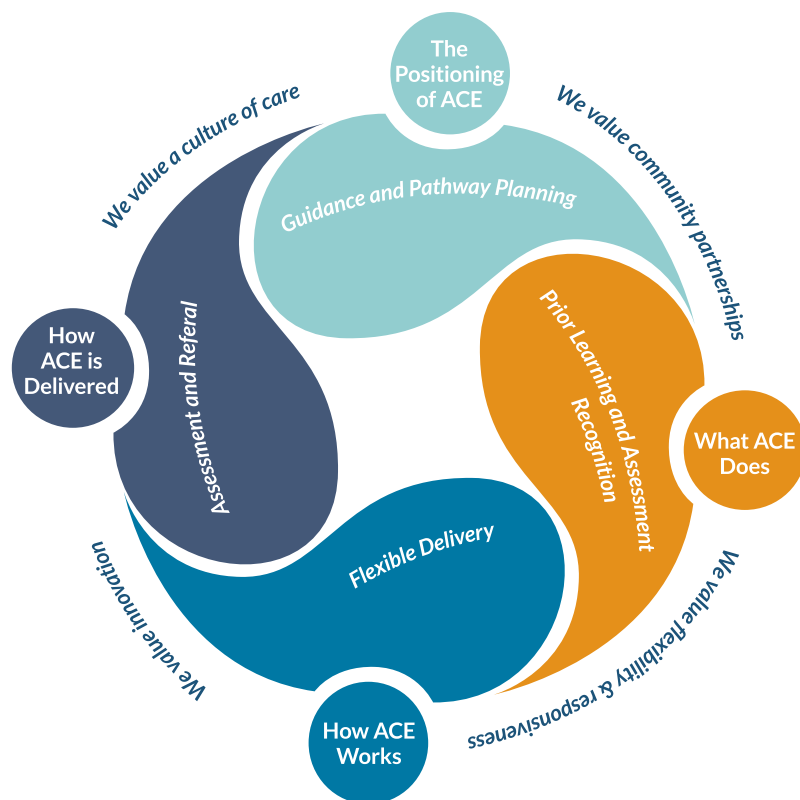
### DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- What are the benefits of community partnerships in A & CE?
- What community partnerships does our program/school/board have? Do these partnerships currently benefit adult learners? How could we leverage existing partnerships to do so?
- What are some new community partnerships that we should consider developing?
- What are some practical ways we can work to develop and sustain community partnerships?

To learn more about community partnerships in the ERPAE, read:

[ERPAE Cross Sector Partnership Report](#)

[ERPAE Cross Sector Partnership Poster](#)



## 6. FOSTERING INNOVATION

The goal of educational innovation is to foster student achievement. Such innovation can involve the implementation of a new method, idea, or tool. Trying something innovative in A & CE can result in more positive adult learner outcomes, but it also carries with it the risk of being less successful than anticipated. For this reason, it is best to pilot test an innovation before scaling it up. As part of the Adult Education Strategy (AES), each school board in the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education (ERP AE) identified a problematic area in relation to one of the AES mandates (or a regional-specific mandate), came up with an innovative way to address the problem, pilot tested their innovation, and evaluated the effectiveness of their innovation. The process was guided by effective practices in action research thereby ensuring the goal was clearly stated, data would be collected to gauge the impact of implementation, and the intent, process, and results of the project would be shared. Examples of innovative practices in A & CE are presented below, with respect to each of these four AES mandates: 1) intake, assessment, and referral, 2) guidance and pathway planning, 3) prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), and 4) flexible delivery. The innovative projects of three school boards related to the regional-specific mandate of positioning of adult education are also included.

1) Intake, assessment, and referral – One school board focused on creating an online process for coordinated information, intake, assessment and referral to ensure learners were directed to the program or service that best met their needs.

2) Guidance and pathway planning – One school board piloted the development and implementation of an online process for regionally available guidance, career counselling and pathway planning, using *Creating Pathways to Success (2013)* as a guide with the overarching goal of ensuring adult learners were supported in their pathway planning (including the consistent application of PLAR).

3) Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) – One school board modernized the PLAR process by making it available online and transformed the process by make it more personalized, student-friendly, effective, efficient and supportive of deep learning.

4) Flexible delivery – Two boards focused their efforts on providing new flexible A & CE programs. One board used a math parent program in a school board to offer participants an opportunity for high school completion. Another school board sought community partners in underserved communities to offer A & CE programs using a shared space and resources.

5) Positioning of adult education – Three school boards undertook projects related to increasing community awareness of their A & CE programs. One school board partnered with a marketing agency to develop a successful campaign. Another school board developed and implemented their own marketing strategies to raise their community profile and made program presentations to every school in their board to make their colleagues aware of their programs. The third school board developed a resource for its community partners to help them understand the nature and scope of adult and continuing education programs.

Innovation in A & CE is critical for maximizing adult learner success. While the ERP AE was limited to the four AES mandates (and one regionally specific mandate), the opportunities for innovation in A & CE are endless. A & CE innovation requires the investment of time, resources, and funds, but its return is the positive transformation of individuals, their communities, and society.

### FOSTERING INNOVATION REFLECTIVE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of educational innovation? What impact do we wish to have?
- Is my program/school/board supportive of innovation? How do we gain support?
- What are some innovative practices our program/school/board has implemented?
- What are some problematic areas of our program/school/board that we believe could benefit from innovation?
- What innovative solutions might we propose to address these concerns?
- What is our plan of action for piloting and evaluating an innovative approach to the problem we identified?

For more information about innovative projects in A & CE, see:

[ERP AE Phase Three Report](#)

[ERP AE Innovative Projects Monograph](#)



## FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION Conclusion

**Adult and continuing education** plays a vital role in equipping adults with the skills they need to pursue postsecondary education, employment, and lifelong learning. Indeed, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released a report on the importance of adult learning systems in preparing adults for the future of work (OECD, 2019). The Adult Education Strategy provided the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education with a unique opportunity to work collectively to improve the quality of A & CE programs across the region. In doing so, the six principles for optimizing adult and continuing education were articulated and operationalized in practice: 1) raising awareness about A & CE, 2) being responsive to adult learner needs, 3) offering flexibility for adult learners, 4) creating a culture of care, 5) developing and sustaining community partnerships, and 6) fostering innovation. The intention of this framework is to capture the learning from the regional work so that adult educators may continue to raise both the profile and quality of A & CE programs locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

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