

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT and RECOGNITION PROJECT

Saskatchewan Outfitters Association

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PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT and RECOGNITION PROJECT

1. Project Overview

A. Sector Profile

Outfitting is a sub-sector of the Saskatchewan Tourism Industry and is the largest single source of export dollars in the industry. The sector consists primarily of small owner-operated businesses, which are responsible for providing equipment, guides and accommodations for hunting, angling and touring experiences throughout the province. There are approximately 600 registered outfitters in the province. The direct income, from the industry, is approximately \$90,000,000.00 to \$100,000,000.00.

The industry relies heavily on strong partnerships with provincial regulatory and environment and resource management bodies. Outfitters have an inherent interest in the sustained management of Saskatchewan's natural environment and have been leaders in this area.

Over the last few years, the industry has identified the service component as being critical to maintaining its competitiveness. The industry deals in a world market with the majority of clients coming from the United States and Europe. Various other areas of Canada, the United States, Mexico, Russia and South Africa offer products similar to that found in Saskatchewan. Providing superior services and fostering value-added product are essential for the continued success of the industry.

The regulatory environment, in which the industry presently operates, does not recognize or encourage the quality of the outfitting experience. The industry and the public sector have taken some initiatives to address this situation. To date, discussions have centered on separating the wildlife management component from the business component with the latter to be more reflective of industry needs. It is proposed that a new system be established which would reflect service standards and other business ethics.

B. Background

During the late 1980's there was considerable growth within the outfitting industry, particularly in the big game hunting sector. Many new outfitters were licensed; some that were ill prepared to competently manage their business,

resulting in customer service which did not meet client expectations. This dissatisfaction over service in the outfitting industry negatively impacts the entire industry and can ultimately impact market demand for Saskatchewan outfitting services.

Examples of identifiable client dissatisfaction relate to quality of accommodation and equipment, the expertise of guides, the organization and effectiveness of the overall operation. More seriously, some complaints have been received from clients who have put down a deposit for future services which were not forthcoming or which did not meet promised expectations.

In October of 1996, the Executive of the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association met with the Provincial Cabinet. Being acknowledged as the industry's representative, the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association received an endorsement to become more involved in establishing standards and accreditation of the industry and participating in the administration of outfitter licensing.

In mid 1997 the Department of Economic and Co-operative Development established a Business Services Improvement Branch with a focus to improve regulatory processes for businesses. The project team had as part of its mandate the responsibility to explore alternatives to regulations with an emphasis on the development of regulatory partnerships or self-management options. Economic and Co-operative Development officials have provided input and assistance in the development of this proposal.

Tourism Saskatchewan has also participated to facilitate improvements in the outfitting industry and to enhance the overall tourism appeal of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council will participate in the development and delivery of education and accreditation programs.

The Policy on Outfitting in Saskatchewan. which was completed in the spring of 1997 by the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, states that "the department will encourage the outfitting industry to participate in the resolution of outfitting and development of outfitting programs through a single representative body" and "the department will require industry accreditation of an applicant as a prerequisite to issuing or renewing an outfitters license".

To this end a project was undertaken to define and describe outfitting standards. A document was produced entitled "*Professional Outfitting Standards,*" which identifies eight areas of skills and knowledge that individuals should demonstrate to be considered competent in outfitting.

The report also recommended the establishment of a certification process for the industry. The concept of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition was viewed as integral to its success in that existing outfitters were more apt to "buy in" if recognition was made of their existing abilities.

In the fall of 2000 a second project was undertaken to establish a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition model for the outfitting sector. This P.L.A.R.

process will form the basis for the introduction of a certification process within the industry.

C. Rationale

The outfitting industry is involved in the provision of services to paying clients, primarily from outside the province. Although resource regulations and allocations control many of the activities, the client's overall satisfaction depends on the level of services provided by the outfitting operation. It is advantageous from both the management and economic perspective that the industry clientele has the necessary guarantees in place to allow their expectations to be met.

In 1997-1998, the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council and the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council developed standards and a certification process for both Fresh Water Angling Guide and Hunting Guide.

Processes were developed in Saskatchewan to implement these into the Saskatchewan outfitting industry.

In 1998-1999 Professional Outfitting standards were identified as a continuation of the process for improving industry standards and competitiveness.

The Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition project defines the process of providing for improved industry standards by forming the basis for an industry accreditation program.

With maturation of the outfitting industry in the past decade, it is now positioned to take a more pro-active role in the management and promotion of their industry, similar to other service industries.

D. Implications

In 1996, the economic contribution of outfitting in Saskatchewan was estimated to be \$90-100 million in gross economic impact for primarily the rural and small community economy. Strengthening this industry's business management will increase benefits to the province. The outfitting industry provides about 1,000 person-years of direct employment each year, and a significant amount of indirect employment in support service industries such as motels, restaurants, food processing and taxidermy. One third of the northern work force is employed by the outfitting industry, mostly on a seasonal basis. An estimated \$32 million is spent by outfitters in Saskatchewan for employment, accommodations, food services, supplies and equipment.

Outfitting occurs in all areas of the province. Big game and bird outfitting are more common in Southern Saskatchewan while angling outfitting is more common in the North. A growing number of outfitting operations are owned and/or managed by Metis or First Nations individuals.

Some outfitting operations while not in contravention of any legislation, are providing services that do not meet the expectations of their clients resulting in a poor image of the outfitting industry and the Saskatchewan tourism product.

With the development of an accreditation process, the direct economic impact to the industry is significant.

A precise economic impact is difficult to determine. It may be ^{assumed} that if each of the 600 outfitters in the province was able to attract 10 new clients, at \$2000 per client, a conservative estimate of 12 million dollars in direct economic benefit could be generated to the industry.

Failure to introduce industry standards and accreditation would have the reverse effect to the industry and greater consequences to the tourism industry.

Internationally, it is arguable that hunting and fishing is the single competitive advantage Saskatchewan currently enjoys in the global market place. A poor image of the outfitting industry will overshadow other tourism sectors approaching these markets.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are described as follows:

1. Develop assessment tools to be used in the verification of skill and knowledge attainment related to the outfitting industry.
 - Identify key indicators for each of the sub-skills identified in the Professional Standards.
2. Establish a process to apply these assessment tools to certify new outfitters as part of a licensing process.
 - Design assessment tools to assess the key indicators identified in step one.
3. Design an implementation strategy for the PLAR process.
4. Enhance and strengthen an industry partnership that fosters long term strategic human resource planning and the delivery of accessible training to meet the needs of the outfitting industry.

3. METHODOLOGY

A. *Partnership/Steering Committee*

In order to facilitate this project a number of partnerships were formed with industry stakeholders including;

- Sask. Post secondary Education and Skills Training
- Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management
- Saskatchewan Outfitters Association and Individual Members
- Tourism Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council
- Saskatchewan Economic & Cooperative Development
- Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association acted as the project manager.

A steering committee was established from this group to provide a variety of perspectives on the objectives and outcomes.

B. Selection of a Developer

The concept of Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition is a relatively new field of endeavor and consequently access to development personnel is rather limited. A search was undertaken nationwide to identify suitable candidates.

The development of prior learning and assessment recognition is relatively standard in the process used to determine the end product. The steps are normally:

1. Identification of industry standards as defined by the skills and knowledge necessary for the individual to be considered competent in this field.
2. Identification of key indicators for the sub-skills that are measurable or identifiable.
3. Selection and development of assessment tools and processes appropriate for each of the sub-skills.

The SIAST Woodlands Campus have been involved in PLAR development and was determined to have the necessary expertise required and was subsequently contracted as the project developer.

C. Industry Involvement

The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association is a business organization with 250 members involved in outfitting throughout the entire province. The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association has demonstrated a strong commitment to human resource planning and development. Working with its membership the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association with other partners has been instrumental in developing both a hunting and fishing guide-training curriculum in accordance with national occupational standards. To date this program has been responsible for the training of over 300 guides who have or are receiving certification.

The Association has undertaken the development of "Professional Outfitting Standards" which describes the skills and knowledge necessary for an individual outfitter to be considered competent in his field.

The membership of the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association was again active in the development of this PLAR project. A team of outfitters acting as expert practitioners assisted the developer in the identification of outcomes and key indicators for each of the identified sub-skills. They also provided direction in the development of assessment tools.

Select individuals were then used for ongoing communication for refinement of processes.

A total of approximately 1000 man-hours of industry time were committed to this project.

D. Involvement of First Nations and Metis

Metis and First Nations involvement in this project was accomplished by;

- Involvement of First Nations and Metis belonging to the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association.
- Involvement of First Nations/Metis as expert practitioners for consultation on key indicators and assessment tools.
- Addressing the Minister's Advisory Committee on Northern Outfitting

4. RESULTS

A. Objectives one and two

Develop outcomes, key indicators and design assessment tools to assess key indicators.

The project team in conjunction with industry experts identified outcomes from the eight standard categories previously identified as follows;

- i.) Professionalism
- ii.) Business Planning
- iii.) Financial Management
- iv.) Legislation and Regulations
- v.) Marketing
- vi.) Operations Management
- vii.) Human Resource Management
- viii.) Public Relations

The objective of designing assessment tools to measure the key indicators presented the greatest challenge in meeting industry needs. Three different industry target groups were identified.

- Individuals with little or no experience in outfitting but some training.
- Individuals with business experience or some outfitting experience.
- Individuals with substantial experience in outfitting.

A number of different assessment tools were identified to address the key indicators. The following chart summarizes the key indicators and assessment processes.

	CHART	
Outcomes	PLAR Method	Evidence Required
1. Demonstrate the Qualities of a Professional in the Outfitting Industry	1. Interview	1. Eligibility for bonding
2. Describe a Feasibility Study	2. Exhibit a completed Feasibility Study OR Complete Business Course	2a. Existing Feasibility Study or Feasibility Study created for future business 2b. Certificate, transcript, or validation letter
3. Develop a Business Plan	3. Interview AND Exhibit business plan OR Exhibit sample business plan for future business OR Formal Business Classes	3. Existing business plan AND/OR amended business plan OR Sample business plan for future business OR Certificate, transcript, or validation letter
4. Prepare Budget	4. Refer to Budget in Business Plan OR Business course/seminar on budgeting	4. Business Plan with included budget AND oral or written statement giving three reasons why budgets are important for business success OR Certificate, transcript, or validation letter showing performance indicators were completed
5. Arrange Business Start-Up/Expansions	5. Open Book Knowledge Test	5. Successful completion of open book knowledge test
6. Develop Policies and Procedures	6. Knowledge test AND Demonstrated knowledge of policies and procedures OR Recognized course(s) on developing policies and procedures	6. Letter from previous employer validating demonstrated knowledge of policies and procedures OR sample of self-developed policies and procedures OR Certificate, transcript, or validation letter showing that "Policies and Procedures" were studied in a business course
7. Write Client Sales Contract	7. Interview AND Exhibit an existing sales contract OR Exhibit a simulated sales contract	7. Sales contract dated within the past three years OR Simulated sales contract

Outcomes	PLAR Method	Evidence Required
8. Access Funding	8. Knowledge Test	8. Successful completion of knowledge test
9. Manage Finances	9. Access to a financial consultant OR Interview AND Previous experience managing finances OR Business course/seminar on accounting procedures/payroll	9. Services of a financial consultant OR Resume, showing previous experience managing finances OR Certificate, transcript, or validation letter showing a business course on accounting procedures/payroll has been successfully completed, including the course content outline
10. Apply Legislation and Regulations Relevant to Outfitters	10. Interview AND Open book test on <i>The Outfitter and Guide Regulations, 1996</i>	10. Successful completion of interview and open book test on <i>The Outfitter and Guide Regulations, 1996</i>
11. Develop Marketing Plan	11. Exhibit an existing personally developed marketing plan OR exhibit a simulated personally developed marketing plan	11. Existing personally developed marketing plan OR Simulated personally developed marketing plan
12. Use a Variety of Marketing Tools	12. General Knowledge Test AND Interview AND Work samples	12a. Sample database b. Sample reference sheet c. Minimum of one developed marketing tool from past business or sample of developed marketing tool for future business
13. Sell Product	13. Resume AND Sales experience Or Demonstration of sales techniques OR Course/Seminar on sales techniques	13. Resume which includes three references AND Documented sales experience OR Demonstration of sales technique Or Certificate, transcript, or validation letter showing course/seminar on sales techniques has been successfully completed

Outcomes	PLAR Method	Evidence Required
14. Evaluate Marketing Activities	14. Interview AND Refer to Marketing Plan	14a. Marketing Plan with attached evaluation of marketing activities, including 5 of the 8 Performance Indicators b. Letter from former employer validating experience in evaluating marketing activities c. Certificate, transcript, or validation letter showing Performance Indicators were completed
15. Identify the Issues in Resource Management	15. Interview	15. Knowledge of management issues
16. Oversee Operations	16. Interview AND Resume	16. Resume, which includes three references
17. Prepare Staff for Emergency Situations	17. Current CPR/First Aid Certificate AND Interview on Staff Training and Emergency Equipment Readiness AND Open book test on Occupational Health and Safety regulations	17. Current CPR/First Aid Certificate AND Successful completion of open book test on Occupational Health and Safety Regulations
18. Develop Human Resource Plan	18. Interview AND Open book knowledge test on Labour Standards, The Outfitter and Guide Regulations, 1996 and Revenue Canada guidelines	18. Successful completion of interview and open book knowledge test on Labour Standards, The Outfitter and Guide Regulations, 1996 and Revenue Canada guidelines
19. Manage Staff	19. Interview AND/OR Resume	19. Resume which details work history and includes three references
20. Implement Public Relations Strategy	20. Interview	20. Successful completion of interview

B. Objective three

Implementation of an industry certification program and the PLAR process presents some challenges that must be addressed.

1. Reluctance of some industry members to participate.

The big game sector of the industry is relatively new and has been profitable since the beginning. Early in 1990 Saskatchewan emerged as the primary destination for US hunters for black bear and white tail deer, instigated largely by population demographics and the taking of the world record white tailed deer. New outfitters emerged in the midst of a gold rush mentality for this product. There as yet has been little need for concentrated marketing effort in this sector and facilities are sometimes substandard. Many of these outfitters might not recognize the need for standards and certification and could perceive this as an intrusion on their business.

As well, some well-established, mature operations that have achieved success could view this process as unnecessary.

2. The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association does not include all outfitters in Saskatchewan.

Membership in a professional association is not a requirement for industry licensing. The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association will take the lead in certification development and will need to recognize the importance of including the entire industry and develop programs inclusive of all provincial outfitting operations.

3. New Entrants

Various degrees of experiences and expertise are characteristic of industry players. The need for recognized, accessible training programs particularly for new entrants is desirable.

Presently Lakeland College has shown interest in providing an outfitter training program. This is a two-year program entitled "Wildlife Guiding and Outfitting". Discussions have taken place with Lakeland College, Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council, and the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association. Lakeland College has agreed to incorporate any existing or proposed certification processes into their curriculum.

The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology is also interested in looking at options for training modules.

B. Objective four

Enhance and strengthen industry partnerships to foster long term strategic human resource planning and delivery of accessible training.

To date the partners involved in the PLAR developments have been;

- Saskatchewan Outfitters Association
- Saskatchewan Post Secondary Education and Skills Training
- Tourism Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council
- Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management
- Saskatchewan Economic & Cooperative Development
- Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

To date all of these agencies have recognized the need for human resource planning and industry training.

Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management is presently in discussions with the industry to examine ways of recognizing industry certification in regards to the licensing process. Tourism Saskatchewan is open to discussion on industry certification and its consequences to marketing the Saskatchewan outdoor product.

5. Next Steps

Continue to advance regulatory changes.

Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management is prepared to assist in the development of a new system that reflects increased industry standards and business ethics. In particular both Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management and Saskatchewan Economic Development would be open to programs that provide additional consumer protection. To this end Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management is proposing a Consumer Protection program that would provide some assurance on client deposits in case of insolvency, bankruptcy or fraud. The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association is proposing self-administered insurance program on behalf of association members that would meet the necessary criteria of the Consumer Protection Program. This in turn will lead to opportunities to initiate certification programs that will allow for membership in the Association and eligibility for insurance.

It is proposed that the time line for regulatory changes will target 2003.

B. Create a Pilot Certification Program

The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association will introduce a pilot certification process in 2002. The objectives of this program will be;

- a. Determine challenges and strengths for certification before introducing certification to the industry.
- b. Further identify training needs in relationship to certification.
- c. Establish a degree of comfort within the industry on the certification process.
- d. Provide an opportunity for industry leaders to assist in the implementation of the certification concept.
- e. Determine challenges around the assessment process.

C. Minister's Task Force on Northern Outfitting

The Minister of SERM, the Hon. Buckley Belanger has initiated a Task Force to look at opportunities for northern residents to become more involved in the outfitting industry. Certainly any recommendations with regard to PLAR and certification should consider the task force recommendations. The committee's final report is expected to be released in the fall of 2001.

The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association is represented on this committee.

D. Identify and Foster Partnerships in regards to certification and training.

The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association will enter into discussions with interested organizations on the establishment of a pilot certification program. A proposal is expected to be developed prior to January 1,2002.

The Saskatchewan Outfitters Association will also continue to discuss training options with Lakeland College, SIAST, Dumont Technical Institute the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and the Keewatin Career Development Corporation.

P.L.A.R. Process

Outcomes

1. Demonstrate the Qualities of a Professional in the Outfitting Industry
2. Describe a Feasibility Study
3. Develop a Business Plan
4. Prepare Budget
5. Arrange Business Start-Up/Expansion
6. Develop Policies and Procedures
7. Write Client Sales Contract
8. Access Funding
9. Manage Finances
10. Apply Legislation and Regulations Relevant to Outfitters
11. Develop Marketing Plan
12. Use a Variety of Marketing Tools
13. Sell Product
14. Evaluate Marketing Activities
15. Identify the Issues in Resource Management
16. Oversee operations
17. Prepare for Emergency Situations
18. Develop Human Resource Plan
19. Manage Staff
20. Implement Public Relations Strategy

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