# Recognizing Prior Learning

## You live. You learn. It _all_ counts.

Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL) in Saskatchewan

# Provincial Policy Framework

"All learning is valued because it contributes to the
social and economic well being and growth of
individuals and our communities."

Saskatchewan Centennial 2005

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a core part of Saskatchewan Learning's mandate to ensure an effective and efficient education and training system in Saskatchewan. For employers, RPL can mean cost savings by identifying a greater number of candidates from within their current workforce who have the skills to fill vacant and/or new positions. By enabling people to apply what they already know and can do, RPL can reduce barriers and create opportunities that will lead to greater social and economic prosperity for our province.

The Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB) championed the advancement of RPL by building on the commitment of its reference group, the Forum for Racialized Canadians, to the creation of fair and equitable learning and foreign credential recognition processes since the mid -1990's. This led to the SLFDB Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Services Project (October 2000 – March 2002) receiving funding from Human Resources Development Canada Learning Initiatives and significant in-kind contributions from Saskatchewan Learning.

In addition to building greater awareness of and significant capacity for RPL, a major project outcome was the development of the *Provincial Framework for RPL in Saskatchewan.* The PLAR Services Project (co-chaired by business and labour) created an important forum for engaging a broad group of diverse stakeholders (i.e., business, labour, professional trade associations/regulatory bodies, education/training providers, community-based organizations, learners and government). The project culminated in the SLFDB submitting the Framework to Saskatchewan Learning in October 2003.

The Minister of Learning formally approved the Framework in the Legislative Assembly on June 15, 2004. The Minister also requested that Saskatchewan Learning and the SLFDB co-chair the Saskatchewan RPL Coordinating Group, which was tasked with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Framework's comprehensive Action Plan.

The Government of Saskatchewan wishes to acknowledge the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board for its leadership and the many individuals and organizations that have contributed their efforts, ideas, and time to complete this important work. The Framework will be instrumental in our strategic planning as we work collaboratively to improve the learning recognition system in Saskatchewan.

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**THE CURRENT STATE**

While there are successful examples of RPL processes and practices in place across the country and in Saskatchewan, a major learning recognition gap continues to exist. A network of RPL services is not well established, and relatively few people are accessing and/or benefiting from RPL processes. This is true not only in Saskatchewan, but across Canada.

In September 2001 the Conference Board of Canada estimated that eliminating the learning recognition gap in Canada would enable Canadians to earn an additional $4.1 billion to $5.9 billion in income annually.[1] Without appropriate recognition of their skills and abilities, many highly skilled people remain unemployed or underemployed. As a result, they are inclined to move elsewhere ("the brain drain") to increase their earning power and career prospects by accessing improved learning recognition systems.

The Conference Board's 2001 survey identified those individuals who have the most serious problems in getting their learning recognized and rewarded: immigrants, people with work-based training, and people who have transferred between educational institutions or provinces in licensed professions.

Closing the learning recognition gap is even more critical given the demographic and labour market trend projections in this province:

- Our population is aging and there will be fewer workers available to replace retiring workers. This is evidenced in the projected population. In Saskatchewan, the population in the "baby boom" age group (currently aged 40 to 54) will continue to increase for five to ten years and then begin to decline. The group of people aged 55 to 64 will increase. Younger age groups ─ those aged 15 to 24 and 25 to 39 ─ will experience a slight increase in their populations.[2]

**Projected Population by Age Group**



Source: Sask Trends Monitor

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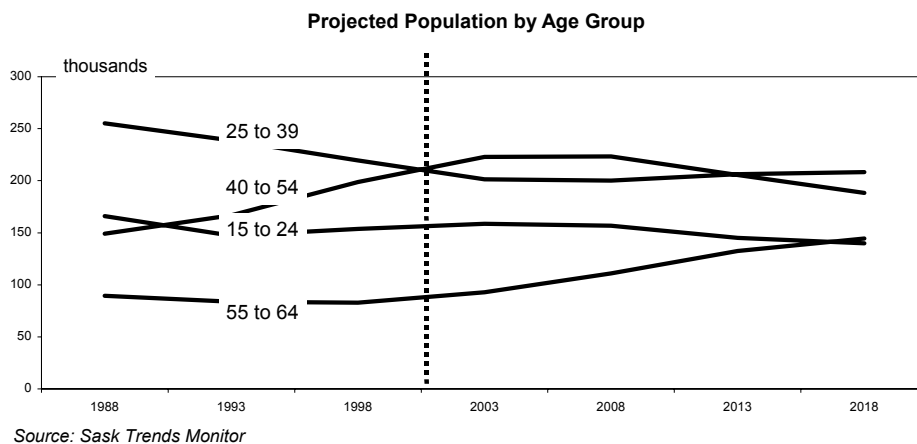
[1] Brain Gain: The Economic Benefits of Recognized Learning and Learning Credentials in Canada. The Conference Board of Canada: 2001. P.1.

[2] Saskatchewan Labour Market Trends Report. Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training: January 2000; p.46.

- The projected changes in demographics (overall population and Registered Indian Labour Force) will have a substantial effect on the labour force in Saskatchewan.

| | | Projected | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1998 | 2003 | 2008 | 2013 | 2018 |
| **Total Potential Labour Force** (assuming constant participation rates of Registered Indian population) | 519,960 | 531,490 | 536,745 | 530,387 | 518,611 |
| • **Registered Indian Labour Force** | 25,896 | 32,167 | 39,962 | 49,097 | 59,186 |

*Source: Saskatchewan Labour Market Trends, January 2000*

- The projected rate of growth in the labour force slows substantially in the coming years, and the size of the labour force in Saskatchewan is expected to peak between 2008 and 2013 (depending on the scenario). Employers will need to look beyond the traditional labour supply and find ways of attracting and retaining workers with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, including First Nations, Métis, immigrants and refugees.

- The workplace is changing, requiring employees to develop and apply new skill sets, often acquiring these skills on-the-job. Continuous learning is a growing expectation in the workplace, and RPL is a means to support, encourage and reward that learning. Learning recognition enhances the performance of businesses, as it encourages staff to improve their own skills and abilities by building on what they know ─ leading to innovation and improved productivity. Workers also seek to have transferable and portable skills, and RPL provides a means to do that.

- The demands of learners on the education system are changing and have resulted in the development of more learner-focused institutions that provide flexible and responsive programming. The growing trend of part-time and non-sequential learners, including learners enrolling in part-time programs while maintaining full-time employment, has created a need for RPL services that serve as a bridge to the recognition of workplace learning. Thus, finding ways to value and recognize prior learning is becoming increasingly important for educational institutions that promote and support a life long learning culture.

- Demand for RPL at educational institutions in Saskatchewan is increasing. The SIAST PLAR Report for 2000-01 (issued February 2002) identifies that SIAST has seen an increase in demand for PLAR applicants by 59% (from 224 in 1999-00 to 357 in 2000-01), which involved:
  - an increase by 73% for course requests (559 up to 965 in 2000); and,
  - an increase by 97% of successful credits awarded (402 up to 790).

- RPL can also serve as a means to achieve a representative workforce, as it requires a competency-based approach to assessing an individual's skills and attributes and therefore is a more inclusive assessment than accepting only formal credentials. In this way, the learnings acquired through different cultural practices or traditions can be assessed and documented, then applied against the requirements of a job or educational program. An example would be the benefits of being able to assess and recognize an individual's proficiency in Cree as equivalent to a university language credit requirement.

A national call for improved RPL is clearly articulated in the "Halifax Declaration for the Recognition of Prior Learning", a document produced as a legacy from the Recognizing Learning National Conference in October 2001. The importance of RPL is also referenced in key federal and provincial strategic policy, including the federal *Innovation Strategy: Knowledge Matters* paper and the provincial post-secondary sector strategic plan.

However, during the consultation process, a variety of stakeholders expressed that implementing a system of RPL services required consideration of the following issues:

- A concern that RPL may lead to a decline in quality or standards in a workplace or educational institution;
- Issues related to the resources required to support RPL services, including the implications of organizational change and adoption of new ways of recruiting and retaining workers;
- Existing funding models and capacity limitations at educational institutions may hamper the development/implementation of RPL services;
- Costs of RPL to individuals, which may deter low-income individuals from seeking employment or further training;
- The timeliness of the assessment process. Some people express concern that it takes longer for the assessment than to re-take the training program;
- A lack of awareness, especially among small and medium businesses, about RPL services and benefits;
- A perception that RPL could lead to an increase in staff turnover due to enhancing skills portability;
- A perceived lack of coordination in the delivery of RPL services;
- Difficulty incorporating RPL processes into established qualification recognition practices; and,
- Concern around a lack of national RPL standards and portability of credentials or recognition.

This Framework is intended to serve as a mechanism to address these challenges and provide a plan to make progress on closing the learning recognition gap in Saskatchewan.

## VISION STATEMENT

Saskatchewan's education and training sector, professional/trade associations, regulatory bodies, government, industry (business and labour), and communities work collaboratively to promote and support the recognition of *all* learning, contributing to the development of a skilled, flexible, and responsive labour force, making Saskatchewan an ideal place to live and work. All learning is valued because it contributes to the social and economic well-being and growth of individuals and our communities.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In 1997, fourteen guiding principles were put forth by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) as a framework for the development of an effective national system for the recognition of prior learning. The CLFDB set of guiding principles have been adapted and modified in the guiding principles listed below:

Accessibility: RPL must be accessible and recognize the unique needs and abilities of individuals. The delivery of RPL services must also be inclusive and respectful of the diversity of Saskatchewan's population. While the process is voluntary, all learners will be encouraged and supported in accessing RPL services, regardless of their place of residence, socio-economic circumstances, culture, or demographic characteristics.

Transparency: The RPL process must be transparent. Criteria and standards of assessment, as well as RPL processes and outcomes, must be well-understood.

Effective Service: All personnel involved in RPL should have appropriate skills and knowledge, relevant to their roles and responsibilities in the RPL process.

High-Quality Assessment: Assessors are content specialists, and the assessment tools are valid and reliable. Learners will receive recognition and credit for demonstrated knowledge, skills and judgments, and not solely for experience.

Relevance: The RPL outcomes will be recognized by individuals, employers/industry, education/training providers, professional regulatory bodies/associations, and credit awarded will be transferable between different organizations.

Flexibility: Different assessment mechanisms and procedures are necessary to accommodate the needs of different individuals (for example, academic credentials, employment, career advancement, lifelong learning).

Efficiency: RPL processes are efficient and timely by making the best use of resources.

Right of Appeal: If a person is not satisfied with the RPL assessment, an appeal process must be available.

## ACTION PLAN

*Acronym Guide for the Action Plan:*

| | |
|---|---|
| ATCC | Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission |
| CG | Coordinating Group |
| CBO | Community-Based Organizations |
| DCRE | Department of Community Resources and Employment |
| EO | Employers' Organizations |
| ETP | Education/Training Providers |
| GDA | Government Departments/Agencies |
| IND | Industry |
| PRBA | Professional Regulatory Bodies/Associations |
| SaskCAT | Saskatchewan Council for Admissions and Transfer |
| SL | Saskatchewan Learning |
| SLFDB | Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board |

| Actions | Lead |
|---|---|
| **GOAL ONE:  DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP** | |
| **A.1 COORDINATE PLANNING AND SUPPORT FOR RPL SERVICES:** | |
| **A.1.1** Develop and maintain a Provincial Framework for RPL that is endorsed and adopted by stakeholders, and reflected in their respective RPL policies. | SLFDB, SL |
| **A.1.2.** Establish or identify a coordinating group to monitor the implementation of the Provincial Framework, provide a forum for on-going strategic planning, and identify resource requirements needed to undertake the Framework actions. | SLFDB, SL |
| **A.1.3** Support a central collection of RPL resources and materials available to stakeholders and the public that can be used to support the promotion, planning and delivery of RPL services in Saskatchewan, including information on other Canadian and international assessment services. | SLFDB |
| **A.1.4** Create and maintain a publicly accessible provincial electronic credit transfer guide, which is built upon institutional credit transfer agreements. | SaskCAT |
| **A.1.5** Incorporate results of annual progress reports from stakeholders, with recommendations for improvement, into Framework strategic planning process. | CG |
| **A.1.6** Develop and maintain an on-line forum for RPL practitioners in Saskatchewan that facilitates information and expertise sharing and dialogue. | SL |
| **A.1.7** Support the provision of labour market information and forecasted demand to identify those program areas where RPL may be beneficial in increasing the number of people with the requisite skills to meet labour market demand. | SL |
| **A.1.8** Develop and deliver accredited training for RPL practitioners. | ETP |
| **A.1.9** Support the development (start-up) of RPL expertise with various stakeholders, encouraging new models for implementation that may serve as examples for others. | CG |
| **A.1.10** Collaborate with industry, other provinces and territories, and the federal government to develop and adopt national standards for RPL that support the portability and transferability of skills. | CG |
| **A.1.11** Develop options to provide funding to individuals who require RPL assessment services and demonstrate financial need to do so, and ways to provide financial incentives and assistance for learning recognition and credentialing. | SL |

| Actions | Lead |
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| **A.2** CONDUCT AND SHARE RESEARCH ON BEST PRACTICES AND THE BENEFITS OF RPL: | |
| **A.2.1** Highlight and recognize excellence in the delivery of RPL services through the annual SLFDB Training for Excellence Awards. | SLFDB |
| **A.2.2** Contract with a private sector firm to undertake an assessment of the costs and benefits of RPL to small, medium and large businesses in Saskatchewan. | SLFDB |
| **A.2.3** Promote best practices through organized events, e.g., promote industry best practices at labour conferences, or through business events, at educational conferences, etc. | SLFDB, ETP, EO |
| **A.2.4** Support on-going opportunities that allow RPL practitioners to share information, expertise, stay networked, and provide updates to each other on RPL activity. | ETP, IND |
| **A.2.5** Undertake periodic reviews of RPL initiatives in other jurisdictions and distribute to stakeholders, in order to help improve the planning and delivery of RPL services in Saskatchewan. | CG |
| **A.3** INCREASE AWARENESS OF RPL SERVICES AND BENEFITS: | |
| **A.3.1** Publish and promote the Provincial Framework to the public and stakeholders. | SLFDB, SL |
| **A.3.2** Develop and implement a coordinated communications strategy that promotes the benefits of RPL services to stakeholders and promotes the value of recognizing acquired competencies in addition to credentials. | CG |
| **A.3.3** Develop and maintain a "one-stop" website that provides an overview of RPL processes in Saskatchewan, with contact information and/or links to the various stakeholders. | CG |
| **A.3.4** Promote portfolio approaches to high school students as part of career development curriculum and guidance services. | IND, SL, ETP |
| **A.3.5** Promote RPL services and portfolio approaches to employers | CBO, DCRE |
| **A.3.6** Promote partnerships between training institutions and employers in recognizing RPL and thus enhance the efficiency of training/education. | SLFDB |
| **GOAL TWO:  DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE AND RELEVANT RPL SERVICES IN SASKATCHEWAN.** | |
| **B.1** INTEGRATE RPL PROCESSES INTO EMPLOYERS' HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: | |
| **B.1.1** Develop expertise on how to incorporate RPL into the HR systems of businesses of all types. | IND |
| **B.1.2** Enter into partnership agreements with educational institutions to recognize industry-based training and assessment for academic credit, where applicable. | IND |
| **B.1.3** Conduct regular reviews of skills/competencies of staff and incorporate into strategic plans and succession plans that forecast medium to long term business needs. | IND |
| **B.1.4** Conduct portfolio-assisted interviews. | IND |
| **B.1.5** Provide prospective employees/applicants with access to information about international credential recognition and assessment (e.g., IQAS), and support, where applicable, the assessment process and costs. | IND |
| **B.1.6** Help employees prepare a portfolio and access RPL services in the community. | IND |
| **B.1.7** Through provincial or local business associations, develop common tools and resources that help small to medium size firms (that may lack the dedicated HR resources of large firms) to implement RPL activities. | SLFDB, EO |
| **B.1.8** Identify and articulate occupational competencies and learning standards expected in the workplace. | IND |

| Actions | Lead |
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| **B.2 ADOPT RPL AS A SERVICE PROVIDED BY SASKATCHEWAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS/TRAINING PROVIDERS:** | |
| **B.2.1**  Develop an integrated RPL service for learners. | |
| **B.2.1.1** *Establish a first contact at each institution/organization (e.g., phone number, website, etc.) for individuals with questions about RPL.* | ETP |
| **B.2.1.2** *Develop and make available information materials for learners, including international students, on RPL services provided and related fees.* | ETP |
| **B.2.1.3** *Train student services staff as RPL advisors (knowledge of basic information on RPL and referral services).* | ETP |
| **B.2.1.4** *Encourage and promote portfolio approaches into employment services provided to students.* | ETP |
| **B.2.1.5** *Integrate RPL into apprenticeship system student in-take and assessment.* | ATCC |
| **B.2.1.6** *Incorporate RPL processes into adult basic education assessments (e.g., challenge to exams, equivalency assessments, portfolios, etc.).* | SL |
| **B.2.1.7** *Provide pre and post-assessment guidance and support services for the learner to explain RPL assessment outcomes and identify next steps for the learner.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2**  Build capacity to provide RPL services. | |
| **B.2.2.1** *Develop and adopt RPL policy and procedures for the institution/organization, and by program area, where applicable.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.2** *Develop mechanisms to acknowledge RPL credit on official academic transcripts.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.3** *Develop and collect information materials for staff (not limited to advisors and assessors) on RPL processes and benefits.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.4** *Provide referral services to international credential assessment services (IQAS) and/or provide in-house international credential assessment expertise.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.5** *Provide RPL training and on-going professional development opportunities for advisors and assessors, and secure external RPL expertise where required.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.6** *Develop RPL assessment tools or methods, (e.g., interview questions, role-play exercises, challenge exams, portfolio/evidence file expectation,; etc.) that will assess the prior learning against the achievement levels required by the particular credential to be awarded.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.7** *Share information and expertise on RPL processes with other institutions/organizations and interested stakeholders.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.8** *Encourage faculty to communicate expectations and standards more clearly by the articulation of learning outcomes in program areas.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.9** *Develop and make available an appeals mechanism for learners who are unsatisfied with the result of the RPL process.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.10** *Based on labour market demand/forecasts, enter into partnerships with employers and regulatory bodies to provide RPL services to employees or prospective employees.* | ETP |
| **B.2.2.11** *Develop and maintain credit transfer agreements with other institutions and/or organizations to facilitate the efficient use of RPL.* | SaskCAT/ETP |
| **B.2.2.12** *Regularly monitor, review, evaluate and revise RPL policies and practices to maintain and improve standards.* | ETP |

| Actions | Lead |
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| **B.3 USE RPL AS A MEANS TO SUPPORT LABOUR MOBILITY FROM OTHER PROVINCES AND COUNTRIES:** | |
| **B.3.1**   Develop an integrated RPL service for membership candidates**.** | |
| **B.3.1.1** *Establish a first contact for prospective candidates (e.g., phone number, website, etc.) who have questions about how to become licensed in Saskatchewan.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.1.2** *Develop and make available information materials on how prior learning (including international learning) will be assessed by the regulator and any related fees.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.1.3** *Provide pre and post-assessment guidance and support services for the prospective candidate to explain RPL assessment outcomes and identify next steps for the learner.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2**  Build capacity to provide RPL services. | |
| **B.3.2.1** *Develop and adopt RPL policy and procedures.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.2** *Develop mechanisms to acknowledge RPL credit for licensure requirements.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.3** *Develop information materials for staff and professional members (not limited to advisors and assessors) on RPL processes and benefits.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.4** *Enter into partnerships with educational institutions to provide RPL services to prospective members, where applicable.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.5** *Provide referral services to international credential assessment services (IQAS) and/or provide in-house international credential assessment expertise.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.6** *Provide RPL training for advisors and assessors, with on-going professional development opportunities to continue to develop RPL expertise, where applicable.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.7** *Develop RPL assessment tools or methods, e.g., interview questions, role-play exercises, challenge exams, portfolio/evidence file expectations; etc., where applicable.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.8** *Share information and expertise on RPL processes with other provincial regulators and interested stakeholders.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.9** *Articulate skills and competencies required for licensure.* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.10** *Enter into arrangements with other provincial regulators to recognize the skills and competencies of prospective members acknowledged in other jurisdictions through the licensing process (e.g., Mutual Recognition Agreements).* | PRBA |
| **B.3.2.11** *Develop and make available appeals mechanisms for prospective members who are unsatisfied with the result of the RPL process, where applicable.* | PRBA |
| **B.4  INCORPORATE RPL INTO THE CAREER AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS/AGENCIES:** | |
| **B.4.1** Promote Saskatchewan RPL services as part of career counseling advice provided to clients. | |
| **B.4.1.1** *Develop and make available information materials for clients on RPL services provided in Saskatchewan.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.1.2** *Train counseling staff as RPL advisors (knowledge of basic information on RPL and system-wide referral services).* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.1.3** *Encourage and promote portfolio approaches and the documentation of learning "on-the-job" into employment services provided to clients.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.1.4** *Provide non-credit RPL assessment services for the purposes of facilitating employment for clients (e.g., work placements).* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.1.5** *Provide pre and post-assessment guidance and support services for the client, in partnership with the RPL assessor (e.g., educational institution or regulatory body) to explain RPL assessment outcomes and identify next steps for the client.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |

| Actions | Lead |
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| **B.4.1.6** *Provide support for individuals who may have requisite knowledge/skills but have difficulty expressing/demonstrating them. Focus especially on the needs of women, First Nations, Métis, youth, immigrants, refugees, visible minorities and people with disabilities.* | CBO, GDA |
| **B.4.1.7** *Support immigrants/refugees in Saskatchewan by providing services to individuals that will help facilitate the RPL process, where applicable.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.1.8** *Stay well-connected with other stakeholders in order to provide effective RPL advising and referral services to clients.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.2** Build capacity to provide RPL services. | |
| **B.4.2.1** *Develop information materials for staff (not limited to advisors) on RPL processes and benefits.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.2.2** *Provide referral services to international credential assessment services (IQAS), where applicable.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.2.3** *Provide RPL training for advisors, with on-going professional development opportunities to continue to develop RPL expertise.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **B.4.2.4** *Share information and expertise on RPL processes with other CBOs and interested stakeholders.* | CBO, DCRE, GDA |
| **GOAL THREE: DEMONSTRATE ACCOUNTABILITY** | |
| **C.1  EVALUATE RPL SERVICES AND OUTCOMES:** | |
| **C.1.1** Establish a common (minimum) set of output and outcome indicators that measure province-wide RPL activity and the impact of RPL in Saskatchewan. | CG |
| **C.1.2** Individual stakeholders develop additional indicators, if useful to do so, to track and report on RPL activity internally, using the information to improve service delivery. | CG |
| **C.1.3** Develop an evaluation strategy for the Framework that will include a long-term evaluation of the retention, graduation and employment outcomes of learners who have accessed RPL assessment services. | CG |
| **C.1.4** Stakeholders collect and analyze data on RPL activity, and report progress to the public and stakeholder groups. | CG |

## WHAT IS THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING?

Learning does not always take place in the classroom: it also happens on the job, at home, and in the community ─ through hands-on experience, volunteer work, military service, independent study, even leisure activities and travel. Often the skills acquired through these experiences can be applied to the skills or knowledge required in the workplace, at school, or elsewhere.

Recognition of prior learning is a means by which all learning is recognized. It is a credible and practical process that looks at what a person knows and can do, and may lead to recognition for skills and knowledge ─ regardless of how they were acquired. It is a way to address the challenges of skills identification and assessment in a knowledge-based economy where continuous learning must be encouraged and supported.

The term "Recognition of Prior Learning" (RPL) is a broad "umbrella concept" that includes recognition practices undertaken in the fields of qualification recognition (QR), credit transfer (CT), and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). Although terminology in the RPL field may vary according to a range of contexts and perspectives, the development of a general understanding of key terms is essential to facilitating communication among diverse stakeholder groups in the province. The following section outlines several working definitions of important concepts in the field of RPL and it is anticipated that these definitions will continue to evolve.

## DEFINITIONS

*Prior Learning* is comprised of three commonly understood categories including:

- Formal Learning – Learning which is structured and intentional, is achieved through credit-based programs/courses at accredited educational institutions (e.g., certificate, diploma or degree) or recognized by a regulatory body/professional organization for certification.
- Non-Formal Learning – Learning which is intentional, gained through participation in organized workplace-based training, non-credit courses and workshops but does not receive formal credit (e.g. certificates of participation or attendance)
- Informal Learning – Learning which is the incidental learning resulting from life experience, workplace-based tasks, volunteer activities, self-directed learning, hobbies, family responsibilities, etc.

*Qualification Recognition* (QR) practices involve the fair, credible, and standardized assessment of credentials to assist employers, educational institutions and professional regulatory bodies in making informed decisions. QR includes, but is not limited to international credential recognition. The process of QR involves the assessment of credentials obtained at a recognized institution, to determine the degree of comparability with the level of education and standards of an educational institution or professional regulatory body/association. QR processes can lead to, but does not necessarily include, the determination of equivalency of subject matter.

*Credit Transfer* (CT) is defined as the process by which credit is granted towards a credential by one institution for programs or courses previously completed at a recognized institution. The granting of credit is based on the evaluation of equivalencies of subject matter.

*Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* (PLAR) is a systematic process that assesses and recognizes an individual's knowledge and skills regardless of where or how the learning was acquired. A PLAR process generally involves the assessment of experiential learning for a variety of purposes including: career development planning, promotion in the workplace, and obtaining educational credit or occupational certification with reference to the standards of the credential granting body. Experiential learning can be non-formal (e.g., workplace-based training, non-credit courses) or informal (e.g., learning resulting from life experience, workplace-based tasks, hobbies, volunteer activities, family responsibilities, etc.).

The PLAR process includes four key steps:

1.  Identification:  An individual identifies what he/she knows and can do; often an advisor will guide the individual through this process.

2.  Documentation:  Evidence is gathered that demonstrates the individual's knowledge and skills.  There are many forms of evidence, such as letters of validation, work samples, course outlines, performance appraisals, and portfolios.  Individuals can also demonstrate their skills and abilities through role plays, interviews, completing an assignment, taking a test, preparing a case study, etc.

3.  Assessment:  A trained and experienced Assessor will review evidence and determine if it meets the established requirements for recognition.

4.  Recognition: Recognition is awarded, and can take various forms, such as educational credit(s), occupational certification, employment, workplace advancement, or self-recognition.

\*   In addition to the four steps listed above, an ideal PLAR process will also provide candidates with adequate pre and post-assessment guidance, as required.


## WHY IS RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IMPORTANT?

RPL has a variety of benefits for individuals/workers, education/training providers, employers/industry, and professional regulatory bodies/associations.

**RPL can help individuals/workers:**
*   Identify personal strengths and abilities and set career and life goals;
*   Demonstrate skills and knowledge to do a specific job;
*   Work toward achieving academic credits or occupational certification;
*   Improve their job marketability and mobility; and,
*   Clarify employment goals.

> *For example:*
>
> *Cindy needed to obtain occupational certification in her field of Early Childhood Education to keep her job due to regulatory changes. Since she had several years of work-based experience in the field, she decided to challenge the practicum for PLAR credit at SIAST. Cindy demonstrated that she had acquired knowledge and skills from her work experience that matched the practicum's learning outcomes by providing work samples and participating in an interview. She received a PLAR credit for the practicum and is currently taking other courses on a part-time basis to complete her credential. Cindy was very satisfied with the process because she didn't need to duplicate her learning and it saved her time and money. She's also pleased because she can continue to work in her field while attending school.*

**RPL can help education/training providers:**
- Increase recruitment and retention of adult learners;
- Make better use of resources;
- Broaden the range of assessment tools for learners;
- Provide more lifelong learning and career development opportunities;
- Provide flexible and responsive training and education programs that meet the needs of learners and industry; and,
- Forge strategic partnerships with the industry and community.

*For example:*

> *Diane acquired most of her welding knowledge and skills on the job, but didn't have her journeyperson's certificate that would make her more employable and increase her earning power. The company she worked for went through a major reorganization and her welding crew was "downsized".*
> *The company's Employee Relations manager met with Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services to discuss employment/training options for the welders who would soon be out of work. They decided to find out how many of the welders wanted to work towards a journeyperson's certificate and discovered that the majority of them wanted this certificate. These welders participated in a prior learning assessment and recognition process provided by the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission (ATCC) to identify the knowledge/skills they already had and to determine individualized knowledge/skills gaps. After participating in the ATCC evaluation process, the welders were awarded credits and exemptions towards applying for their examinations. SIAST provided the "top-up" training and over half of the trainees were successful in obtaining their certificate through the ATCC. ATCC and SIAST enhanced their reputations for providing effective "made-in-Saskatchewan" solutions to industry training needs by incorporating RPL through working collaboratively to meet these individuals' training needs in a very efficient and timely way. Diane and her colleagues easily found work with their new journeyperson certificate.*

**RPL can help employers/industry:**
- Maximize the skills and knowledge of everyone in the workplace;
- Gain a better understanding of employees' skills, knowledge and training needs;
- Recruit, develop and retain a skilled workforce;
- Promote efficiency by eliminating unnecessary repetitive training;
- Define, document and verify employees' skill/knowledge sets through a systematic process;
- Increase morale and productivity through the recognition of employees' skills/knowledge; and,
- Create job descriptions and expectations to help in hiring and training processes.

*For example:*

> *A Band Council posted an employment opportunity for a deputy returning officer. Darren believed that he had acquired the necessary knowledge and skills from his combined work experience as a firefighter, harvester of wild rice and wood-cutter and so he applied for the position. In the interview, Darren demonstrated how his work-based knowledge and skills were transferable by providing copies of the forms, policies/procedures he followed in the different workplaces, explaining how he delegated authority and showing that he had acquired math skills on-the-job as well. Although Darren did not have the formal educational requirements for the position, the Band Council recognized the transferability of Darren's prior learning and he was hired. As a result of this experience, the Band Council has incorporated competency-based interviewing into their hiring process and values the integration of a RPL process in their overall recruitment and retention strategy.*

*For example:*

> *Ron owns a company in the oil and gas sector with many locations across Canada. Due to growing competition for a smaller pool of skilled workers and the need to begin succession planning in the face of anticipated retirements, Ron instructed his HR manager to explore how the recognition of prior learning could be a potential solution. So, the HR manager worked with staff representatives and senior management to design and implement a human resources management strategy that incorporated RPL.*
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> *All employees had the opportunity to participate in a prior learning assessment to identify knowledge/skills they already had. The assessments were facilitated by industry experts and documented electronically. An analysis of the knowledge/skills set inventory was closely linked to individualized training plans. This allowed the company to plan how they would develop their employees both "horizontally" and "vertically" to tie in with succession planning (especially at the senior management levels) and position the company to secure new contracts.*
>
> *The HR manager also engaged in discussions with the local regional college and universities to negotiate how the employees could obtain academic credit for prior learning gained through work experience and industry-based training. The company's goal is to create mechanisms and flexible learning pathways for employees to obtain desired credentials at the college or university. Ron recognizes that his staff have valuable experience and are interested in moving up, which is a tremendous asset to the company, as many of his existing senior managers are close to retirement. Ron is keen on facilitating an arrangement whereby the company's in-house administration and management training is recognized as equivalent to components of a high-quality business administration program in order to encourage existing staff to pursue promotion and advancement. From Ron's perspective, the return on the investment required to develop and implement a RPL process is very high due to the competitive edge it gives him as an employer who is successful in recruiting and retaining the best talent in the field.*

**RPL can help professional regulatory bodies/associations:**

- Identify competencies required to practice in the profession, and benchmark those competencies against established standards elsewhere (for example, other jurisdictions);
- Create competency-based assessment tools and practices;
- Create fair and equitable access for all prospective applicants; and,
- Meet the needs of their members and prospective members by supporting an efficient qualification recognition process and maintaining high-quality standards for entry to practice in their profession.

*For example:*

> *Kim was trained and worked as an electrical technologist in Southeast Asia for many years and now lives in Saskatchewan as a landed immigrant. He contacted the Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians (SASTT) to find out what the provincial regulations were for practicing in the field. Although professional membership in SASTT is voluntary, it is highly recommended because its members are recognized across Canada and internationally (in seven other countries) since the competency standards upheld by SASTT are developed in accordance with the Canadian Technology Standards. Kim decided it was in his best interest to become a member of SASTT to enhance his employability prospects and so he submitted his official documents for evaluation.*
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> *SASTT's Board of Examiners, in conjunction with a subject matter expert and international credential evaluator, reviewed his credentials and recommended that he receive credit for all the competency standards except computer-assisted design (CAD). A letter was sent to Kim indicating the Board's decision with recommendations for further training and a detailed outline of the competency standard he needed to complete. However, Kim believed that he already possessed the necessary knowledge/skills for the CAD component through a combination of prior learning on the job and work-based training. He followed an appeal process, submitted evidence of his CAD skills and knowledge, and was successful in his RPL challenge.  He is now a SASTT member.*

## ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Framework has been developed based on the participation of many individuals, groups and organizations, intended to reflect a variety of perspectives.  The adoption of a collaborative approach to the management and delivery of RPL services is required to achieve the vision and successfully implement the Framework.  The partnership of stakeholders includes: individuals, education/training providers, industry (business and labour), community-based organizations, professional/trade associations and regulatory bodies and government.

Each stakeholder has a role to play, supporting actions and initiatives that aim to achieve a series of goals/objectives.  It is important to note that many of the actions in the Framework have already been undertaken to varying degrees and that the listed leads serve as preliminary recommendations that require further review and consideration.  The implementation of this Framework will also respect the individual mandates and/or terms of reference of stakeholders.