

Final Evaluation
Learning for Life Initiative

Network of Community Enterprise Development Centres

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Submitted to:

Network of Community Enterprise Development Centres

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Executive Summary

Given the potential of information technology, it is reasonable to expect that technology-based community learning organizations, known as community learning networks, could indeed play an important role in the development of many rural Manitoba communities. In 2000, the Network of Community Enterprise Development Centres (N-CEDC), a network of six rural communities and regional economic development organizations located in south western, south central and west central Manitoba, began the Learning for Life (LFL) Initiative, a three-year pilot program aimed at establishing a community learning network for the benefit of its six member communities. The Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) within Human Resources Development Canada was the primary funder for the project with further financial assistance from Assiniboine Community College, Manitoba Advanced Education & Training; Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, and Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs. Community-based partnerships and funding complemented this funding support.

This final evaluation report is intended to satisfy the evaluation requirements under the terms and conditions of the funding support provided by the Office of Learning Technologies, Human Resources Development Canada. Accordingly, it contains an overview of the N-CEDC as an organization, a review of the major concepts adopted for use by the N-CEDC, and a description of the evaluation methodology. It also presents the major findings of the evaluation as well as major conclusions and recommendations for consideration by the N-CEDC.

The conclusions of the evaluation are that:

- the N-CEDC successfully established a model for building a culture of lifelong learning in the member communities. The efforts on the part of the community facilitators and the community steering committees were major contributing factors to the success of the LFL Initiative at the community level.
- the N-CEDC was highly successful in balancing its aims and purposes as an associative network with the needs of its member communities who vary widely in the population as well as in available human, financial and technological resources.
- the LFL Initiative in every community provided or improved access to lifelong learning activities that helped create a culture of lifelong learning and supported community and individual capacity building.
- at the community level, the LFL Initiative used existing and emerging technologies to the best of their available resources and abilities.
- the N-CEDC's commitment to providing access to resources for the benefit of its member communities was consistent throughout the life of the project.

- the community steering committees played a key role in identifying their community's learning needs and assisting the community facilitator in implementing activities and coordinating partnerships.
- the community facilitators did a remarkable job of implementing a variety of learning activities which were appropriate to their particular community context, made the best use of human and financial resources and addressed the community's learning needs.
- the project manager was essentially the glue that held the project together.

An overarching feature of the LFL Initiative was that the N-CEDC was highly successful in balancing the aims and purposes of the Network with the needs of its member communities. This is significant as the N-CEDC member communities vary widely in population as well as in available human, financial and technological resources. This was often a challenge for the LFL Initiative however, the N-CEDC's commitment to meeting the needs at the local level prevailed throughout the life of the project.

Introduction

The Network of Community Enterprise Development Centres

The Network of Community Enterprise Development Centres (N-CEDC) is an associative network comprised of the following six communities and regional economic organizations: Deloraine, Neepawa, Souris, Rosburn, the Russell area, and Swan Valley which includes the community of Swan River and area. The Board of the N-CEDC is comprised of a representative from each of the six communities. Ex-officio members of the N-CEDC Board are representatives of the Assiniboine Community College, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs, Manitoba Industry, Trade and Mines, and the Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The Learning for Life Initiative was a project of the N-CEDC. The project included the involvement of the N-CEDC Board, ex-officio board members, community facilitators and a project manager (Appendix A) as well as a considerable number of members of community steering committees.

The N-CEDC emerged from a consultative process in 1996 that examined and encouraged the development of regional or associative networks (WESTARC Group, 1996). The N-CEDC is an associative network, that is they are linked by the desire to cooperate with each other by:

- providing expertise and advice;
- complementing and accelerating community-based activities with shared resources;
- offering a means for communities to exchange information and knowledge;
- providing common support resources such as administration, directories of available resources and technical assistance that may be required by all member communities; and,
- developing mechanisms to access resources available from other resources.

Focus on Community Capacity

Initially, the N-CEDC adopted a conceptual understanding of economic development that was aimed at creating industry, or in the vernacular, chasing smoke stacks. In 1999, prompted by the growing recognition of the importance of the development of human and knowledge capital, the Board of the N-CEDC re-evaluated its direction and agreed to focus its efforts on the development of individual and community capacity. The Community Learning Networks Program, sponsored by the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT), provided an opportunity for the N-CEDC to pursue this direction.

Through a series of discussions as a group and as individual communities, the N-CEDC developed and submitted a proposal to the OLT that would benefit the N-CEDC, as a network, as well as bring resources to each of its member communities. In 2000, the N-CEDC received funding approval from the Office of Learning Technologies, Human Resources Development Canada for a three-year, community learning network (CLN) project known as the Learning for Life Community Learning Network or, for the purposes of this report, the LFL Initiative. Additional funding and in-kind support came from Assiniboine Community College, Manitoba Advanced Education & Training, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, and Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs.

Community Learning Networks

The Community Learning Networks is an initiative of the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT), Human Resources and Development Canada. The initiative provides funding to community-based pilot projects, known as community learning networks (CLNs), that demonstrate innovative and sustainable uses of existing network technologies to upgrade skills and knowledge of adult learners in Canadian communities. Partnerships, lifelong learning and the use of information technology, as they are understood by the OLT, characterize community learning networks (Office of Learning Technologies, 2004).

It is important to note that the OLT does not prescribe a model for community learning networks nor does one exist in the literature (New Economy Development Group, 2000). According to the OLT, community learning networks “demonstrate innovative and sustainable uses of existing network technologies to upgrade skills and knowledge in Canadian communities. These community-based approaches help individuals to prepare for and keep employment, and to participate in a culture of lifelong learning” (Office of Learning Technologies, 2004).

The description of community learning networks allows for considerable community flexibility. One aspect of this flexibility is that the community, or in this case, the N-CEDC must refine the rather vague concepts associated with a community learning network.

The evaluation found that the N-CEDC Board refined the key conceptual dimensions of the LFL Initiative by:

- a) developing a set of characteristics adopted by the N-CEDC for its community learning network;
- b) accepting a broader, social perspective for lifelong learning practices; and by,
- c) strongly supporting the nature of the N-CEDC’s community-based approaches to lifelong learning activities.

The N-CEDC outlined these conceptual dimensions at the onset of the project and, with slight modifications, maintained their consistency throughout the LFL Initiative. An understanding of these dimensions helps situate this particular CLN within the wider, national program, and enhances the value of the information provided by this final evaluation. A discussion of each of these dimensions follows.

Characteristics of the Learning for Life Initiative

At a general level, the OLT provided a working description of community learning networks as “community controlled structures and systems aimed at furthering community development and enhancing the lives of their constituencies by supporting and encouraging lifelong learning” (Office of Learning Technologies, 2004).

This description clearly supports the emphasis on community control and decision-making that the evaluation found was a hallmark of the LFL Initiative. For example, the goal of the LFL Initiative was to:

create a model for promoting the sustainability of rural communities by improving access to formal and informal learning opportunities at the local level, creating a culture of lifelong learning and supporting community and individual capacity building (N-CEDC, December 2000).

This clearly speaks to community control and decision-making. As one N-CEDC Board member stated:

It is important to understand that although the OLT Initiative provided some of the resources, the LFL project of the N-CEDC is community-based. The result is that each community is similar in intention but unique in implementation.

The N-CEDC, however, did adopt some specific characteristics for the intentions of the learning activities to be supported by the LFL Initiative. These were activities that would:

- a) help promote lifelong learning;
- b) use, when appropriate and available, information technology as tools to support and enable learning;
- c) use or encourage the development of networks which refer to both the technology that connects individuals and groups, and to the patterns of communication and relationships that stem from a community;
- d) include strong community participation through partnerships with the public, voluntary and/or private sectors; and,
- e) promote individual and community development.

From the documents and discussions, it was clear that the N-CEDC expected differences in the learning activities of each community. Further, these differences were considered to be a strength of the project. At the same time, the N-CEDC as an associative organization of communities wanted the opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of the communities working together.

The unique characteristics of the N-CEDC LFL Initiative can also be seen in the type of operational management, program management and delivery that accommodated individual community contexts, variability of activities, and local level decision-making.

Social Perspective of Adult Lifelong Learning Activities

The concept of lifelong learning suffers from conceptual ambiguity throughout the literature. As indicated by a member of the N-CEDC Board, the concept of lifelong learning was a difficult one for the N-CEDC and its partners to formally define.

As he stated:

In the end, providing a vague definition gave us the greatest opportunity for growth and self-determination in each community.

The Board member added that:

when each community examined its ability to work with the LFL Initiative, it quickly became apparent that the baseline ability, resource and infrastructure, was different in each community. Thus an activity might be seen as progressive by one community but regressive by another.

The evaluation found that the N-CEDC wanted the LFL Initiative to have a great deal of flexibility at the local level. At the same time, the Board recognized its responsibilities to the funders and partners, and prescribed the following set of parameters or “cornerstones” of the project. These cornerstones were that the LFL Initiative would:

1. create awareness and support for the lifelong learning culture at both the local community and network level;
2. provide better coordination of existing learning opportunities at the local level;
3. provide new resources to the communities to facilitate learning opportunities, both formally and informally, based on need and interest; and,
4. build a network of lifelong learning centers to assist and support communities of interest.

These cornerstones clearly referred to the concept of lifelong learning. Many sources referred to lifelong learning as:

- a) *formal education* refers to the type of program format associated with full-time study in traditional educational institutions;
- b) *non-formal* education is with reference to all other organized, systematic educational activities that can be offered by educational institutions or other agencies in the community; and,
- c) *informal education*, is described as being frequently unorganized and unsystematic (Selman, Selman, Cooke and Dampier, 1998).

While useful to organize the type of adult education, these terms more accurately reflect the type of delivery of instruction or program rather than the type of learning activities. As a result, this terminology was not sufficient to describe the variety of lifelong learning activities associated with the LFL Initiative.

For the purposes of this evaluation, the inherent flexibility and application of the concept of lifelong learning at the local level called for a typology of lifelong learning activities, or practices, that was better situated in contemporary social practices rather than program delivery (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997). Thus, the typology of lifelong learning activities used for this evaluation are:

- *lifestyle activities or practices* which are learning activities focused on the individual with an emphasis on self-expression and autonomy. Examples of lifestyle practices are found in recreational and leisure activities.
- *self-improvement activities or practices* are activities focused on one's self as the object of study to be explored and enhanced. Examples of self-help practices include support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, seminars, courses and workshops leading to personal and inner fulfillment.
- *vocational activities or practices* are those adult learning activities that address the needs of the socio-economic system and are targeted at the employability of the individual and marketization of knowledge. Examples include upgrading, institutional-based courses, and university courses taken for credits.
- *social action activities or practices* involve adult learning activities which involve learning for the purpose of social action. Learning is directed at developing an understanding or gathering of information for social action. Examples of these practices include environmental causes in the case of rural communities, farm crisis, rural action groups or immigrant organizations.

Community-based Approaches to Lifelong Learning Activities

The last conceptual understanding embedded in the LFL Initiative is the concept of community-based approaches. The N-CEDC's manifestation of this concept was to:

- a) provide the majority of its funding support to the individual member communities;
- b) allocate these funds equally; and to,
- c) rely on the individual communities to determine the learning priorities of their respective communities.

The Board's decision has foundation in the literature as well as in practice. For example, the literature revealed that community-based learning can be closely associated with a *communitarian* political philosophy that, in its simplest form, can be considered as the intentional activities focused on a common good for the community rather than an individual's preferences (Etzioni, A., 1995; Kymlicka, 1990). This theme is present in an article from G. Hawkins in 1954 which indicated that in Canada,

the concern is more with what one might call the 'community' aspects of adult education. Partly this is a consequence of geography and time. With newly formed and changing communities, with immigrant groups, with the awful challenge of distance, methods and aims are bound to be different. But there is also a newer, consciously evolved philosophy of adult education. It stems from a deep concern with the processes of democracy – with *how* the individual and the group and the community work, as much as *what* they set out to achieve. Hence, the emphasis in their scheme of things on group work, community organization, discussion methods and techniques, leadership courses and so on, and as a background to all that, on the use of mass media to spread a common basis of information for their discussion and their social actions (Selman, Cooke and Dampier, 1998, p. 44).

There are also references in the literature that described community-based learning activities in rural Manitoban communities since the province's earliest days. Illustrative examples of community-based learning in rural Manitoba are the Manitoba Women's Institute, agricultural societies, museum and natural history societies, horticultural organizations and so on (Chapman, 1950; Cox, D. 1997; Harrison, J.F.C., 1961, Poonwassie, D. & Poonwassie, I., 1997, Sandiford, 1936).

Many of these activities continue today, but to date, have received only minimal recognition of their contributions to lifelong learning. A comparison of the features of contemporary community-based approaches and institutional-based approaches to adult and lifelong learning is presented in Table 1 (Rempel, K. 2003).

Table 1: Adult and Lifelong Learning Activities in Rural Communities

Community-based approaches	Institutional-based approaches
Community is a specifically identified social group, organization or geographic entity that identifies learning assets and gaps.	Adult education programs located in a geographic community that may be identified by either the community or by an educational institution.
Aims are to address all types of learning practices (i.e. lifestyle, self-help, vocational, and social action) involving adults in the particular community.	Aims are to meet the educational needs of adults in the community. Generally involves vocational learning practices and certification.
Significant reliance on community-based partnerships, organizations and associations to initiate and support, but not necessarily provide, learning activities. No formalized funding arrangements in Manitoba.	Reliance on professional practitioners or adult educators located in the community. Combination of institutional support and cost recovery from participants.
Individual as well as social and economic goals for the betterment of the common good (Ilgan, P. 1997).	Social and economic goals of individuals in communities, labour force development, skill training or upgrading programs.
Examples: Women's Institutes, LFL Initiative, volunteer organizations, recreational activities, local history societies, agricultural societies, marketing networks.	Examples: Universities, community colleges, training programs offered in the community.

The best description of the LFL Initiative's community-based approach came from one of the community facilitators:

Our local community group usually knows which programs and events would benefit the community or best suit the needs of the community but we often do not have the resources to bring in a presenter or host an event. When this occurs, our community benefits extensively from our partnerships and connections to provide either financial, logistical, in-kind or other support to the event.

Summary of Conceptual Understandings

The preceding discussion presents the particular conceptual understandings for the LFL Initiative. In summary these conceptual understandings are:

- a) the LFL Initiative has a number of unique characteristics as a community learning network that takes into account the individual community context, the variability of activities and the community-level processes used to make decisions about the activities undertaken by each community.
- b) the inherent flexibility and application of the concept of lifelong learning at the local level called for a typology of lifelong learning activities, or practices, that was better situated in contemporary social practices. This typology of lifelong learning practices is based on a social perspective rather than an institutional, instructional or delivery perspective.
- c) a community-based approach to adult or lifelong learning activities differs significantly from an institutional approach to adult or lifelong learning.

Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation Model

In late 2001, the N-CEDC-LFL asked the Rural Development Institute (RDI), Brandon University, to develop an evaluation plan for the LFL Initiative. Based on initial information gathering and analysis of the proposal submitted by the N-CEDC to the Office of Learning Technologies, inception documents (network and community committees), quarterly reports (community to network, project manager to Board), the RDI and the N-CEDC Board confirmed the primary goal, desired outcomes, parameters and objectives of the LFL Initiative (Appendix B).

Early in 2002, the RDI proposed a decision-making evaluation model for the mid-point and final evaluation of the LFL Initiative (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 1985). This is a general purpose evaluation similar to a logic model of evaluation. However, this particular model is more attentive to both the local context, the network dimensions of the LFL Initiative, and the broad nature of the goals and objectives of the LFL Initiative. The model also provided a process to encourage necessary change as the project moved along.

The model incorporated four components:

- a) context (local and organization attitude and approach to lifelong learning activities);
- b) inputs (locally available partnerships, human resources, technological resources);
- c) decision-making processes (how were decisions made at the local level and at the N-CEDC organizational level); and,
- d) products (outcomes of the project at both the local and organizational level).

In March 2001, the N-CEDC approved this evaluation model, the purpose of the various elements, the information required and the suggested instruments that would be used to gather evaluation data (Appendix C). The RDI was not asked to include an evaluation of the management of the financial resources for the LFL Initiative.

The evaluation used a process of data collection from *internal sources*, that is the community facilitators, project manager and N-CEDC Board members, and, an *external evaluator* from RDI. The choice of internal and external evaluators was purposefully selected to help alleviate some of the costs of the evaluation, and to provide information to the N-CEDC that would help change or modify the LFL Initiative throughout the course of the project. The external evaluator managed the type of information gathered from the internal sources according to guidelines set out in the evaluation literature (Love, 1991).

The evaluation process became a useful tool for the project manager, the N-CEDC Board and the community facilitators. For example, the type of data collection process contributed to the professional development of the community facilitators. It also helped the project manager, community facilitators, and the Board develop a good understanding of the LFL Initiative. While the on-going nature of the evaluation brought the external evaluator close to the N-CEDC Board, project manager and community facilitators, this relationship did not in any way interfere with the LFL Initiative as verified by the project manager.

Data collection and analysis

It is rarely possible to prescribe specific benchmarks for programs that have a broad range of objectives without limiting the potential understanding of the comprehensive nature of the program. This is the case of the LFL Initiative. With this in mind, the evaluator reviewed the documentation and the set of parameters and objectives (Appendix B) and subsequently identified four major benchmarks with relevant indicators that were used as the guiding framework for data collection and analysis.

The instruments (Appendix D) used to collect information about the LFL Initiative were designed to include the elements of the particular community characteristics which influenced the LFL activities and outcomes (context), the particular resources available to the community (input), the decision-making processes used (process), and the outcomes (product).

The evaluator analyzed the data gathered through the various instruments based on, but not limited to, the major benchmarks and relevant indicators outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Goal, Benchmarks and Indicators

Goal:	
To create a model for promoting the sustainability of rural communities by improving access to formal and informal learning opportunities at the local level, creating a culture of lifelong learning and supporting community and individual capacity building	
Benchmarks	Indicators
LFL Initiative's ability to address local community context.	<p>Participation of local steering committees.</p> <p>Individual community goals and objectives.</p> <p>Lifelong learning activities that are indicative of individual community goals and objectives.</p> <p>Community-based decision process as described by the community steering committees.</p> <p>Impact on the community of goals and technology based on survey results.</p>
LFL Initiative's use and application of new and emerging technology for its activities.	<p>Identification and promotion of existing technological resources within and available to each community.</p> <p>Use of existing and emerging technologies.</p> <p>Access to learning opportunities the use or demonstrate new and emerging technologies.</p> <p>Use of technology to create and sustain "communities of interest".</p> <p>Sharing of community learning experience within the membership of the N-CEDC.</p> <p>Impact of technology based on interview results and surveys.</p>
Culture of lifelong learning at the local level.	Increased recognition of the potential of lifelong learning in rural community.
Long-term impacts and outcomes at the N-CEDC and the local level.	<p>Partnerships.</p> <p>Outcomes and impacts of the LFL Initiative at the local and organizational level..</p> <p>Best Practices documentation.</p>

Findings

The evaluation findings for the LFL Initiative are organized using headings which follow the benchmarks identified under Table 2.

Ability to Address the Local Community Context

The N-CEDC Board and its member communities focused on the local level by implementing an operational model for the LFL Initiative that encouraged local decision-making and administration (Figure 1). At the apex of the pyramid, the N-CEDC Board provided policy and planning direction to the project manager. The project manager was hired on a part-time contract over the life of the LFL Initiative and reported to the N-CEDC Board. In general, her responsibilities were to provide overall administration and implement Board decisions for the LFL Initiative.

In the early days of the LFL Initiative, the N-CEDC member communities either:

- a) established a community steering committee of volunteers or interested agencies (Neepawa, Rossburn, Souris and Swan Valley); or,
- b) took advantage of an existing adult education committee (Deloraine and Russell).

In either situation, these community steering committees formed the baseline of the operational model used to address the local community context. These community steering committees were responsible for:

- identifying the learning needs of the community;
- helping to facilitate partnerships; and,
- encouraging the sustainability of lifelong learning activities over the life of the LFL Initiative.

Each of the N-CEDC member communities received an equal amount of funding support to hire a part-time (20 hours per week) community facilitator. Specifics of the job description were left to the N-CEDC community board member with some assistance of the project manager, and in some cases, the community's steering committee.

The communities supplied office space for the facilitator. The duties of the community facilitators included, but were not limited to:

- planning and organizing learning activities which would respond to the community needs;
- administering budgets;
- seeking partnerships for learning activities;
- overseeing the CAP sites;

- promoting lifelong learning in the community; and,
- arranging facilities and advertising for LFL learning activities.

In addition to providing funding for the position of the community facilitator, the LFL Initiative provided funding resources for the community learning activities or other duties performed by the community facilitator. The community facilitators prepared a proposed plan of quarterly and yearly activities including budgets and in-kind or financial support from community partners. These reports were then submitted to the project manager for approval. At the completion of each quarter, the community facilitators completed an activity report that included a checklist of the project parameters involved in the learning activity (see the Activity Report Form in Appendix D).

The community facilitators reported to the project manager; however, the evaluation found that the allegiance of the community facilitators was solidly with their communities. Typically, activities were pre-approved yet there were occasions when community facilitators seized opportunities or carried out activities that were outside of the plan. Usually this did not cause problems although there were instances when the project manager did not agree with the activity and funding of the activity became an issue.

Figure 1: LFL Initiative Operational Model



Community Steering Committees

The community steering committees played an important role in the LFL Initiative. At the beginning of the LFL Initiative, the community steering committees brought together individuals from the community or representatives from various organizations. For most of the communities, this was a new committee for the community. In the case of **Deloraine** and **Russell**, existing adult learning committees took on the responsibilities for the LFL Initiative. The responsibilities for the committees included:

- determining the goals and objectives of the community;
- identifying community learning needs;
- recommending learning activities for the community based on the needs of the community; and,
- bringing partnerships to the table.

The evaluation revealed that as the project carried on the participation of the community volunteer members of the community steering committees dwindled while participation of 'institutional' members remained strong and committed. This diminished participation was noted by the remaining members of the community steering committees and attributed to volunteer burnout in rural communities. Notably, all of the community steering committees remarked on the lack of participation of the business sector.

Having a residual base of members from various institutions was not without its benefits. All of the community steering committees expressed a great deal of satisfaction and benefits from being at the table together. The LFL Initiative resulted in a number of partnerships among the agencies that previously did not happen. For example, the community steering committees in **Deloraine**, **Neepawa**, **Souris** and **Swan Valley**, remarked that partnerships and inter-agency cooperation were likely the most important outcomes of the LFL in their communities.

The Education and Training Committee in **Russell** and the Board of the Prairie Skills Inc. in **Deloraine** had long recognized the benefits of a community-based approach to adult learning. Both of these committees have carried on at the end of the LFL Initiative.

The benefits of the partnerships appear to have left an impression on other communities. At the time of the evaluation, the Chamber of Commerce in Swan River had begun to think about possible education sessions. In **Souris**, the new economic development officer, was pursuing the potential of the establishment of an education and training committee. In **Neepawa**, the LFL community steering committee was planning to continue to work on literacy as their goal.

Attracting Partnerships

Partnerships are one of the characteristics of community learning networks cited by the OLT. The enhanced ability of the LFL Initiative to encourage partnerships and to

increase the coordination of learning activities was clearly demonstrated in all of the N-CEDC communities. The types of partnerships included in LFL activities included increased coordination of activities, funding support to match contributions from the N-CEDC or in-kind assistance of various forms.

For example, the community of **Souris** partnered with the local community access channel to broadcast some of the learning activities. **Russell** partnered with the local juried art show to provide a marketing seminar for artists and craftspeople. **Rosburn** worked with the local Ukrainian dance group to initiate cultural activities. **Neepawa's** LFL community steering committee members and the facilitator were able to attract a number of technology-based businesses to participate in their highly successful technology fair. **Deloraine's** partnership with the Prairie Skills Inc. helped establish the Adult Learning Centre in the community.

One of the most notable was **Swan Valley's** partnership with the local Metis Friendship Centre. The LFL community facilitator position was a full-time position supported in part by the Manitoba Metis Federation. As a member of the Metis community in the Swan Valley area, the coordinator was active within the local friendship centre and able to encourage other Metis people to attend LFL activities. This relationship also encouraged the Friendship Centre to partner in other LFL activities. This partnership was cited by the community steering committee as one of the legacies of the LFL Initiative in **Swan Valley**.

It is worth noting again that some members of the community steering committees commented on the lack of participation of the business community in LFL learning activities in spite of their best efforts to collaborate with or communicate LFL activities to this sector. This was obviously a gap that the committees would have liked to fill.

Local Interpretations of the LFL Initiative

In 1999, the N-CEDC made a decision, as a network, to seek the goal of building community capacity. This goal inherently includes the development of human and knowledge capital through the continual development of knowledge, skills and abilities over an individual's lifetime.

Subsequently, the N-CEDC received approval for the LFL Initiative. The following four parameters or cornerstones guiding the Initiative were the N-CEDC's overarching objectives to:

1. create awareness and support for the lifelong learning culture at both the local community and network level;
2. provide better coordination of existing learning opportunities at the local level;
3. provide new resources to the communities to facilitate learning opportunities, both formally and informally, based on need and interest; and to,

4. build a network of lifelong learning centers to assist and support communities of interest.

Early in the LFL Initiative, the N-CEDC as a network, determined that the local communities should take the lead in determining how best they would achieve these overarching goals. However, the N-CEDC further refined these overarching goals with more specific LFL project parameters. As indicated on the project activity reports, LFL activities were to include some or all of the following project parameters:

- facilitate and expand formal and informal learning opportunities;
- provide opportunity for skill development;
- promote technological resources in the community;
- demonstrate existing and emerging technologies that support lifelong learning;
- encourage the use of technologies that support agricultural and rural entrepreneurship;
- ensure programs and resources meet rural needs of accessibility and flexibility; and,
- explore communities of interest.

The evaluation found that the community facilitators, and in some cases the community steering committees, adopted a much more flexible interpretation of these overarching goals. The evaluation also noted, as evidenced by the activity reports, that in some cases, the community facilitators gave broad interpretation of the project parameters. This flexibility was expected by the N-CEDC Board which they deemed to be a strength of the LFL Initiative. In the opinion of the evaluator however, this flexibility was, on occasion, stretched to an extreme. The diligence of the project manager kept these activities to a minimum.

Determining Local Learning Needs

While the N-CEDC encouraged flexibility, it also encouraged the community steering committees to use a decision-making model to determine their priorities (Appendix E). The evaluation concluded that this model was not used to the extent desired by the N-CEDC Board and project manager.

The N-CEDC Board adopted this model in response to a recommendation from the mid-point evaluation for a more deliberate decision-making process at the community level for determining learning priorities. At the time of the mid-point evaluation, there appeared to be no mechanism in place at the community level for choosing among a number of competing demands for learning activities at the community level. Using a collaborative process with the community facilitators, the project manager encouraged

the community facilitators to use the decision-making model to determine their community's learning priorities.

Some of the community steering committees and facilitators were grateful for the model. For example, the community facilitator in **Rosburn**, after initially struggling with decisions about the priorities of learning activities, appeared to find significant comfort in using the model:

At the start, the committee consisted of nine people representing different clubs and organizations within the community. It was difficult to decide at a meeting what activities would be acceptable. By following this checklist, there was no deviation from the focal point. This also accomplished the goals for the project.

In contrast, the steering committee in **Swan Valley** expressed consternation at the parameters suggested by the decision-making model, even though the community facilitators were comfortable with it. The community steering committees and facilitators in **Deloraine** and **Neepawa** were also comfortable with the model. The community steering committee of **Souris**, which was disadvantaged due to change over in community facilitators, adopted the model over time. Members of the Education and Training Committee in **Russell** were unaware of the decision-making model having placed their confidence in the community facilitator to make the appropriate decisions for selecting the LFL learning activities.

The N-CEDC Board adopted the decision-making process to help achieve the overall goals of the Initiative while at the same time addressing the learning needs and priorities of the member communities. However, throughout the life of the LFL Initiative, decision-making about learning activities appeared to be a problem. Reflecting back, many of the members of the community steering committees, community facilitators and N-CEDC Board members stated that it would have been helpful if the decision-making model had been in place at the beginning of the project. It point of fact however, the parameters used in the decision-making model were in place and stated from the beginning of the project.

Operational Decisions of the LFL Initiative

The operation of the LFL Initiative did allow for flexibility and application of the initiative at the local level. To make operational decisions, facilitate decisions, the N-CEDC used a decision-making process using the configuration shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: LFL Initiative Decision Making Process for LFL Learning Activities



This process was compatible with the accountability pyramid shown in Figure 3. At the top of the pyramid the N-CEDC Board was most accountable to external funders and the community steering committees, were the most removed from accountability.

Figure 3: LFL Initiative Accountability to External Funders



The evaluation found that, over time, the decision-making process for the LFL Initiative did not stand up well to the competing demands of addressing and meeting local needs while trying to administer and be accountable for a network project.

In particular, the project manager had the most difficult time administering decision of the Board at the local level. There were also indications that some of the N-CEDC Board members walked on a narrow fence between loyalty to their own community and loyalty to the N-CEDC as a network. This situation was most noted by the ex-officio members of the N-CEDC Board who wondered if there had been too much focus on meeting the needs of the local communities.

Local Community Goals and Objectives

At the local level, the community steering committee and the community facilitator were given the responsibility to determine the learning goals and activities for their community. The evaluation found that the N-CEDC member communities successfully achieved their identified goals and objectives through the variety of partnered and stand-alone activities that were provided through the LFL Initiative in each of the communities. Discussion of each of the communities follows.

Deloraine

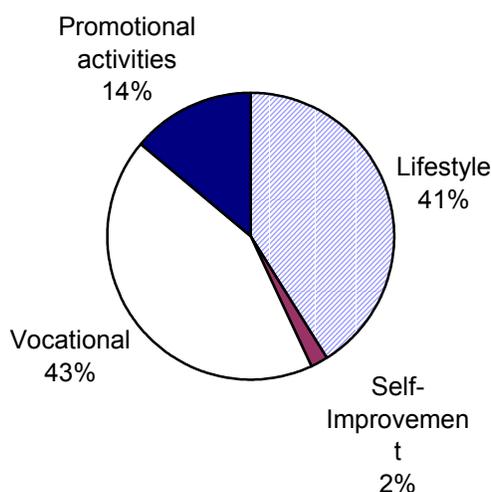
Using a PATH needs assessment process, the Deloraine community steering committee identified its goals as the promotion and facilitation of adult learning activities in the community.

Prior to the LFL Initiative, the community of Deloraine did not have an adult learning centre. However, Prairie Skills Inc., (PSI) a not-for profit, charitable organization had

included as one of its areas of focus, the development of education, skill development and lifelong learning opportunities. With considerable volunteer effort, PSI had a facility available for use but no identified adult learning program and no facilitator to help organize and promote adult learning activities in the community.

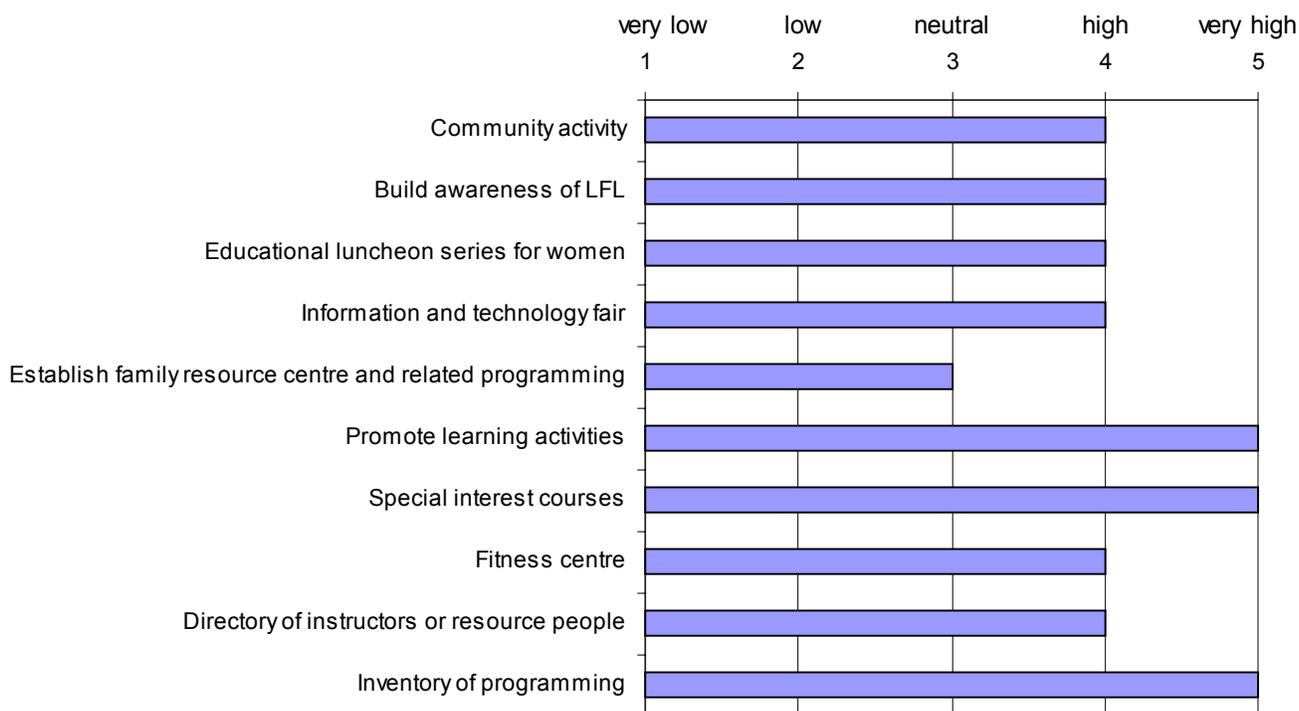
The LFL Initiative was an excellent match for PSI. The facility provided by

Chart 1: Learning Activities in Deloraine
(n=49)



PSI became known as the Adult Learning Centre. The Centre provided programming options not previously available in the community. The PSI board acted as the community steering committee for the LFL Initiative. A community facilitator was hired to put into place adult learning programs and initiate contact with other partners in the community. From the onset of the LFL Initiative, Deloraine focused its efforts on complementing and building the adult learning activities in the community. Promotional activities, specifically a newsletter, identified lifelong learning opportunities in the community and surrounding area. Lifestyle activities included a ‘lunch and learn’ health series and early childhood sessions. Vocational learning activities involved the community facilitator’s efforts to support access to computer-based instruction, such as Campus Manitoba, or administer the CAP sites, some of which were made possible through the LFL Initiative.

Chart 2: Impact of LFL Activities in Deloraine



The scale of the impact of the LFL Initiative in Deloraine was described as high or very high as presented in the following graph.

The evaluation concluded that the goals and objectives of the LFL Initiative in Deloraine were successfully achieved. The most significant achievements were the establishment of the Adult Learning Centre, the increased access and participation of adult learners in

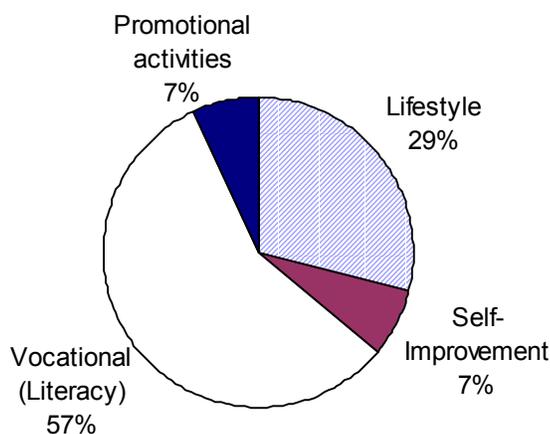
CAP sites and Campus Manitoba, and the enhanced technological skills of the community facilitator. The PSI remained as a strong community-based board focused on adult learning and built on the ability of partnerships.

Neepawa

The LFL Initiative in Neepawa suffered from a one-year delay in implementation, caused by factors beyond the control of the N-CEDC. Once established, the community steering committee and the community facilitator initially presented a variety of learning activities. Later on the steering committee and the facilitator reached a decision to focus on literacy needs in the community.

Lifestyle activities were largely health related and delivered in partnership with the regional health authority. The vocational activities of Neepawa were comprised of CAP site administration and related training, a reading program for young mothers and children, and the considerable effort that went into the development of a comprehensive literacy strategy and proposal submission to a federal funding agency. The community steering committee and the facilitator were profoundly disappointed when the proposal was declined. At the time of the evaluation interviews, committee members were highly frustrated and criticized government policies and practices for adult learning that they felt were not based on community needs.

Chart 3: Learning Activities in Neepawa (n=14)

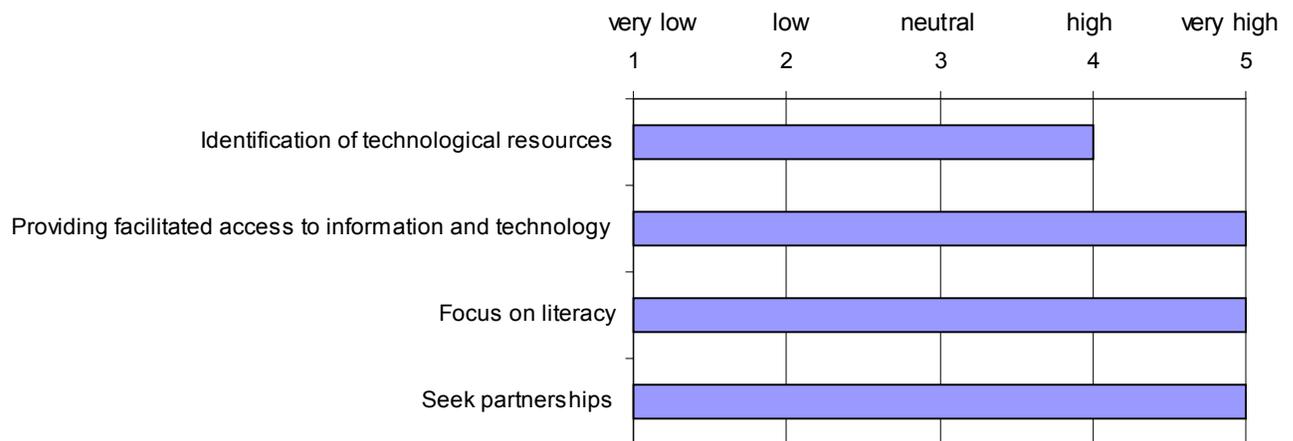


The community steering committee described the Mother Goose program as one of the best examples of the LFL Initiative in their community. The reading program focused on young mothers and children in the community. The program encouraged reading activities and parenting skills to young mothers.

The impacts of the LFL activities in Neepawa were generally considered to be high in spite of the declined submission for a literacy program in the community (Chart 4).

The steering committee felt that identifying the community's literacy needs was a significant outcome of their efforts and had a very high impact on the community. Other activities cited as having a very high impact was the work of the community facilitator assisting people with using technology and the partnerships established throughout the LFL Initiative.

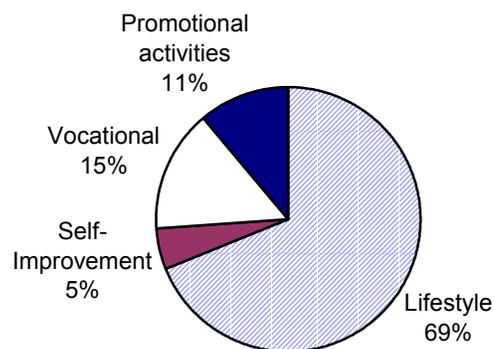
Chart 4: Impact of LFL Activities in Neepawa



Rosburn

As the smallest community in the Network, Rosburn was continually challenged by human and financial resources, access to partnerships, and weak community participation. It should be noted that during the life of the LFL Initiative, the community faced issues including the potential loss of a police detachment and loss of health care services that consumed a considerable amount of emotional energy from the community steering committee and the community facilitator.

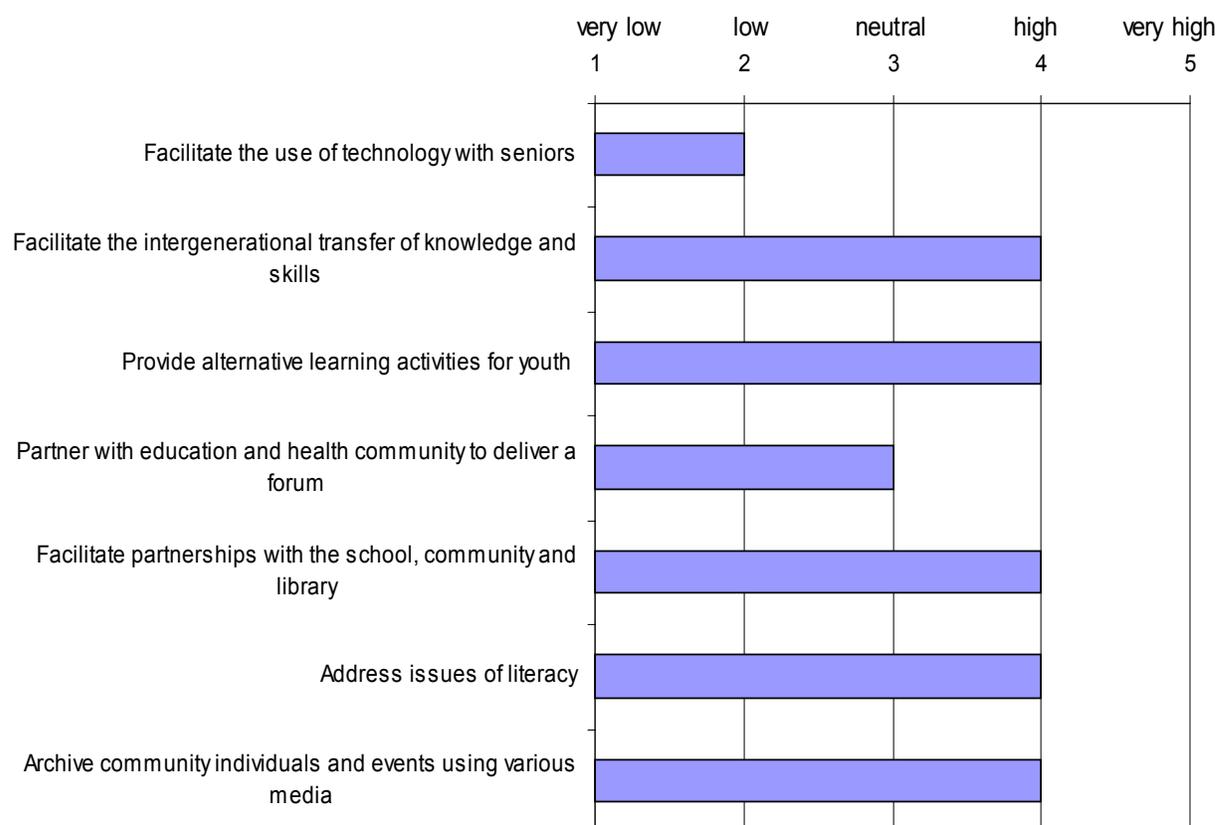
Chart 5: Learning Activities in Rosburn (n=55)



The community steering committee determined that it would focus on the needs of cultural and lifestyle learning activities for youth and seniors in their community.

Overall, the LFL Initiative in Rosburn successfully met the goals for learning activities set out by the community steering committee. Its high proportion of lifestyle activities reflected the LFL Initiative's cultural learning activities. These activities were in large part made possible by access to the Ukrainian culture.

Chart 6: Impact of LFL Activities in Rosburn



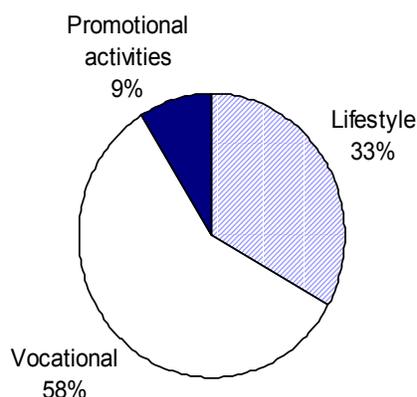
The evaluation concluded that the LFL Initiative did achieve the learning goals that the community steering committee set out but was continually challenged by the lack of participation. Seniors and youth appeared to receive the most benefits from the learning activities.

Russell

The initial goal of the LFL Initiative in Russell was to secure an administrative person to help improve and expand educational opportunities within the community and around the

region. In Russell and area, there are a variety of agencies with an interest in lifelong learning activities including Assiniboine Community College, Parkland West Adult Learning Centre, the Community Employment Centre and the Park West School Division. The Education and Training Committee, a committee organized through the Russell and District Chamber of Commerce, brought these agencies together; however, an administrative person was needed to help identify learning gaps and facilitate training sessions needed for a short duration. Information exchange, improved promotion and better coordination of lifelong learning activities were seen as critical to ensuring the viability of all agencies.

Chart 7: Learning Activities in Russell (n=33)



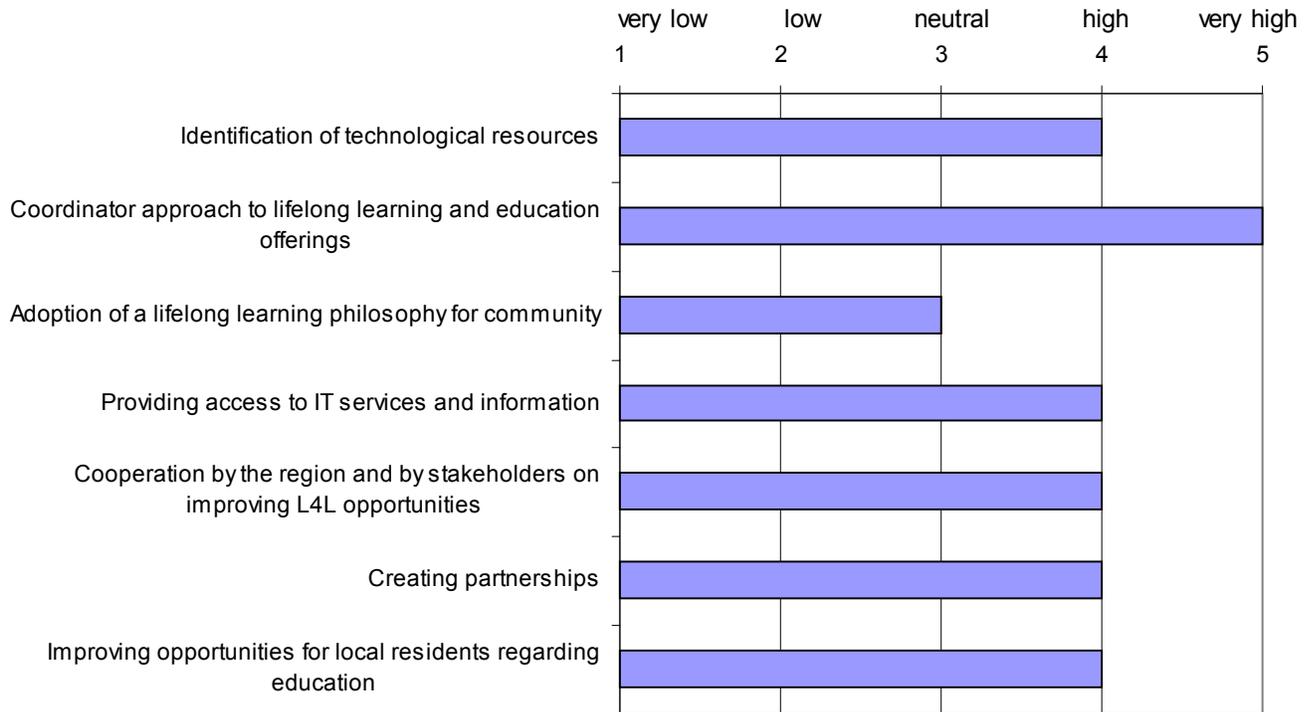
The position of the LFL community facilitator was combined with the position of recreational director. It appeared that this combined position helped initiate lifestyle learning activities associated with fitness. There was an overlap with vocational learning activities, as the Russell LFL Initiative used recreation as a platform for training instructors and promoting the 'business' of

fitness. The community also had considerable success in facilitating art and music events.

The extent to which the LFL Initiative reached its learning objectives was difficult to assess. In large part this can be attributed to the community's goals for increased coordination among the agencies through the Education and Training Committee. This was a notable success of the LFL Initiative and a valuable model for coordinating community-based approaches to lifelong learning.

The support provided through the LFL Initiative helped the community facilitator bring together a number of agencies with the ability to present a coordinated approach to lifelong learning. The impact of this coordinated approach was cited as being very high. However, the evaluator would like to have seen a more complete rationale for and description of the community's learning priorities.

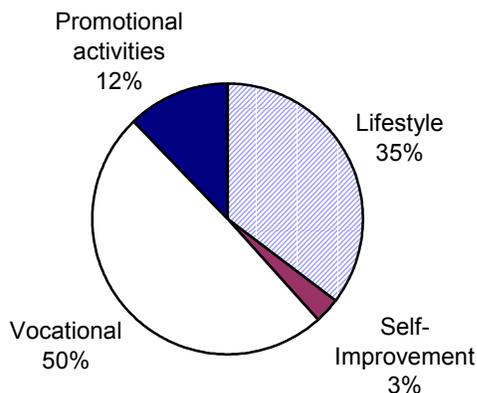
Chart 8: Impact of LFL Activities in Russell



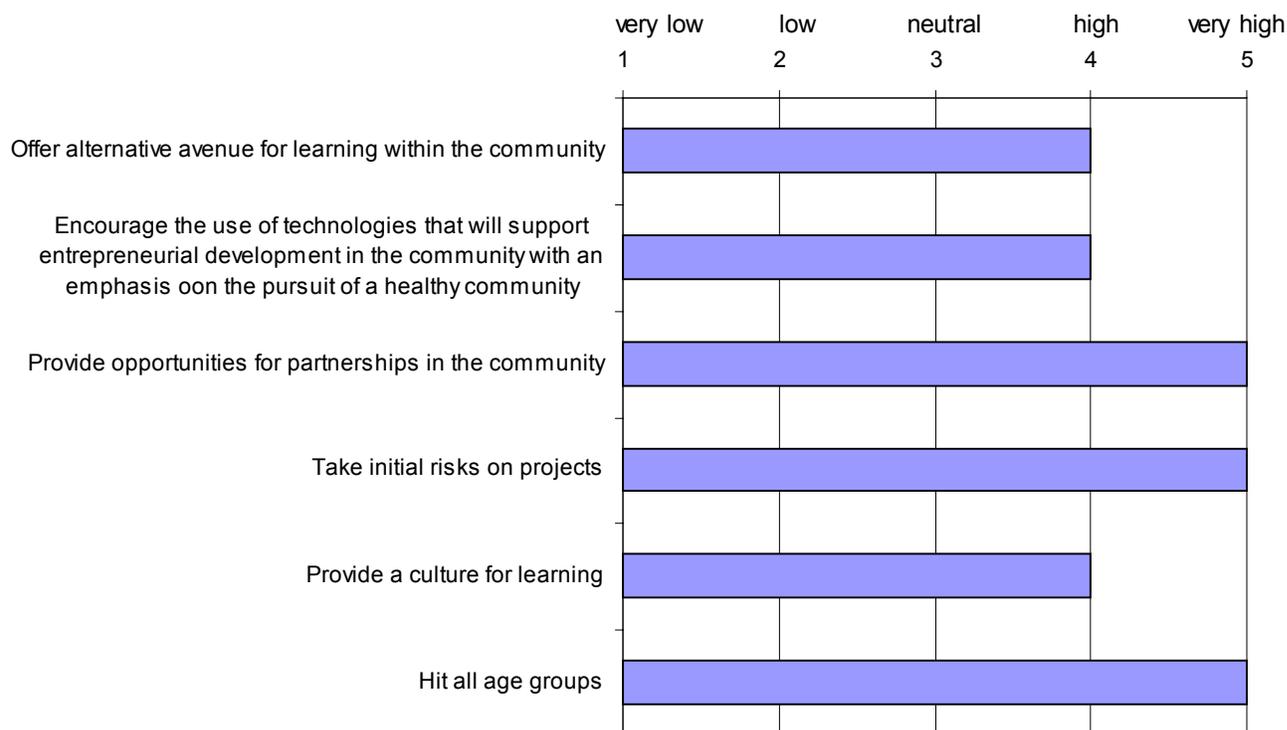
Souris

The community steering committee in Souris also used a PATH needs assessment process to determine its learning goals and objectives of the communities. These needs were a combination of vocational (business, entrepreneurial programs, computer training) and lifestyle types of learning activities (health series).

Chart 9: Learning Activities in Souris (n=57)



The LFL Initiative focused on providing alternative approaches to learning in the community. These efforts as assessed by the community steering committee were considered to have a high impact.

Chart 10: Impact of LFL Activities in Souris

In addition to these alternative approaches the Souris LFL Initiative developed and sustained partnerships and launched new learning activities such as the luncheon health series, e-commerce sessions and virtual conferences. Chart 10 presents the impact of other aspects of Souris' activities based on survey information.

The LFL Initiative in Souris faced a considerable challenge caused by the departure of two community facilitators and a vacancy in the position for nearly six months. In the last months of the LFL Initiative in Souris, the recreation director did an admirably job in facilitating the LFL learning activities.

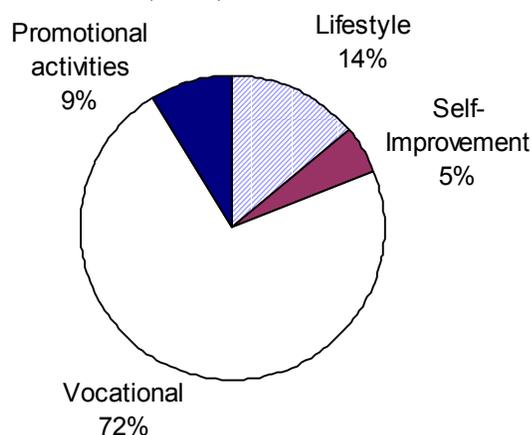
The evaluation found that the Souris LFL Initiative provided a well-rounded set of learning activities that stretched across all ages. Many experts in the field of lifelong learning would be well pleased with Souris' efforts to take an inclusive approach to learning across all ages.

Swan Valley

The Swan Valley LFL Initiative is regionally based and includes the community of Swan River and several smaller rural communities. The Swan Valley LFL Initiative concentrated its efforts on vocational learning activities particularly on the development of labour force skills and technological skills.

Without question, Swan Valley, as elaborated elsewhere in this report, stood out as an exemplar of for the LFL Initiative. These efforts are highly commendable and due in large part to the extra efforts on behalf of the N-CEDC Board member from Swan Valley, who faced an additional challenge resulting from the high rate of turnover of the LFL community facilitators.

Chart 11: Learning Activities in Swan Valley
(n=91)

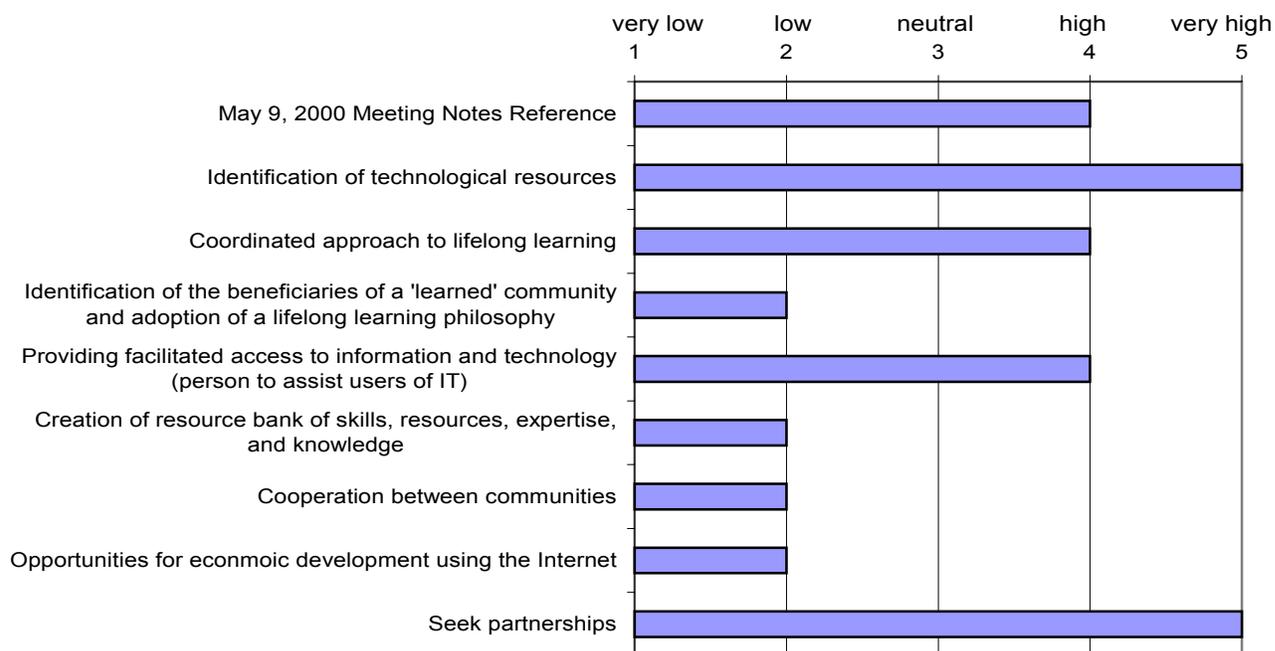


A conclusion of this evaluation is that the Swan Valley LFL Initiative best typified the notion of a community learning network and best fulfilled the stated objectives of the LFL Initiative.

The LFL Initiative, facilitated by the Swan Valley Enterprise Centre (SVEC) provided a variety of learning activities aimed at labour force and skills development, facilitated a number of partnerships, encouraged the development of a volunteer network in the area and extended the use of existing and emerging technologies and reached out to partner with a disadvantaged population in the community.

The administration and documentation provided by the SVEC was also exceptional. One of the activities with the highest impact was the identification of all publicly available technology in the area. Another high impact outcome were the establishment of new partnerships with organizations that traditionally had not been involved in learning activities.

Chart 12: Impact of LFL Activities in Swan Valley



Use of Existing and Emerging Technology

The use of technology is one of the characteristics of community learning networks. Based on that characteristic, the LFL Initiative pursued a number of major objectives focused on technology. These objectives included:

- identification and promotion of existing technological resources within and available to each community;
- demonstration and encouragement of the use of existing and emerging technologies that support lifelong learning and that support entrepreneurial development in the community;
- consideration of access to learning opportunities and technologies that addressed the needs of rural communities for accessibility and flexibility; and,

- seeking opportunities to use technology to create and sustain communities of interest.

The evaluation sought answers to following three broad questions regarding the use of technology at the network and at the local level.

- To what extent did the N-CEDC as a network and as individual communities demonstrate and encourage the use of existing and emerging technologies that support lifelong learning?
- What factors contributed or inhibited the use of technology?
- What demographic groups benefited the most from the use of technology promoted as part of the LFL Initiative?

The evaluation examined the activity reports provided by the community facilitators to determine each community's use of existing and emerging technology. The impact of technology was assessed from the short-term observations from the N-CEDC Board members, community steering committees and community facilitators.

Providing Access to Learning Opportunities and Technology

The partnership between the N-CEDC and the Community Access Program (CAP) funded through the Manitoba Community Connections Initiative, had a 'high' or 'very high' impact on the LFL Initiative particularly at the local level.

Prior to the LFL Initiative, there was no relationship between the N-CEDC and the CAP. Through the LFL Initiative, the N-CEDC was able to access program funds to place additional CAP sites in the various communities. In each of the N-CEDC communities, the maintenance and monitoring of these sites became a large component of the community facilitators' responsibilities. Over the summer months, these responsibilities included the supervision of students hired through the Community Access Program – Youth Initiative (CAP-YI).

As a result of the LFL Initiative, the **N-CEDC** is now recognized as a community resource network based on a 'community of interest' philosophy rather than geographic network. It participates in a provincial 'e-association' as a community service agency and is currently contributing to the federal-provincial consultations with Industry Canada regarding the future of community access to technology.

At the local level, the partnership between the N-CEDC and the CAP provided real benefits to the member communities. The partnership enabled each community to refresh its public access computers and establish new contacts. These resources were then available for programming for lifelong learning activities.

For example, the **Swan Valley** area added six additional CAP sites. The community steering committee in Swan Valley was particularly pleased with its one-on-one and group training sessions offered to seniors, other adults, and youth. These sessions

included basic computer use, the Internet, email, digital photography and desktop publishing. The N-CEDC Board member from Swan Valley indicated that people in the community have become more aware of the CAP sites and more comfortable with using computers and related technology.

At the beginning of the LFL Initiative, **Deloraine** had two single access sites that were outdated systems with no access to high speed connections. At the conclusion of the LFL Initiative Deloraine had multiple access sites in the community including a new system at the Library, an access point at the seniors' housing and a medium access site at the Prairie Skills Centre. As indicated by one of the Deloraine Community Steering Committee,

Prior to the LFL Initiative, the only computer access was during the evenings at the high school – when there was no other school program on. Over the past three years we have offered more than 20 courses to more than 100 community residents. The senior population is a totally new market that was untouched prior to the LFL and additional CAP sites.

At the start of the Russell LFL Initiative, CAP sites were available only in the town of **Russell**. Over the past three years it has been expanded to include a number of smaller communities, providing learning opportunities particularly for seniors in these communities. Since the beginning the LFL Initiative, Russell has seen a continual rise in computer usage.

Creating and Sustaining Communities of Interest

At the network level, the **N-CEDC** had mixed results in achieving its desire to utilize appropriate technologies, including web based technology as a way to create and sustain communities of interest.

One of the most successful examples of the potential of technology was the Living Leadership professional development sessions offered simultaneously via satellite conference, in each of the member communities of the N-CEDC. This opportunity provided the communities with access to world leaders. In the community of **Deloraine**, one of the community's major employers used the Living Leadership seminar as a professional development opportunity for its employers. In rural communities, professional development opportunities are not readily available. All the communities indicated that they were able to create a greater awareness of the value and use of technology in their communities particular to reduce the barriers of distance.

In the last months of the LFL Initiative, the N-CEDC and its member communities expended considerable energy in trying to organize another technology-based, virtual conference, *Rural Forcast*, in partnership with the Community Connections Initiative, and the Manitoba Smart Network.

At the end of the LFL Initiative, many of the technological barriers were still unresolved resulting in postponement of the conference for several months after the end of the LFL Initiative. It was obvious that the N-CEDC Board and its partners remain committed to the virtual conference as well as the potential of technology to overcome the barriers of distance. In this case, however, the potential was undermined by the reality of the technological infrastructure as a tool. As one member of the Board commented:

Rural Forcast will be an interesting experiment and most closely resembles the 'testing ' of technology than can have a great impact on rural communities.

The evaluation findings indicated that the N-CEDC as a network did use and integrate technology but primarily for standard communication purposes even though there was potential via the web site or the web portal. As one Board member commented

Some people find that using technology to communicate is not usually very effective, but we could have used the opportunity to learn how to effectively use technology to communicate.

Another Board member commented that the mandatory use of technology amongst board members was needed to encourage greater use of technology.

Use of Existing and Emerging Technologies for Learning Activities

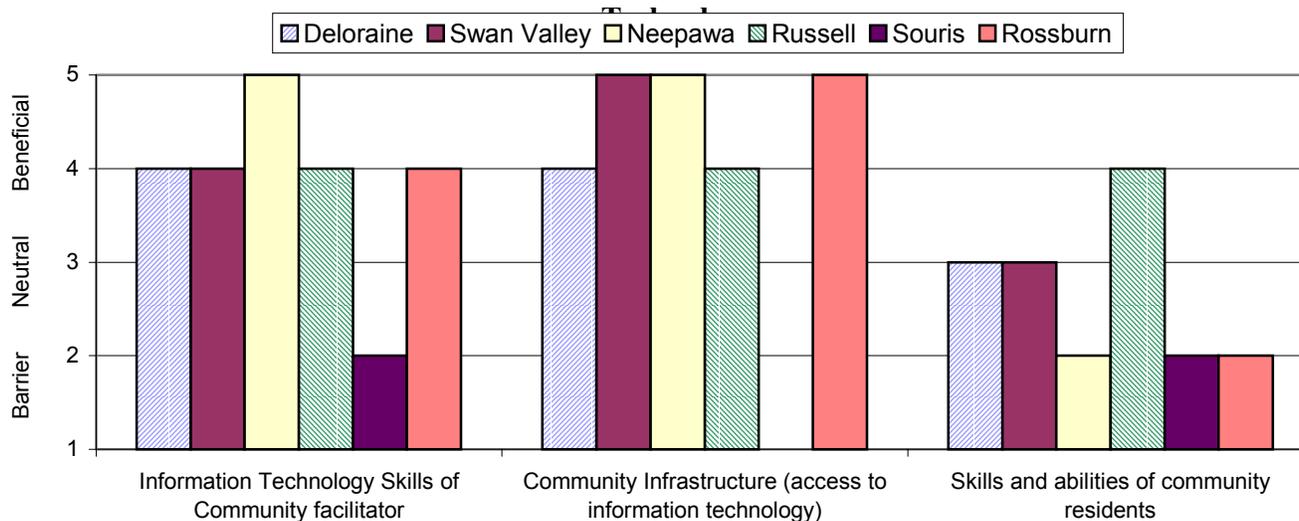
At the local level, the evaluation revealed that there was a wide variety of the types of learning activities that demonstrated or encouraged the use of technology for lifelong learning.

There were a few major factors that appeared to influence the use and integration of information technology at the local level. These factors were:

- a) the information technology skills of the community facilitator;
- b) the community infrastructure for technology; and,
- c) the skills and abilities of the community residents.

A survey questions posed to the N-CEDC Board and the community facilitators asked the extent of the influence of these factors (Chart 13). These factors were then compared with the activity reports provided by the community facilitators.

Chart 13: Factors Influencing the Use and Integration of Information



The findings indicated that:

- In **Deloraine**, the technological skills of the community facilitator and the community infrastructure were somewhat beneficial factors influencing the use and integration of technology. The skills and abilities of the community residents was a neutral factor. The variety of learning activities involving technology in Deloraine was nearly 50%. This is indicative of the location of multiple CAP sites in the Adult Learning Centre and the coordinator's joint position as the coordinator of the Centre.
- In **Neepawa**, the technological skills of the community facilitator as well as the community's technological infrastructure were beneficial factors influencing the use and integration of technology. The skills and abilities of the community residents were cited as a barrier. The percentage of learning activities (20-25%) involving technology in that community may reflect this barrier. It may support the community steering committee's decision to focus on the preparation and coordination of the literacy proposal.
- In the case of **Rossburn**, the skills of the facilitator, the community infrastructure and the skills and abilities of the residents were cited as being beneficial to encouraging the use of technology. However, less than 15% of Rossburn's learning activities were focused on the demonstration and use of technology. It would appear that the skills and abilities of community residents might have contributed to this situation. Rossburn did, however, make great use of video and digital photography as components of a number of their archival types of learning activities.

- It appeared that **Russell** and area used technology whenever appropriate. Approximately 45% of their learning activities were focused on demonstrating or encouraging the use of technology. A significant percentage of Russell's activities were lifestyle activities, therefore this was a good indication of the efforts put forth by the community facilitator to integrate technology whenever possible.
- The factors influencing the use of technology were neutral in **Souris**. This may be indicative of turnover in community facilitators as well as the wide variety of learning activities developed to accommodate a number of interests and age groups. Nearly 40% of Souris' activities involved the use of technology.
- **Swan Valley's** variety of learning activities using or integrating technology were almost 50%. This number is exceptional given the high number of types of learning activities that occurred (n= 91). In other words, Swan Valley provided more than 45 different types of learning activities that used or integrated information technology.

When presented with these findings, the N-CEDC Board rightly questioned the validity of these findings. The feeling of the Board was that technology was a key feature in the majority of learning activities if overhead projectors, PowerPoint presentations, word processing, and so on are taken into consideration.

This is quite true. Doubtless, the N-CEDC Board and community facilitators used and integrated technology on a daily basis. However, for the purposes of this evaluation, it is the purposeful identification and promotion of existing technological resources available within and available to each community that was the indicator for this particular benchmark.

There are two mitigating factors that must be noted before too hasty a conclusion is drawn about the use of technology for the LFL Initiative. First, all or nearly all, of the learning activities undertaken in each of the communities needed the matching support of partners which, based on the interviews with community steering committees, were difficult to find for many of the technology-based learning activities. Second, participation in learning activities was a persistent challenge for all of the communities.

Ultimately, the evaluation found that all of the communities involved in the LFL Initiative did an exceptional job of trying to use existing and emerging technology in the face of competing demands, limited resources and unpredictable community participation.

The community groups and levels of benefits for technology for each community are presented in charts 14-19.

Chart 14: Groups and Levels of Benefits from the LFL's Use and Promotion of Technology (Deloraine)

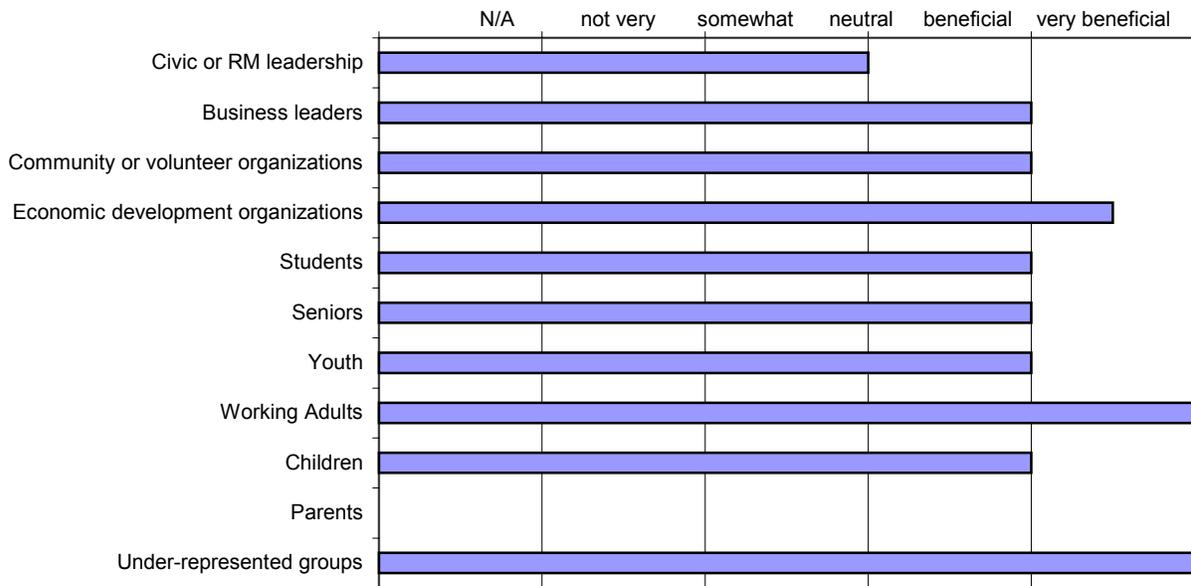


Chart 15: Groups and Levels of Benefits from the LFL's Use and Promotion of Technology (Neepawa)

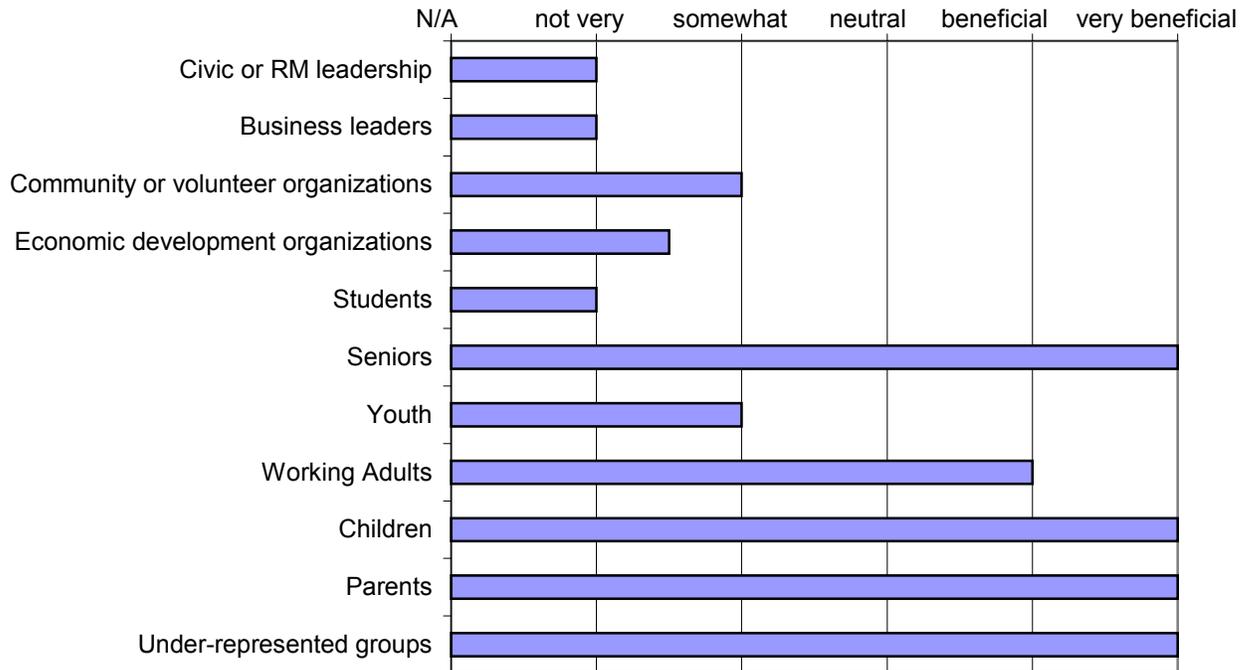


Chart 16: Groups and Levels of Benefits from the LFL's Use and Promotion of Technology (Rossburn)

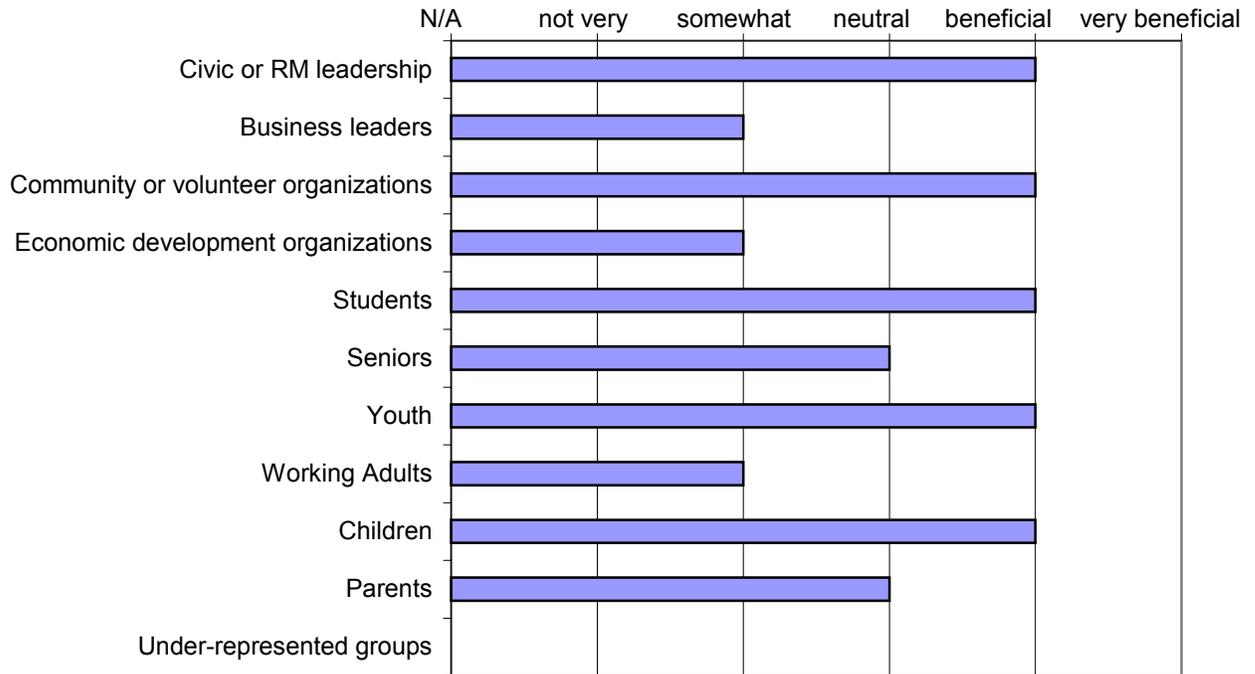


Chart 17: Groups and Levels of Benefits from the LFL's Use and Promotion of Technology (Russell)

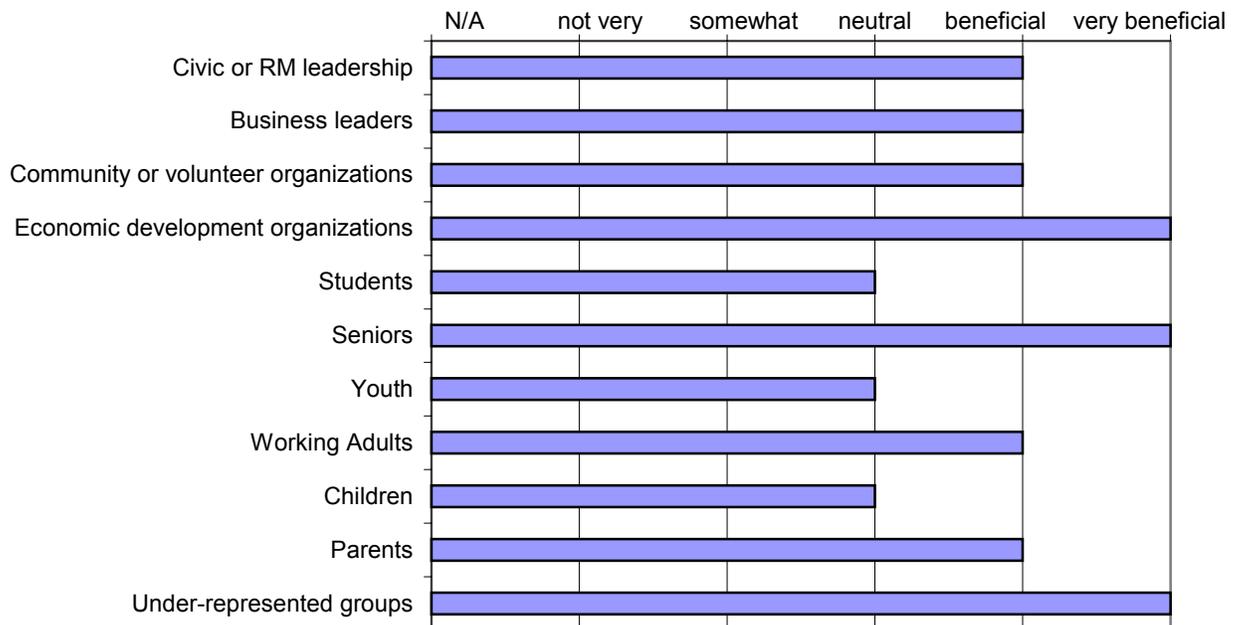


Chart 18: Groups and Levels of Benefits from the LFL's Use and Promotion of Technology (Souris)

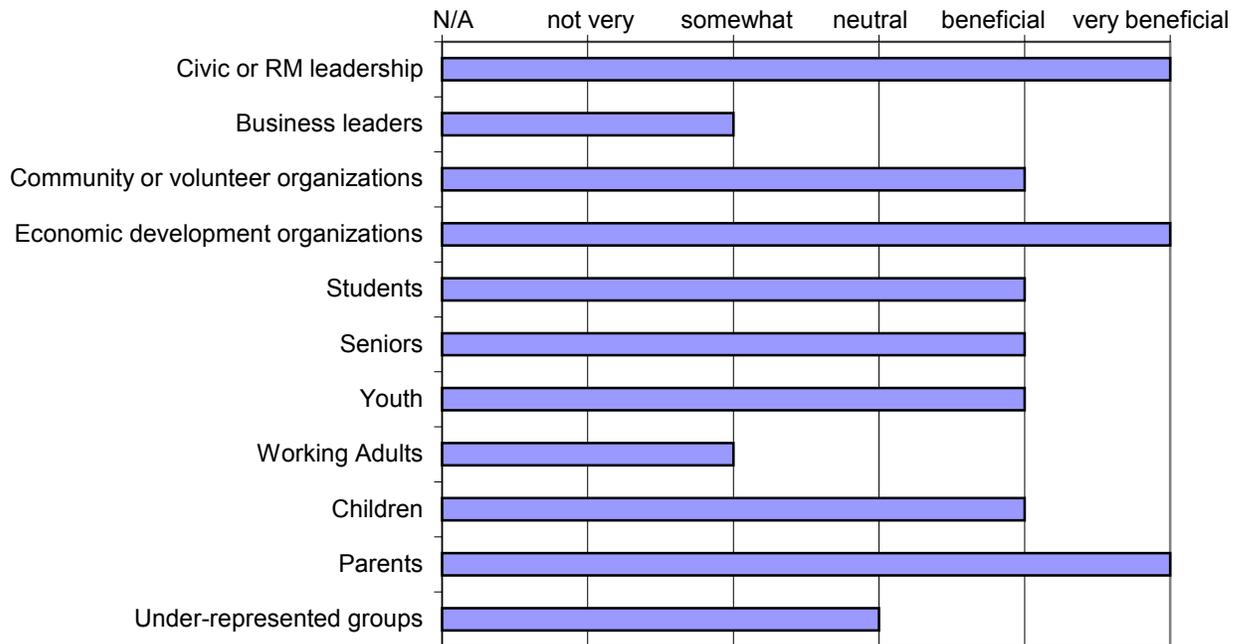
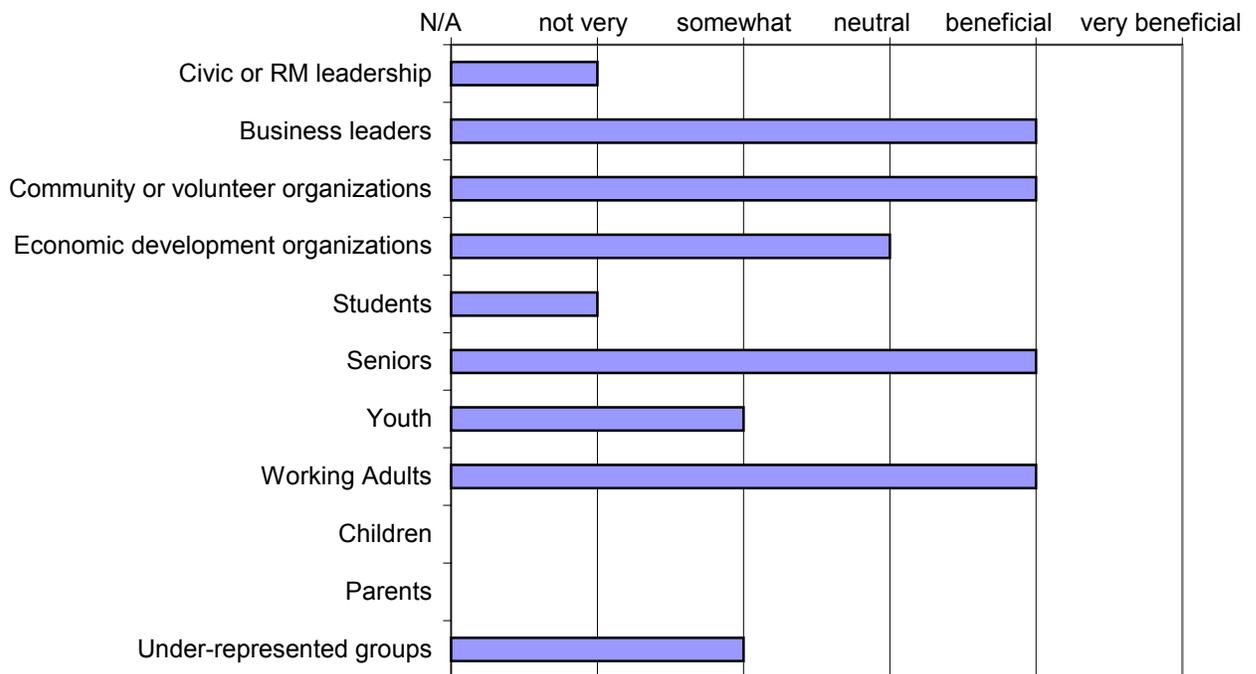


Chart 19: Groups and Levels of Benefits from the LFL's Use and Promotion of Technology (Swan Valley)



Building a Culture of Lifelong Learning at the Local Level

The N-CEDC Board set out to enhance community capacity by building a culture of lifelong learning in each of its communities. In each of the communities, promotion of lifelong learning and learning opportunities comprised slightly more than 10% of all the LFL activities. Every community promoted lifelong learning through newsletters, trade fair promotions or mass registration nights in the communities.

One of the most effective ways to promote lifelong learning was the development and use of the Learning for Life logo (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Learning for Life Logo



A number of community steering committee members commented that the Learning for Life logo had become well recognized by people in their communities. However, there were also comments that many times community residents associated the concept of lifelong learning with the programs and services provided by the educational institutions.

The evaluator asked members of community steering committees to comment on the extent to which the LFL Initiative had encouraged a culture of lifelong learning in their communities. The evaluation concluded that a) that impact of the LFL Initiative was hard to assess by individuals in the communities; and, b) the members of the community steering committees were just starting to see the changes in attitude around learning in their communities. As one of the members of a community steering committee stated:

When you refer to Learning for Life it's qualitative and you can't measure what you've done until years down the road. But you can see it when someone tells their friends about a program that is really good and they come looking for it. It brought people together in our community that weren't together before. It's really sad that it's ending but we're going to keep meeting anyway."

Long Term Outcomes and Impacts at the Local Level

The evaluation looked for evidence in the interview data and surveys for examples of the long term outcomes and impacts at the local level. Some of the examples have also been selected from the Best Practices documentation provided by the community facilitators.

Selected excerpts from interviews

I think that the next generation is going to get the most benefits from this because if you have an educated population – or a population that feels empowered and people get better jobs that are able to provide for their basic needs and their kids will do better.

I think that the biggest impact on the community as a whole is a better understanding and acceptance between people. I think the top end benefits the most because they have a better attitude toward society in general and they now look at society differently.

We had a group of kids that were having a hard time in school and we started a special program for these kids. People came in and wanted to measure the success of the program but they were really measuring the success of the program on the basis of all other programs. But when the basis is different for all kinds of people it's difficult to measure across the board. You're starting from different spots and getting to different spots. If we help 1 person with literacy skills then we've made a difference.

All of us have benefited from Learning for Life because it touched a lot of areas and a whole cross section of the society.

If people would actually do some learning before they start talking they would help the community out a lot! This is a very easy community to get people on one side or the other and then it's a war. It was hard to get people involved or in understanding how important learning is.

Maybe historically we didn't know the benefits of learning. Older generations learnt the benefits of hard work so we're coming from generations of labourers rather than thinkers.

The thing about Learning for Life is it reached out to every age group – it just didn't focus on one age group.

Examples of Best Practices

The N-CEDC is currently documenting a number of the ‘Best Practices’ that took place at the network and at the local level. The following are only a small sample of Best Practices that provide evidence of the long-term impacts and outcomes of the LFL Initiative.

Lunch and Learn Women’s Health Series

The Learning for Life facilitator and community organizations such as the regional health authority and Manitoba Agriculture and Food were involved in planning a Women’s Health Series in the community of **Deloraine**. The activity was designed to increase public awareness of health issues for women and provide a safe venue for individuals with common health concerns to meet. The activity was learner-centered, affordable for participants, accessible and well presented. The series provided health information during the lunch hour on topics that directly affected their lives and the lives of their families. The success of the activity in Deloraine acted as an impetus for other N-CEDC communities to adopt the series.

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

The LFL Initiative in **Neepawa** organized a reading program at the library for young mothers and children. This activity was learner-centered, had hands on activities, was accessible, was suitable and affordable for participants, was well presented, cost-effective and attractive to partners. The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program activity used the needs assessment of the community, partnerships in the community and opportunities to “piggy back” to succeed. The impact on participants was significant. Parents of different social and economic classes were brought together for a sharing of parenting issues. Also, as children enter the program, their behavior was positively influenced by the other children.

Internet Training

In **Swan Valley**, the LFL community facilitator worked with local government staff and the Parkland Learning Technologies consortia to deliver basic Internet training in four small communities in the area. More than 60 participants attended the sessions. The basic training motivated many of the participants to learn more about computers or improve their skills.

Cultural Activities

The small community of Rossburn undertook a number of cultural activities as part of the LFL Initiative. These activities included Ukrainian dancing, archiving of community history and weekly music concerts in the town’s park. These activities used the human resources available in the community. Importantly, a number of these activities are carried on at the end of the LFL Initiative.

Aquasize Training

Prior to the LFL Initiative, no one in the community of Souris had training for aquasize exercise. The program used existing fitness leaders in the community to help design and implement an aquasize training program. In exchange for the fitness leaders providing, free lessons of swimming time was offered. Aquasize training benefited many people in the community. It provided leadership training, an upgrading of skills and was a workplace activity. This program was learner-centered, accessible, affordable and suitable for participants.

Marketing Your Art Workshop

The LFL Initiative in **Russell** organized a marketing course for artists that ran in conjunction with the community's juried art show. The workshop focused on entrepreneurial activities for arts and crafts people. Participants in the session were able to make a number of contacts with art organizations that they can use in the future.

Time Management Seminar

Swan Valley presented Time Management, a one-day seminar delivered by Franklin Covey Canada. More than 30 participants from financial institutions, government employees, school divisions and the business community attended the session. This was a topic of high interest across many sectors. It was the first time that a 'high-end' organization had come to the area to deliver this type of professional development seminar.

Professional Development for Community Facilitators and N-CEDC Board members

The evaluation found that the N-CEDC Board recognized at about the half-way point of the project that the community facilitators and N-CEDC Board members needed a better understanding of the concept of lifelong learning and its connection to decision-making for the LFL Initiative. Sponsorship funding was found to deliver a series of five professional development sessions for the community facilitators and N-CEDC Board members.

Topics included adult and lifelong learning concepts, decision-making processes, adult learning styles and concepts associated with 'training the trainer'. The project manager was particularly impressed with the improved skills and abilities of the community facilitators that came as a direct result of the LFL Initiative.

Swan Valley merits particular attention for its relationship with the Swan Valley Friendship Centre prompted in large measure by the LFL Initiative. One of the outcomes of this relationship was additional employment support from the Manitoba Metis Federation. This support enabled the Swan Valley LFL Initiative to engage a full-time coordinator from the Metis community in the Swan Valley area. The community steering committee indicated that it was impressed by the improved skills and abilities of the facilitators. One of the facilitators received special mention and has gone on to other positions using the experience gained in the LFL Initiative as a stepping stone.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The intention of this evaluation is not to pass judgment on the LFL Initiative. Rather, the findings have been presented for the N-CEDC Board to reflect on what they learned from the experience and what would they do differently. With this in mind, it is reasonable to expect, even desirable, that the N-CEDC Board draws a different set of conclusions from this evaluation.

The conclusions that are presented below reflect the evaluator's opinion of the extent to which the N-CEDC achieved its goal for the Learning for Life Initiative to:

create a model for promoting the sustainability of rural communities by improving access to formal and informal learning opportunities at the local level, creating a culture of lifelong learning and supporting community and individual capacity building.

The conclusions of this evaluation are that:

- the N-CEDC successfully established a model for building a culture of lifelong learning in the member communities. The efforts on the part of the community facilitators and the community steering committees were major contributing factors to the success of the LFL Initiative at the community level. The evaluation concluded that many involved in the Initiative are profoundly disappointed that the Learning for Life pilot project has come to an end. Hopefully, community-based committees such as the Education and Training Committee in Russell will either continue or be rejuvenated with the support of the local communities.
- the N-CEDC was highly successful in balancing its aims and purposes as an associative network with the needs of its member communities who vary widely in the population as well as in available human, financial and technological resources. This was not an easy accomplishment; however, the N-CEDC's commitment to meeting the needs at the local level prevailed and was an overarching feature of the LFL Initiative.
- the LFL Initiative in every community provided or improved access to lifelong learning activities that helped create a culture of lifelong learning and supported community and individual capacity building. These activities reflected a contemporary, social perspective of lifelong learning that included lifestyle, vocational, and self-awareness learning activities.
- at the community level, the LFL Initiative used existing and emerging technologies to the best of their available resources and abilities. More use of technology was certainly possible; nevertheless, the learning needs of the communities as well as the realities of resources were mitigating factors.

- the N-CEDC's commitment to providing access to resources for the benefit of its member communities was consistent throughout the life of the project. Regrettably, some of the leaders in the member communities did not know about the N-CEDC's efforts nor fully appreciate the N-CEDC's efforts on their behalf.
- the community steering committees played a key role in identifying their community's learning needs and assisting the community facilitator in implementing activities and coordinating partnerships. Overall, the local goals and objectives as set out by the community steering committees were achieved.
- the community facilitators did a remarkable job of implementing a variety of learning activities which were appropriate to their particular community context, made the best use of human and financial resources and addressed the community's learning needs. The role of the community facilitator was critical to the success of the LFL Initiative. Swan Valley, and to a lesser extent Souris, faced additional challenges brought about by the changes in facilitators over the life of the project. The Board members from these communities filled in during these times and their efforts are appreciated.
- the project manager was essentially the glue that held the project together. Without her ability to see the larger picture, patience, good humour, and large number of unpaid hours, the LFL Initiative would not have achieved the success that it did.
- everyone involved in the LFL Initiative deserves considerable credit their efforts in building a culture of lifelong learning in their communities. Appreciating the value of lifelong learning at the local level is a significant legacy of the Initiative that will hold the N-CEDC in good stead for future network activities.

Recommendations

The N-CEDC may wish to consider these recommendations for immediate action or for future activities.

For immediate action

The evaluator recommends that the N-CEDC

- develop and implement mechanisms to more fully communicate the role and benefits of the N-CEDC as a network to the respective communities as well as to the associate members of the N-CEDC. For example, there was some concern expressed by the associate members that the benefits of the N-CEDC network had been overshadowed by the emphasis on the local communities. Conversely, many of the members of the community steering committees had no idea of the N-CEDC, its role or its function in the LFL Initiative.

For future activities

The evaluator recommends that the N-CEDC

- clearly articulate the decision-making processes, administrative procedures, evaluation plan and conceptual dimensions at the very earliest stages of implementation.
- communicate as broadly as possible, but particularly to the member communities and associate partners, the successes of the N-CEDC as an associative network model.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participants of the N-CEDC Learning for Life Initiative

N-CEDC Board Members

Wally Melnyk, Chair
Chief Administrative Officer
Town of Russell,
Russell, MB

Tyler King (2003)
Economic Development Officer
Deloraine-Winchester Community
Development Corporation
Deloraine, MB

Darlis Collinge
Economic Development Officer
Swan Valley Enterprise Centre
Swan River, MB

Amanda McNaughton
Economic Development Officer
Neepawa Area Development Corporation
Neepawa, MB

Shirley Kalyniuk
Mayor of Rosburn
Rosburn, MB

Leanne Rowat, replaced by Joy Dornian
Economic Development Officer
Souris & Glenwood Community
Development Corporation
Souris, MB

N-CEDC Ex-Officio Board Members

Gerald Bashforth
Assiniboine Community College
Brandon, MB

Bob Grodzik
Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs
Winnipeg, MB

Mona Cornock
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural
Initiatives
Brandon, MB

Trudy Hemstad
Assiniboine Community College
Brandon, MB

Al Dowhan
Assiniboine Community College
Dauphin, MB

Darrell Pack
Rural Secretariat
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Winnipeg, MB

Keith Glennie
Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism
Winnipeg, MB

Learning for Life Initiative

Laurie Crowe, Project Manager
Deloraine, MB

Learning for Life Community Facilitators

Brenda Kryschuk
Neepawa, MB

Leanne Rowat
Carole Williams
Alice Schkawritka
Souris, MB

Robin Mack
Russell, MB

Brandy Bulycz
Joanne Genaille
Shirley Mullet
Jessica Spence
Swan Valley, MB

Ollie Mackedenski
Rossburn, MB

Chantal Mills
Deloraine, MB

Appendix B: Goal, Desired Outcomes, Parameters and Objectives of the LFL Initiative

Goal

The goal of the NCEDC-Learning for Life efforts in each community is to:

“create a model for promoting the sustainability of rural communities by improving access to formal and informal learning opportunities at the local level, creating a culture of lifelong learning and supporting community and individual capacity building.”

Parameters of the NCEDC-Learning For Life Initiative

1. Create awareness and support for the lifelong learning culture at both the local community and network level.
2. Provide better coordination of existing learning opportunities at the local level.
3. Provide new resources to the communities to facilitate learning opportunities, both formally and informally, based on need and interest.
4. Build a network of lifelong learning centers to assist and support communities of interest.

Objectives of the Project

The documentation suggests that the following are some (but not all) of the objectives of the project:

- Identify and promote existing technological resources within and available to each community;
- Demonstrate the use of existing and emerging technologies that support lifelong learning;
- Encourage the use of technologies that support entrepreneurial development in the community (and for the pursuit of a healthy community);
- Ensure that access to learning opportunities and technologies addresses the needs of rural communities for accessibility and flexibility;
- Encourage use of technology to create and sustain “communities of interest”; and,
- Commit sharing of community learning experience within the membership of the NCEDC

Other Considerations

Use of Technology

“...will develop and evaluate a community learning network that will utilize appropriate technologies, including web based technology, to link Community Enterprise Development Centres in western rural Manitoba, thereby reducing barriers to distance.”

Community Context, Variability of Activities and Process

- Celebrate Lifelong Learning
- Coordinate programs and services
- Facilitate access to learning opportunities
- Facilitate access to informal sourcing of information
- Maximize technology-based communication opportunities
- Establish community databases of skills, resources, expertise and knowledge
- Expand mentorship programs

The Perspective of the Office of Learning Technology

- “the use of technologies as tools to support and enable learning and networking;
- a strong community participation or community control at the local level; and,
- the promotion of individual and community development.”

Appendix C: Components, Purpose, Information Required and Instruments of the Decision-Making Evaluation Model

Decision-based Evaluation Components	Purpose	Information Required	Instruments
<p>Context evaluation (used to identify individual differences of communities)</p> <p>INTERNAL/ external</p>	<p>To look at individual community context and network context</p> <p>To search for unmet learning needs, unidentified opportunities and challenges that prevent needs or LFL objectives from being met</p>	<p>target population, challenges community situation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document reviews - surveys - interviews
<p>Input evaluation (identifies available or established human, physical and financial resources)</p> <p>INTERNAL/EXTERNAL</p>	<p>To examine characteristics of the community programs in terms of ease of implementation, costs, effectiveness</p>	<p>Identify resources available to achieve objectives including financial, human and time</p> <p>Identify organizational plans and structures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document review - interviews
<p>Process evaluation (how decisions are made)</p> <p>internal/EXTERNAL</p>	<p>To determine if the LFL project is being used as intended</p> <p>Provides information needed for anticipating, identifying and overcoming procedural difficulties</p>	<p>Details of how the program is actually operating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - document review - meetings - interviews - surveys - logs - observation
<p>Product evaluation (provides information on products in order to revise, recycling, continue or provide examples to funders)</p> <p>EXTERNAL</p>	<p>To determine if the LFL project is producing the intended effects re goals and objectives</p> <p>At mid-point of project can be used to determine whether to continue, terminate, modify or maintain community level program.</p>	<p>descriptions and judgments of outcomes and relates them to goals and objectives as well as context, input and process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - results - group interviews - case studies - surveys

Appendix D: Evaluation Instruments

A. Interview Guide for N-CEDC Board, Community Steering Committee members and Community Facilitators

B. Activity Report Form

C. Example Survey Questionnaire

A. Interview Guide to NCEDC Board, Community Steering Committees and Community Facilitators

Script to be read to individuals from NCEDC Board, Community Steering Committees and Community Facilitators

This interview is part of the final evaluation for the Learning for Life project. You may recall that the mid-point evaluation examined four elements of the project – the Context (the unique circumstances of your community), the Input (the resources that were used for the project), the Process (the way that you made decisions) and the Products (what were some of the outcomes of the project in your community). Results from this interview will be used together with comments from Board members and facilitators from communities involved in the LFL project. Results from this interview will be included in the final evaluation report and made available to the NCEDC board.

1. How would you describe the particular or unique circumstances, that is, the context, of your community? (Prompts: community attitude, unique challenges)
2. Can you tell about the inputs, that is, the community resources and the resources that were provided by the LFL project? (Prompts: ability to partner, technological resources)
3. Please describe how you made decisions about which learning activities to pursue in your community. (Prompts: Did you use the Decision-making Model?)
4. Can you describe some of the impacts or outcomes of the LFL project? (Prompts: what are some examples of the legacy, the products that came out of the LFL project)
5. Do you have any other comments?

Activity Report Form

Learning for Life



Community Project Report
October 1 - December 30, 2001

Activity/Description				
Project Parameter Addressed	<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate and expand formal and informal learning opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunity for skill development <input type="checkbox"/> Promote technological resources in the community <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrate existing and emerging technologies, that support lifelong learning <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage use of technologies that support agricultural and rural entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure programs and resources meet rural needs of accessibility and flexibility <input type="checkbox"/> Explore "communities of interest" <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>			
Participants/Target				
Location				
Date/Time				
Partners				
PROJECT COSTS...	LEARNING FOR LIFE	PARTNER / OTHER FUNDING	IN-KIND	
	L4L	Community		
Consultant/Human Resources				
Advertising & Promotion				
Conference/Fairs Prom - ACC				
Consumables				
Rental Space				
TOTAL COSTS	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

*

Total Project Cost: \$0.00

EXAMPLE

Survey for the LFL Initiative

As a descriptive survey, the following information will complement the information gathered from the interviews and activity report. The survey is intended to the perceived impact of the LFL Initiative in your community and to the NCEDC as a network organization.

Section 1: Impact of Activities

1. What is your perception of the extent of the impact for LFL activities in the community of Deloraine?

Community activity for Deloraine	Scale of impact: 1 = very low 2= low 3 = neutral 4 = high 5 = very high N/A – please indicate why						Comments/why
Build awareness of LFL	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Educational Luncheon Issues for Women	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Information and Technology Fair	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Establish family resource centre and related programming	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Promote learning activities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Special interest courses	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Fitness Centre	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Inventory/Director of Instructors or Research people	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Inventory /Directory of programming	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	

Section II: Use of Technology

1. A key component of the LFL Initiative was the Community Access Program.

At the beginning of the LFL Initiative in Deloraine, what was the extent of the Community Access Program? (please describe - sites, programs, usage by community)

At the end of the LFL Initiative, how would you describe the Community Access Program?

How would you describe the impact of the CAP component of the LFL Initiative in the community of Deloraine?

Very High High Neutral Low Very Low

2. Many of LFL Learning Activities had a focus on information technology including the development of information technology skills and abilities. In addition, many other LFL Learning Activities used and applied information technology to deliver or facilitate learning.

Considering all of the LFL Learning Activities in Deloraine, to what extent was information technology used or integrated?

Very Highly used and integrated (80% or more)

Highly used and integrated (60- 80%)

Neutral (40 – 60%)

Not used or integrated very much (20-40%)

Very low use or integration (0% - 20)

3. In your community what factors contributed to or inhibited the use and integration of information technology?

Factors	Scale: 1 = significant barrier 2= somewhat of a barrier 3 = neutral 4 = beneficial factor 5 = very beneficial factor N/A – why?	Comments
Information Technology Skills of Community facilitator	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Community Infrastructure (access to information technology)	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Skills and abilities of community residents	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Not a goal of the community's LFL objectives	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Other (Please specify)	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	

4. Which demographic groups in your community do you think benefited from the use of technology encouraged by the LFL Initiative?

Group / sector	Scale: 1 = not very beneficial 2 = somewhat beneficial 3 = neutral 4 = beneficial 5 = very beneficial N/A – why?	Comments
Civic or RM leadership	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Business leaders	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Community or volunteer organizations	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Economic development organizations	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Students	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Seniors	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Youth	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Working adults	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Children	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Parents	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	
Under-represented groups in the community (single mothers, aboriginal people)	1 2 3 4 5 N/A	Please specify

OTHER COMMENTS

***Appendix E: Decision-making Model for Community Facilitators and
Community Steering Committees***



Almost everything we think of – all of the activities that we come up with at the community and N-CEDC level – we can rationalize and define as “lifelong learning”.

That is the overwhelming aspect of the “Learning for Life” initiative.

Our goal is:

- to come up with a definition and decision making framework for determining what activities / projects will further the goals of the N-CEDC and its member communities.
- to help us prioritize and choose the activities that will provide our communities with the greatest benefit and long-term impact.

I am proposing that the following **decision-making framework** will help us to determine which ideas / activities we will undertake, while taking into consideration the following:

- support the NCEDC as an organization
- meet the goals of the NCEDC – LFL project
- consider the parameters of the project
- help meet the objectives of the project
- consider the community context
- help meet the objectives as described by the OLT

The collective definition of the Network of Community Enterprise Development Centres - Learning for Life Initiative is as follows:

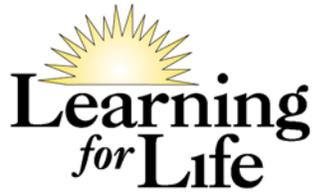
“Lifelong Learning is

The enhancement of individual knowledge, skills, abilities and awareness resulting in increased opportunities for participation in the community for the purpose of community and economic development. Consideration will be given to the development of suitable partnerships and to the use of existing and emerging technologies.”

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

The Layer Cake Model

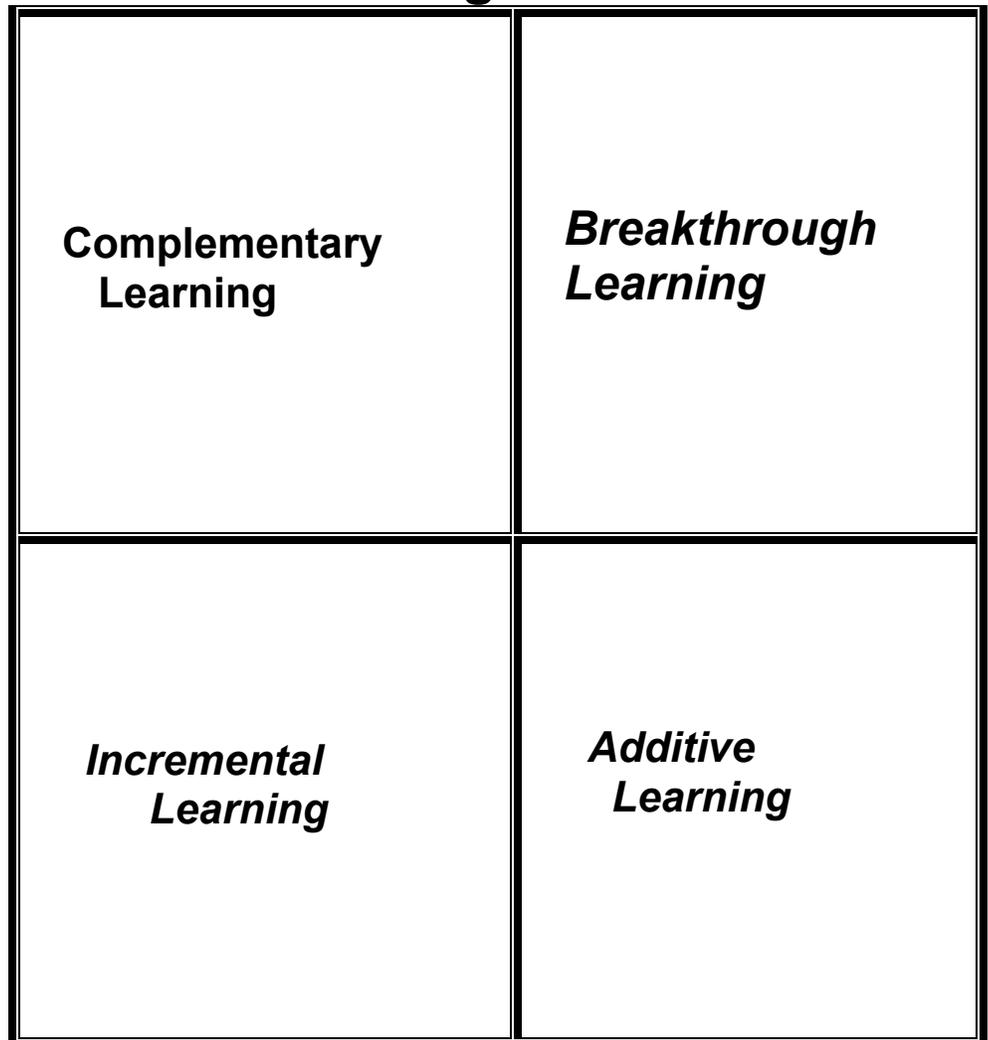
<p style="text-align: center;">APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider regional vision - Expand geographical boundaries/barriers 	Industrial Development	Economic Development	Community Development
<p style="text-align: center;">ECONOMIC BASE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agriculture - Manufacturing - Mining - Forestry - Tourism and Retirees - Call Centres 			
<p style="text-align: center;">PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water and Sewer - Roads and Streets - Utilities - Industrial Parks - Telecommunications - Inter-modal Facilities - Waste Recycling and Disposal 			
<p style="text-align: center;">SUPPORT SYSTEMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health Care - Retail Sector - Housing - Education - Recreation & Parks - Community Foundations - Economic Development Organizations - Financial Sector 			
<p style="text-align: center;">HUMAN & SOCIAL CAPITAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitudes and Values - Work Ethic - Community Spirit - Churches - Family Stability - Knowledge and Skills - Social Trust and Cohesion - Civic and Youth Clubs 			
<p style="text-align: center;">LEADERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic Vision - Empowering Others - Leadership Skills - Local Government - Leadership Training - Community Development Organizations - Knowledge of Resources and Major Trends 			



“Learning for Life” Decision Making Framework

Lifelong Learning Activity

- Demonstrate Technology -
- Existing
- Emerging
- Entrepreneurial Development
- Accessibility
- Flexibility
- Quality of Life
- Opportunity for sharing
- Employment opportunities
- Improved Skill Base



Lifelong Learning

- Value Dimension**
- Client Value**
- Community Value**
- N-CEDC Stakeholder Value**
- N-CEDC Internal/Organizational Value**

Define how this activity meets the definition of “lifelong learning”?

Does this activity:

	Yes	N/A
	1 – 3	0
1. Promote and demonstrate existing and emerging technological resources in the community?	_____	_____
2. Encourage or support entrepreneurial and economic development?	_____	_____
3. Assist in improving learning opportunities?	_____	_____
4. Ensure learning opportunity was accessible and flexible?	_____	_____
5. Encourage and support participation in the community?	_____	_____
6. Create learning experiences that can and will be shared with other communities?	_____	_____
7. Assist in improving employment opportunities?	_____	_____
8. Assist in the enhancement of individual knowledge, skills, abilities and awareness?	_____	_____
TOTAL / # of questions		_____

The benefit of this activity will have value to:

	Yes 1 – 3	N/A 0
1. The individual client?	_____	_____
2. The community?	_____	_____
3. The N-CEDC, project stakeholders / partners?	_____	_____
TOTAL / # of questions	_____	_____