

**Prepared for:**



**Saskatchewan Labour Force  
Development Board**



**Prior Learning Assessment &  
Recognition (PLAR) Services  
Project**

**Final Report**

March 2002



**Prepared by:**



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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The PLAR Services Project is a Project of the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB), as a result of the leadership provided by the Racialized Canadians Reference Group and the direction of the post secondary institutions. Funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST), and the partners of the Forestry Training Subcommittee of the Northern Saskatchewan Labour Market Committee, the Project was launched in October 2000, and completed on March 31, 2002. The Project partners made substantial in-kind contributions. The Project was created to build capacity and raise awareness for the delivery of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) services in the province of Saskatchewan.

This report, jointly prepared by Trimension Training & Consulting Group Inc. and the PLAR Services Project, summarizes the key components of the Project as well as the findings of the evaluation process.

### **Project Goals**

There were two goals of the PLAR Services Project:

- The development of an array of Saskatchewan PLAR services to greatly improve access for learners to education, training and job advancement opportunities. A wide variety of clients including industry sectors will receive assistance to demonstrate the benefits of assessing prior learning. Services will be provided to industry, education and other special groups to facilitate and enable the long-term expansion of PLAR in the province.
- PLAR models and assessment tools will be demonstrated within the forestry sector and will contribute to the human resource planning required to support the expansion of the forestry industry in Saskatchewan. Key to the success of the Project is the network of diverse community partners and stakeholders contributing to this proposal and committing to serve all adult learners in their demand for professional PLAR services.

### **Key Findings**

Following are the conclusions drawn from the qualitative and quantitative research undertaken throughout the term of the Project. They are:

#### **Administration**

- A 15-person Management Team co-chaired by Business and Labour provided leadership and guided the Project. The membership consisted of five (5) Education (University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science & Technology (SIAST)), three (3) Business, three (3) Labour, one (1) Racialized Canadian, one (1) Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) (currently represented

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by SIFC), one (1) Métis and one (1) SLFDB representative. *Funding partners were ex-officio members.*

- The PLAR Services Team included the Project Manager, Administrative Assistant and two Facilitators. Also closely involved was the PLAR Analyst for Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST).
- The members of the Administrative Team include two (2) Business, two (2) Labour, one (1) FSIN, one (1) MNS, one (1) Racialized Canadian and one (1) Education member.
- Over the course of the Project, the workings of the Management Team have evolved and become increasingly effective. The lessons learned in this phase of the Project will greatly aid the Management Team for the next phase.
- The Management Team needs to examine the structure, make-up and role for the next phase.
- Over the course of the Project there were changes in staffing and location.

### **Services & Products**

- In total, Orientation Sessions were delivered to 2,142 individuals through 81 sessions. The largest number of individuals were reached or informed about PLAR through the PLAR Orientations (1,621 individuals), with Advisor Orientations reaching 349 individuals, and Portfolio Development Orientations reaching 59 individuals.
- Those attending Advisor Orientations consisted mainly of 18% Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services Centres (CSCEC), 16% Regional Colleges, 16% NGOs and 16% CBOs.
- Two PLAR Orientations having an assessment focus were designed and delivered for post-secondary education institutions.
- Over the course of the Project, 36 individuals were assisted through the advising process by the PLAR Services Team.
- The Project served as a resource to the Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST) PLAR Pilot Initiatives and led the preparation of the PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative Progress Report.
- A ToolKit was developed providing resources on advising, assessing, portfolio development and general PLAR Orientations.

### **Promotions & Resource Building**

- A communication strategy was developed which guided promotion and awareness-building activities.
- A number of effective communication activities and tools were developed, including a website, brochure, tag line, logo and literature sheet.
- An extensive collection of PLAR-related resources has been assembled.
- The omnibus poll conducted in the fall of 2001 revealed that a small percentage of Saskatchewan residents had heard of PLAR (8%).
- The Project, in collaboration with Saskatchewan PSEST, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, co-sponsored three PLAR sessions with an Aboriginal cultural perspective. On March 18, an introductory PLAR session with an Aboriginal perspective comprised part of the Professional Development Day

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at SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert; the second a three-day (March 19 – 21, 2002) professional development session focused on implementing PLAR within Aboriginal programs of learning; and the third session was (March 22, 2002) a one-day introduction to PLAR within an Aboriginal Holistic Model of Education at SIAST Wascana Campus in Regina.

- The PLAR Services Project also served as a vehicle to initiate and strengthen linkages with inter-provincial contacts to advance the implementation of PLAR on a national level. These linkages led to the development of an information-sharing network, communication and consultative processes, participation in national forums and the identification of potential opportunities for collaboration. These inter-provincial contacts were with British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario.

### **Policy Development**

- A draft *Provincial RPL Framework and Strategy Recommendations* document has been prepared. Further work is required to develop the implementation strategy so that the document can be submitted to government.

### **Forestry**

- An Assessment Tool for Sawmill Operators has been developed.
- There is a commitment by SLFDB and the Forestry Training Subcommittee to finalize the Assessment Tool and achieve industry validation.
- The Forestry Training Subcommittee has been instrumental in facilitating the developmental work in this sector.

### **Unanticipated Outcomes**

- There were a number of unanticipated outcomes that were realized over the course of the Project, which contributed to the success in raising awareness and increasing access to PLAR processes; namely the PSEST PLAR Pilot Initiatives, the youth Project with Construction Careers Regina and Ranch Ehrlo Society, as well as Professional Development opportunities.
- Another unanticipated outcome was that the Racialized Canadians Reference Group was disappointed that the level of capacity for recognizing foreign credentials did not reach their expected level.

### **Evaluation Results**

- The individual advising process done by the PLAR Service Team was found to be very resource intensive.
- 99% of survey respondents indicated the Advisor Orientations and 100% of survey respondents indicated the Portfolio Development Orientations were satisfactory and/or useful. 96% of Advisor respondents and 100% of Portfolio respondents indicated the sessions had met their expectations.
- Many suggestions were given for improvements to the Advisor Orientations, including more physical examples, more hands-on, more role-playing, longer sessions, and provisions for portfolio samples and development.

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- Suggested improvements to the Portfolio Development Orientations included more time, ongoing support and a question and answer period.
  - 76% of Advisor Orientation participants (hereafter referred to as Advisors) felt they required more support to become competent in order to effectively practice the advising techniques learned in the form of a designated PLAR resource person for Saskatchewan, frequent updates possible in the form of a newsletter, active support of institutional departments, further orientations, more trained staff, list of resources available, practical experience and having access to sample portfolios. These participants indicated they would get their support from the PLAR Service Team, SLFDB, co-workers, SIAST or the internet.
  - 84% of Portfolio Development Orientations participants require further support in the form of advising and assessing techniques, more information, more physical evidence, more orientations, and guidance. These participants indicated they would go to Orientation participants, the PLAR Services Project, books, co-workers or develop a network to get that support.
  - 96% of Advisor Orientation participants and 100% of Portfolio Development Orientations participants indicated they intended to actively apply what they had learned in the session.
  - 55% of Advisors are currently using the PLAR advising practices/techniques learned in the Orientation session. Advising techniques are being used with clients on a one-to-one basis, for career counseling, for portfolio development, resumes, to provide clients with PLAR information and make them aware of the PLAR process.
    - Individuals being advised by Advisors include: employment insurance recipients; social assistance recipients; general public; women; students; business people; working clients looking for career changes; learning disabled; injured workers; farm families and immigrant adult students.
    - 82% of Advisors feel the PLAR Services Project influenced them with respect to raising awareness and 62% feel the Project influenced their organization with respect to raising awareness.
    - 40% of Advisors feel the PLAR Services Project influenced them with respect to building capacity and 37% feel the Project influenced their organization with respect to building capacity.
  - The Management Team recognized the importance of their role in achieving the outcomes and goals of the Project. The areas where their roles were of great importance were: communication, both internally and externally, planning, establishing a clear vision and working as a team.

## **Conclusions & Recommendations**

The PLAR Services Project has enabled the SLFDB to facilitate an increase in provincial capacity for PLAR through various avenues, namely post-secondary institutions, employment support services, community-based organizations and industry. A significant number of participants from a large number of communities and organizations from across the province have been introduced to PLAR and connected to initiatives in other provinces. As well, these individuals have been provided with support to not only gain a better understanding of PLAR,

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but also to develop skills to make a change at several different levels – through policy and programs, in the labour market, in service delivery systems and in organizations.

The various activities undertaken by the Project, including working with stakeholders, delivering orientation sessions, consulting and partnering with government and collaborating with post-secondary institutions have all made a difference. The PLAR Services Project has provided many opportunities for employees, employers and other individuals to become more informed, supported and skilled in recognizing the benefits of prior learning and applying prior learning principles and practices.

The following are observations and recommendations resulting from the evaluation process:

1. At the provincial level, co-ordination and communication was found to be of extreme importance, not only with the PLAR Services Team, but also amongst the stakeholders participating on the Management Team, the Administrative Team, as well as with the large number of government departments, agencies and organizations. Community leaders are accepting leadership for this initiative and have taken a risk.

**Recommendation:** To be effective, strategies for the support required to undertake a project of this nature need to be clearly articulated and documented in order to gain commitment and acceptance.

2. The process of building awareness and provincial capacity takes time. In fact, it takes a **long** time to realize the full potential. The acceptance of the fact that challenges did occur and the commitment to see the Project through was very evident.

**Recommendation:** The nature of a project this size needs to be continually recognized and accommodated with a long-term commitment of resources.

3. The PLAR Services Project has raised awareness and assisted with some capacity for service in the province. However, for PLAR service to become sustainable, financial support within the employment and training systems and professional development of service providers are required.

**Recommendation:** National leadership is required to maintain standards and resources are required to provide adequate service in Saskatchewan industry and the post secondary education, training and employment systems.

4. A provincial policy is essential to ensuring sustainability and full implementation of PLAR in Saskatchewan.

**Recommendation:** Efforts in the form of leadership and resources to implement the recommendations in the *Provincial RPL Framework & Strategy Recommendations* document are required.

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5. There is a need for a fully integrated and adaptable service delivery system within the Province of Saskatchewan.

**Recommendation:** A provincial network of stakeholders and implementation strategy is needed to further develop a service delivery system consistent with the vision.

6. Orientation participants have expressed a desire for an information and “support network”.

**Recommendation:** A contact list of PLAR practitioners was established by the PLAR Services Project in Phase 1. The contact list needs to be maintained and formalized.

7. Practitioner standards are important in all areas of PLAR, including advising, assessment and portfolio development.

**Recommendation:** A partnership should be pursued between the SLFDB, Saskatchewan post-secondary educational institutions and the Nova Scotia PLA Centre for portfolio development certification.

**Recommendation:** Support needs to be provided to achieve the development of practitioner certification programs for provincial and national recognition and accreditation.

8. The Project has worked with a diverse group of stakeholders interested in PLAR and has acknowledged their diverse needs. Resources must be provided for the co-ordination of annual consultations with stakeholders in order to continue to address their needs.

**Recommendation:** Annual consultations with stakeholder groups should be coordinated by the SLFDB in cooperation with the Federal and Provincial Governments.

9. The need for support services in PLAR will continue in Saskatchewan.

**Recommendation:** The SLFDB and PSEST need to address the demand for services by pursuing the resources to implement a strategy for recognizing prior learning in Saskatchewan.

10. Linkages need to be strengthened with professional regulatory bodies to advance PLAR/QR.

**Recommendation:** Processes and mechanisms for the recognition of international qualifications and credentials need to be developed and implemented.

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## **Acronym Guide**

CAEL – Council on Assessment and Experiential Learning  
CBO – Community-Based Organization  
CCR – Construction Careers Regina  
CLFDB – Canadian Labour Force Development Board  
CSCESC – Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services Centre  
DTI – Dumont Technical Institute  
FSIN – Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations  
HRDC – Human Resources Development Canada  
MNS – Métis Nation of Saskatchewan  
NGO – Non-Government Organization  
PLAR – Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition  
PSEST – Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training  
RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning  
SCN – Saskatchewan Communications Network  
SIAS – Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology  
SIFC – Saskatchewan Indian Federated College  
SIIT – Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies  
SLFDB – Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board

## 1.0 Introduction

The PLAR Services Project is a Project of the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board (SLFDB), as a result of the leadership provided by the Racialized Canadians Reference Group and the direction of the post secondary institutions. Funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST), and the partners of the Forestry Training Subcommittee of the Northern Saskatchewan Labour Market Committee, the Project was launched in October 2000, and completed on March 31, 2002. The Project partners made substantial in-kind contributions. The Project was created to build capacity and raise awareness for the delivery of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) services in the province of Saskatchewan.

This report, jointly prepared by Trimension Training & Consulting Group Inc. and the PLAR Services Project, summarizes the key components of the Project as well as the findings of the evaluation process.

## 2.0 Project Goals

There were two main outcomes of the PLAR Services Project:

- The development of an array of Saskatchewan PLAR services to greatly improve access for learners to education, training and job advancement opportunities. A wide variety of clients including industry sectors will receive assistance to demonstrate the benefits of assessing prior learning. Services will be provided to industry, education and other special groups to facilitate and enable the long-term expansion of PLAR in the province.
- PLAR models and assessment tools will be demonstrated within the forestry sector and will contribute to the human resource planning required to support the expansion of the forestry industry in Saskatchewan. Key to the success of the Project is the network of diverse community partners and stakeholders contributing to this proposal and committing to serve all adult learners in their demand for professional PLAR services.

## 3.0 Historical Overview

The PLAR Services Project was launched in October 2000. Preliminary activities focused on recruitment of staff and the establishment of a Project office within the Regina Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services Centre (CSCESC) facility. Staffing was completed by December 2000. The inaugural meeting of the Project's Management Team was held in November 2000 at which time the Project's work plan was reviewed.

A news conference held on January 10, 2001 served as the formal 'launch' for the Project. Concurrently, the Project worked with a local professional communications firm to implement a communications strategy. This work involved the development of a cohesive package of communication 'tools' that included a tagline, logos, brochure and website.

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Another priority early in the Project involved securing the services of a firm to undertake the evaluation of the Project. Following a public tendering process, Trimension Group was selected as the evaluation contractor. In consultation with the Management Team and the PLAR Services Team, an evaluation strategy was finalized that encompassed both formative and summative evaluation components. Data collection processes were then implemented to facilitate the formative evaluation process that would result in quarterly progress reports.

In February 2001, planning was initiated for the delivery of a three-day Development Orientation by Susan Simosko (an internationally-recognized expert in PLAR) that would serve as the basis for subsequent PLAR orientations. The Development Orientation took place March 5 – 7, 2001 in Regina.

Due to circumstances beyond the Project's control, relocation of the Project office was necessary in March 2001. There was a disruption in services for a period of approximately one week.

The pace of Project activity accelerated throughout the spring of 2001 and the demand for Advisor Orientations steadily increased as public awareness grew. There was also increasing interest in Portfolio Development and this led to the creation of the Project's "Personal Portfolio Development for Advisors" orientation. The Project also undertook some work with individual clients, however, given the time-intensive nature of individual counseling there was a need to limit work in this area.

Other key areas of activity that were ongoing throughout the Project included Communications and Promotion, the Forestry sub-Project, the development of a Provincial Policy recommendation, the development of a ToolKit of Resources and resource collection, and the PSEST - PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative. These activities are described in separate sections of this Report.

In late September 2001, a major staffing change occurred with the departures of the Project Manager and one of the Project Facilitators. The remaining Facilitator moved into the Manager's position and two new Facilitators were hired; one on a full-time and one on a part-time basis. Throughout this transition process, every effort was made to meet service delivery commitments. Despite there being some delays in the progress of the Project at the time, the Management Team and PLAR Services Team members were able to respond very quickly in moving the Project ahead.

Efforts within the latter stages of the Project were focused on resuming work on the Forestry Project, working with the PSEST Pilot Project initiatives, and meeting the very high demand for Advisor and Portfolio Development Orientations. A consultant was hired to assist with the forestry Project and progress was again made towards achieving the outcomes defined for this area, although not all work was completed. Work with the PSEST - PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative involved the preparation of the Progress Report that forms Appendix A to this Final Report. The PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative Progress Report provides a 'snapshot' of the eleven PLAR pilot Projects underway within various post-secondary institutions in the

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Province, along with a summary of ‘lessons learned’ and best practices. Also noteworthy is a section addressing the support provided by the Project to the Initiatives.

Delivery of the final Portfolio Development for Advisors Orientation on March 21<sup>st</sup> marked the completion of the service delivery component of the Project. Overall, approximately 360 individuals throughout the province attended an Orientation session. These individuals constitute an important ‘network’ of practitioners that will undoubtedly prove invaluable for ongoing capacity-building work.

## 4.0 Project Outcomes & Results

The SLFDB’s overall Project outcomes are as follows:

- Increased provincial capacity to provide PLAR assessments through post-secondary institutions and employment centers. (Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services Centres (CSESC), Universities of Regina (U of R) and Saskatchewan (U of S), Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Regional Colleges, Dumont Technical Institute (DTI) and with industry sectors.)
- Prepared orientations with a variety of assessment tools for individuals.
- Developed PLAR assessor certification and recognition in post-secondary education institutions. (Built on Council for Assessment and Experiential Learning (CAEL)).
- Orientations delivered and tested through a variety of modes for articulated credit in post-secondary education institutions. Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN) – distance education utilizing developed assessors as site tutors.
- A well-developed resource center. (Library, website, network for use by industry and post-secondary education providers.)
- Recommended a provincial PLAR policy for Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training that provides direction to institutions for a reduction of barriers, that meets the CLFDB-SLFDB standards, and includes an appeal process.
- Developed a client referral system and assessment processes.
- Promoted PLAR concept to the public, industry and professional associations. Tested in the Omnibus poll, February 2002.
- Integration of assessment processes and referral system with the CSCESCs.
- Adoption of PLAR processes by the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, industry sector partnerships, and professional associations.
- Forestry Sector Project – Standards developed in occupational skills for sector assessment model that is piloted and refined through the development of a variety of flexible tools.

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## 4.1 Project Administration

Project Administration comprises a Management Team who leads and guides the Project as well as an Administrative Team who was given the authority by the Management Team to make day-to-day operational decisions for the Project.

### **PLAR Management Team Structure and Mandate**

A 15-person Management Team co-chaired by Business and Labour leads and guides the Project. The membership consists of five (5) Education (University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, SIIT, SIAST), three (3) Business, three (3) Labour, one (1) Racialized Canadian, one (1) FSIN (currently represented by SIFC), one (1) Metis and one (1) SLFDB representative. *Funding partners are ex-officio members.* Substantial in-kind contributions were made by these partners.

The Terms of Reference of the Management Team are:

- Develop a vision, mission and goals.
- Develop a broad operational policy and work plan with respect to organization, administration and services.
- Address funding issues, review cash flow and expenditure reports and make recommendations to the SLFDB Budget & Operations Committee and Executive Director as required.
- Address staffing, recruitment and selection issues.
- Approve general policies with respect to the organization, administration, operation and Projects.
- Act as ambassadors or resource persons to ensure increased awareness of PLAR.
- Consult and serve as the link with communities/constituencies whose interests each member represents.
- Provide leadership, direction and advocacy of PLAR in Saskatchewan.
- Serve as an advisory body to the Departments of Education and Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training with regards to the province-wide strategic PLAR for flexible assessment PLAR practices.
- Monitor and review the applicability of PLAR to specific client groups needs.
- Approve the annual work plan and report progress to the SLFDB at Board meetings and to the SLFDB Reference Groups through their newsletter, website and annual forums.

### **PLAR Project Administrative Team**

The members of the Administrative Team include two (2) Business, two (2) Labour, one (1) FSIN, one (1) MNS, one (1) Racialized Canadian and one (1) Education member.

The Terms of Reference of the Administrative Team are to:

- Address funding issues, review cash flow and expenditures reports and make recommendations to the SLFDB Budget & Operations Committee and Executive Director as required.
- Address staffing, recruitment and selection issues.

- Approve general policies with respect to the organization, administration, operation and Projects.
- Approve the annual work plan and report progress to the SFLDB at Board Meetings and to the SLFDB Reference Groups through their newsletter, website and annual forums.

### **PLAR Services Team**

The PLAR Services Team included the Project Manager, Administrative Assistant and two Facilitators. The PLAR Analyst for Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST) also worked closely with the PLAR Services Team.

## **4.2 Services & Products**

The Project's primary areas of service included orientations, individual client advising, support to the PSEST - PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative and the development of a ToolKit of PLAR resources.

### **4.2.1 Orientations**

General PLAR Orientations were delivered throughout the Project to a diverse audience that included community-based organizations, educational bodies, and industry groups. As well, numerous Advisor and Portfolio Development Orientations were delivered.

The purpose of Advisor Orientations was to provide an introduction to PLAR and the role of the PLAR Advisor. Participants explored advising techniques, along with various types of 'evidence' and assessment tools used for recognizing prior learning. The orientation also included an introduction to portfolio development.

Portfolio Development for Advisor Orientations involved two parts. Part A included a review of portfolio development principles, an exploration of portfolio design and organizational techniques, as well as "hands-on" development of a personal working portfolio. In part B, participants had the opportunity to present their portfolios and share what worked and what didn't work in the development process. Presentation of the portfolio was also discussed and practiced.

### **4.2.2 Individual Clients**

The PLAR Services Team provided some client advisory services. Following are the statistics regarding those clients who were involved in the advising process:

Advising (completed)	14
General Inquiries	11
Referred to an Institution	11

In total, 36 clients were assisted through the advising process.

### **4.2.3 PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative Progress Report**

The Project served as a resource to 11 pilot Projects funded by PSEST. Project staff prepared a Report on these pilots, attached as Appendix A.

#### **4.2.4 ToolKit**

Participants at the March 2001 Development Orientation led by Susan Simosko expressed considerable interest in having a variety of developmental resources available in a 'ToolKit' format. Shortly thereafter, the Project began work on this initiative. An organizational framework was created that included four categories: Advising, Assessment, Portfolio Development, and PLAR Orientation. A coding system was developed for cross-referencing purposes, and an overall inventory was established.

The ToolKit is available in binder and electronic format. Items in the ToolKit include a variety of agendas, handouts, and overhead transparencies. Linking all the resources together are Facilitator Guides that essentially serve as 'lesson plans' for various types of presentations, including the Project's Advisor and Portfolio Development Orientations. Attached as Appendix B is the ToolKit Inventory.

### **4.3 Promotion & Resource Building**

#### **4.3.1 Communication Activities**

An early priority of the Project was the development of a communications strategy to guide promotion and awareness-building efforts.

Development work began with a facilitated communications planning session for the PLAR Services Team in December 2000. At this session, a five-step communications model was discussed and objectives were described as follows:

- Develop public awareness that PLAR is a universal tool of value to all participants of the labour force;
- Develop public awareness around the importance of articulating and documenting knowledge and skills;
- Build sustainability through the collaborative development of new models and systems for the delivery of PLAR in industry, education, and community sectors;
- Clarify target audience(s) and related communication needs.

Based on these objectives, a preliminary action strategy was developed that included:

- (i) immediate planning for a January 2001 news conference to launch the Project;
- (ii) contracting of a professional communications firm to assist with ongoing communication activities; and
- (iii) contracting for the acquisition of baseline data for benchmarking purposes.

#### ***News Conference***

A news conference to launch the PLAR Services Project was held on January 10, 2001 in Regina. In attendance were representatives of the Federal and Provincial governments, the SLFDB, and various community groups and organizations, along with the Management Team

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and the PLAR Services Team. Also attending was an adult learner who spoke about her successful experience with PLAR in a post-secondary education program.

News releases were issued by the Federal and Provincial governments as well as the SLFDB. In addition, a media briefing was held immediately preceding the news conference. The conference received good coverage on local television stations as well as a feature article in the Regina Leader-Post.

### ***Communications Strategy***

In late January 2001, the Project issued a Request for Proposal – Communications Strategy to a variety of firms who had previously expressed interest in contractual work with the Project. Responses were reviewed through a formal tender assessment process with predefined selection criteria.

In February 2001, the Project contracted with H.J. Linnen and Associates, a professional communications firm based in Regina, to assist in the development and implementation of a Communications Strategy that would set the direction for future communications activities. Included in this contract was the development of a cohesive package of communication ‘tools’, including a tagline, logos, brochure, literature sheet, and website.

### ***Omnibus Poll***

A Provincial Omnibus Poll was utilized to determine public perceptions related to PLAR. The poll involved a random sampling of 1,000 households within nine geographic sampling districts and was conducted using telephone interviews. Questions were designed to explore public opinion in a number of areas, including education and post-secondary education. The following three questions related to PLAR were submitted for the Poll:

1. Have heard of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, P.L.A.R.?
2. Where would you go to get more information about P.L.A.R.?
3. Have you, or some you know used the P.L.A.R. process?

Attempts were made to have the PLAR questions included in the Poll planned for February 2001 so that data could serve as a baseline against which to measure the Project’s awareness-building efforts. Unfortunately, a number of delays were encountered (e.g. due to local by-elections) and the PLAR questions were not delivered until the November 2001 Poll. While this precludes the use of the results as a ‘baseline’, they are nevertheless valuable as an indicator of current public awareness levels and the need for continued awareness-building efforts.

Key findings (as presented in the Government of Saskatchewan “Public Opinion Polling and Market Research” report from October 1, 2001 – December 21, 2001) were as follows:

- Approximately 8% of Saskatchewan residents have heard of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (P.L.A.R.).

- One quarter (26%) of those residents who have heard of P.L.A.R. indicate they would go to the universities to get more information (2% of all respondents) and 25% would go to SIAST (2% of all respondents).
- Approximately one quarter (26%) of those residents who have heard of P.L.A.R. indicate they or someone they know have used the process (2% of all respondents).

### ***Other Communication/Promotion Activities***

- **SLFDB ‘Training in Action’ Conference** - A promotional highlight was the SLFDB ‘Training in Action’ Conference held November 14 & 15, 2001 in Saskatoon. Four PLAR sessions were delivered by nationally-recognized speakers. Approximately 180 people attended and feedback on the PLAR sessions was very positive.
- **PLAR Information Sessions** - In order to capitalize on the availability of the SLFDB conference speakers, four additional PLAR-related information sessions were held on November 16, 2001 at various venues in Saskatoon. These sessions were also very well-received, with a collective attendance of approximately 180 people.
- **SLFDB Newsletters** - The SLFDB has actively promoted the Project in its quarterly newsletters, which are distributed to approximately 5,000 organizations.
- **Diane Hill Professional Development Sessions** - Diane Hill has worked for the past 17 years as a traditional healer, writer and consultant specializing in the design of educational programs for Native people and has been an invited speaker in North America, South Africa and New Zealand. On November 16, 2001 (as part of the PLAR Information Sessions held in Saskatoon) she presented a one-day introductory information session on “PLAR: Applications for an Aboriginal Model” of Holistic Learning. Subsequent to this session, there was significant interest expressed by various organizations and institutions in having Diane Hill return to Saskatchewan to provide additional professional development sessions. The Project, in collaboration with Saskatchewan PSEST, Gabriels Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, co-sponsored three PLAR sessions with an Aboriginal cultural perspective. On March 18, an introductory PLAR session with an Aboriginal perspective comprised part of the Professional Development Day at SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert. Diane delivered a three-day (March 19 – 21, 2002) professional development session focused on implementing PLAR within Aboriginal programs of learning; and the third session was (March 22, 2002) a one-day introduction to PLAR within an Aboriginal Holistic Model of Education at SIAST Wascana Campus in Regina.
- **SLFDB Training for Excellence Award for PLAR/QR** - The Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board has added PLAR/QR as a new category in its annual Training for Excellence Awards.
- **Promotion to Professional/Trade Associations** - A PLAR information package was mailed to approximately 130 Professional/Trade Associations in Saskatchewan. Information presentations were delivered to the Saskatchewan Home Builders Association, the Saskatchewan Florists Association, the Canadian Welding Society, and Saskatoon District Health. In addition, exploratory discussions regarding sector needs were held with Human

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Resource Development organizations, the Occupational Health and Safety sector, and the Health sector through its Network of Inter-professional Regulatory Organizations (NIRO).

### ***National Significance***

The PLAR Services Project also served as a vehicle to initiate and strengthen linkages with inter-provincial contacts to advance the implementation of PLAR on a national level. These linkages led to the development of an information-sharing network, communication and consultative processes, participation in national forums and the identification of potential opportunities for collaboration. The highlights include:

#### **British Columbia**

- Susan Simosko provided professional development in PLAR that formed the basis of the PLAR Orientation sessions delivered in Saskatchewan.
- Preliminary discussions with the Open Learning Agency are underway to determine the possibility of collaborating on the development of a PLAR Assessor course (web-based).

#### **Manitoba**

- The SIAST PLAR Coordinator participated in the DACUM group (October 2001) hosted by Red River College to develop the knowledge and skills matrix for PLAR Practitioners.
- Representatives from Manitoba's Native Education Directorate, New Directions for Children and the Centre for Education & Work (University of Winnipeg) participated in professional development sessions led by Diane Hill in Saskatchewan: *PLAR: Applications for an Aboriginal Model of Holistic Learning and Implementation of PLAR in Aboriginal Programs of Learning*.

#### **Ontario**

- PLAR experts from Ontario (Diane Hill and Sharon Rose) participated as presenters at the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board's "Workplace Training in Action" conference (November 2001).
- Diane Hill of the First Nations Technical Institute delivered a series of presentations and a professional development session exploring the use of PLAR with an Aboriginal perspective in a holistic education model.
- Several representatives from Saskatchewan attended and presented at the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment annual conference in May 2001.
- The Government Liaison to the PLAR Services Project participated in the *National Roundtable for Articulation Agreements in Canada* sponsored by the Canadian Alliance of Education Training Organizations (CAETO) in Ottawa 2002.

#### **Quebec**

- The Government Liaison to the PLAR Services Project met with the Director General of the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Quebec to examine how Quebec addresses the demand for PLAR in relation to professional regulatory bodies and/or associations.

### **Nova Scotia**

- PLAR experts from Nova Scotia (Doug Myers and Alan Cuvelier) participated as presenters at the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board's "Workplace Training in Action" conference (November 2001).
- A partnership with the Nova Scotia PLA Centre is being explored to provide portfolio development certification for practitioners in Saskatchewan.
- Over 40 delegates from Saskatchewan participated in the *Recognizing Learning Conference* held in Halifax in October 2001. Also, representatives from Saskatchewan were involved in the delivery of several presentations at the national conference.
- Saskatchewan hosted a National Roundtable at the *Recognizing Learning Conference* to initiate discussions regarding the value of inter-institutional collaboration in the development of PLAR practitioner courses and/or certification. Over 20 delegates attended the Roundtable discussion.

### **Saskatchewan**

- Presentation to Minister Stewart June 19, 2001.
- The establishment of a website having links to other national/international sites.

An inventory of communication tools, resources and promotional materials is attached as Appendix C.

#### **4.3.2 Resource Collection**

The Project has assembled an extensive collection of PLAR-related resources that includes books, reports, academic papers, videos, conference proceedings, and electronic media. An annotated bibliography of the collection is available on the Project's website ([www.slfdb.com/plar](http://www.slfdb.com/plar) - "Library" page) and new additions to the collection have been highlighted on the website's "What's New" page. Throughout the duration of the Project, the collection was housed at the Project office, and items were made available on a short-term loan basis to community organizations and institutions. An inventory of the collection is attached as Appendix D.

#### **4.4 Policy Development**

A key outcome for the Project was the development of the *Provincial RPL Framework and Strategy Recommendations* document. This document presents a Vision and rationale for the recognition of prior learning in Saskatchewan. A preliminary Implementation Strategy is also presented. Further development work will be required to expand the Strategy to address the roles and responsibilities of all 'partners' in the implementation process, such as post-secondary institutions, industry (business and labour), community-based organizations, government, and professional/trade associations and regulatory bodies.

The development of the Framework began in April 2001 with the establishment of a Policy Working Group. This group included representation from the SLFDB, post-secondary education, and business.

A Draft Framework was prepared by June 2001 and subsequently circulated for review and comment to the various organizations and institutions represented on the Management Team, including post-secondary institutions and the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. The general public was informed of the Draft via a notification in the SLFDB newsletter, and in October 2001, the Draft was presented to the Reference Groups of the SLFDB.

The Working Group reconvened in Saskatoon in January 2002 and a revised Draft was prepared and forwarded to the SLFDB, which will continue to take a leadership role in finalizing the document for submission to the Saskatchewan government. See Appendix E for a copy of the *Provincial RPL Framework and Strategy Recommendations* document.

## 4.5 Forestry

A primary objective of the PLAR Services Project was to work with industry to pilot an occupational PLAR assessment model. The forestry sector was targeted because of anticipated significant growth in the sector and the potential for PLAR to help address some of the human resource challenges that would accompany this growth, such as an increased demand for skilled workers and a greater need for skill portability within the sector.

The evolution of the forestry sub-Project is detailed in Appendix E. The draft 'PLAR Assessment Tool for Sawmill Operators' represents the culmination of development work to date. It is based on learning outcomes that collectively define the skills and knowledge required of a competent Sawmill Operator. Critical performance factors have been identified, along with related assessment questions.

The Sawmill Operator occupation was selected as the pilot occupation for the following reasons:

- Sawmill Operators have diverse on-the-job experience and differing levels of skills and knowledge.
- The hiring process is typically informal.
- 'Credentials' are becoming increasingly desirable as mills become more technologically sophisticated, requiring higher operator skill levels.
- There are limited 'formal' training opportunities for this occupation; on-the-job training is typical.
- Mills range from small, portable, labour-intensive operations to large and highly automated.
- There appeared to be a 'common core' of skills applicable to all operators.

The Project has greatly benefited from the expertise and guidance of the Forestry Training Subcommittee. The Subcommittee is a unique, sector-based forum that includes representatives from industry (including small, mid-size and multi-national operations), First Nations and Métis organizations, government, post-secondary institutions and private training organizations. Its mandate is to administer forestry sector training funds in order to assist workers, particularly

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Aboriginal people and Northerners, in accessing employment opportunities within the forestry sector.

The Project delivered its first presentation to the Forestry Training Subcommittee in early February 2001. Ongoing consultations helped formulate a work plan that ultimately led to the creation of the Sawmill Operator assessment package.

In its present form, the package serves as a 'menu' that addresses a broad range of skills and knowledge requirements. Preliminary feedback from the Forestry Training Subcommittee has suggested the need for something simpler that focuses solely on the assessment of inexperienced new hires. This will be explored through ongoing development work and continued effort towards achieving a product that has been fully validated and endorsed by the Forestry Training Subcommittee.

SIAST has expressed interest in working with the forestry sector to explore the feasibility of a certification program for forestry workers that would incorporate a PLAR option. It is likely that the development work undertaken in this pilot will serve as a framework upon which this outcome can be pursued.

### ***Challenges and Lessons Learned***

The following points briefly summarize some of the challenges and lessons learned during the forestry pilot Project:

- Industry engagement and commitment is essential. This requires up-front time devoted to awareness-building, and ongoing, proactive communication at all levels, from grassroots to upper management.
- Immediate 'buy-in' cannot be assumed. It is important to fully explore and acknowledge the challenges associated with PLAR alongside the benefits, including practical concerns related to costs (time and fiscal), roles and responsibilities, documentation issues, 'gap' training, assessment processes and tools, assessor training, and certification outcomes.
- Expectations need to be clearly communicated and frequently revisited to ensure that realistic, shared goals are established and pursued. This becomes particularly important when working with multiple stakeholders with diverse perspectives.
- Industry expressed a strong desire for PLAR to be simple, flexible, practical, individualized, and achievable. From the start, a key question was "is it viable"?
- Breaking new ground can be time-consuming and a learning experience for everyone involved. For example, the selection of the Sawmill Operator occupation, though seemingly straightforward at the outset, proved to be very challenging due to the diversity of saw-milling operations within the industry as well as the diversity of operator job functions within the occupation. The matter of assessment was also discovered to be more complex than

originally anticipated. Both of these factors impacted pre-established timelines and outcomes.

- Geography and staffing resources were two factors that negatively impacted the Project's ability to maintain a continuous presence with industry. A more sustained presence would have been beneficial in terms of relationship-building and uninterrupted progress towards goals.

## **4.6 Evaluation**

Trimension Training and Consulting Group Inc. was contracted by the SLFDB to undertake the development and implementation of an Evaluation Strategy.

The goals of the evaluation strategy were to assess the outcomes of the Project through:

1. Quantitative measurement through the collection of statistical results that may include the number of clients served and in what capacity as well as the number of services delivered;
2. Qualitative measurement to assess and determine how the clients react to PLAR services and their level of satisfaction, along with the partners in the process and their level of satisfaction; and
3. Tracking the results of a selected number of clients through their academic/work and career progression following PLAR.

### **4.6.1 Evaluation Strategy**

#### ***Evaluation Model***

The purpose of the evaluation model was to assess achievement of the Projects goals, objectives, strategies and timelines. The evaluation model used for the PLAR Services Project was one of *Formative and Summative Evaluation* using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

#### ***Evaluation Framework***

The components of the evaluation framework were as follows:

1. ***Planning Evaluation*** – assesses the understanding of the key players involved of the Project goals, objectives, strategies and timelines. It addresses the following types of questions:
  - Why was the Project developed? What is the problem or need it is attempting to address?
  - Who are the stakeholders? Who are the people involved in the Project? Who are the people interested in the Project who may not be involved?
  - What do the stakeholders want to know? What questions are most important to which stakeholders? What questions are secondary in importance? Where do concerns coincide? Where are they in conflict?
  - Who are the participants to be served?
  - What are the activities and strategies that will involve the participants? What is the intervention? How will participants benefit? What are the expected outcomes?

- What are the measurable outcomes? What is the expected impact of the Project in the short-term? The long-term?
- What arrangements have been made for data collection? What are the understandings regarding record keeping, responding to surveys and participation in testing?

2. **Formative Evaluation** – assesses ongoing Project activities. It consists of two types: Implementation Evaluation and Progress Evaluation.

**Implementation Evaluation** – assesses whether the Project is being conducted as planned. It addresses the following types of questions:

- Were the appropriate participants selected and involved in the planned activities?
- Do the activities and strategies match those described in the plan? If not, are the changes in activities justified and described?
- Were activities conducted according to the proposed timeline? If not, why? By appropriate personnel?
- Was a management plan developed and followed?

**Progress Evaluation** – assesses the progress made by the participants in meeting the Project goals. It addresses the following types of questions:

- Are the participants moving toward the anticipated goals of the Project?
- Which of the activities and strategies are aiding the participants to move toward the goals?
- Were the participants adequately orientated to perform their respective roles as Advisors, Assessors and/or Trainers?
- Was capacity built within post-secondary institutions to deliver PLAR services?
- Was there an increased awareness amongst the public?
- Was there an increase in the access to support service organizations supporting individuals in employment transition?

3. **Summative Evaluation** – assesses Project success – the extent to which the completed Project has met its goals. It addresses the following types of questions:

- Was the Project successful?
- What were the challenges of the Project?
- Did the Project meet the overall goals?
- Did the participants benefit from the Project?
- What components were the most effective?
- Were there any gaps, voids, limitations or barriers, which could prevent capacity building?

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#### **4.6.2 Evaluation Methodology**

To ensure the Project Outcomes were measured as defined in the documentation provided, the following steps were undertaken:

- An initial meeting with the Project team was held to define and finalize the evaluation goals. This included examining the goals as previously defined. Adjustments were made to the evaluation goals.
- An evaluation framework was adopted which consisted of formative and summative evaluation. A part of this model is based on the assumption that one level of achievement builds on another and that the evaluation at any given level is based on evidence collected for that particular level, as well as from previous levels and for that matter data that has or is gathered by and from other sources can be incorporated into the process.
- This framework incorporates both summative evaluation, which is used to determine the end results and formative evaluation, which is used to evaluate the process of the Project. The evaluation framework is a valuable tool as it recognizes that differences exist in the total Project being evaluated. It is able to relate effectiveness of marketing and the impact of the Project. It is also able to analyze the cumulative effect of the different components that are in the PLAR Services Project. This framework is capable of identifying where weaknesses occur and the model traces the total Project planning process from initial awareness/promotion up to the final impact. It also enables the evaluation to be based on both hard evidence (statistical data) and professional observation.
- Monthly up-dates were provided to the PLAR Project Team together with recommendations for change or improvement.
- Quarterly reports from the second quarter forward were provided to members of the Project Team, Management Team and relevant stakeholders.

#### **4.6.3 Evaluation Goals**

The evaluation goals were defined as follows:

1. Engage the relevant stakeholders in the measurement of the Project performance against the overall Project outcomes.
2. Provide feedback to the Project Team on various activities and services on an ongoing basis to help direct development and revisions to materials.
3. Identify the types of infrastructures and the resources required to increase public awareness in order to build capacity and meet demand.
4. Provide the necessary background information for the development of a strategic plan and policy for ongoing delivery and sustainability of PLAR services.
5. Collect, compile and analyze statistical results of the number of client services being provided and delivered and their satisfaction levels.
6. Measure the effectiveness of the client referral system and assessment processes.
7. Identify the gaps, limitations and barriers to capacity building and develop recommendations to be forwarded to SLFDB PLAR Services Project in a timely manner so they can be addressed.

## **5.0 Unanticipated Outcomes**

### **5.1 Construction Careers Regina/Ranch Ehrlo Youth Project**

In the summer of 2001, the PLAR Services Project became aware of a collaborative venture between Construction Careers Regina (CCR) and Ranch Ehrlo Society that involved introducing at-risk youth to the construction industry. The possibility of using portfolio development as an employability tool arose and the Project approached CCR/Ranch Ehrlo with a proposal for collaboration in this area. There was initial skepticism regarding the applicability of such a tool to First Nations youth, along with concerns related to literacy issues, cultural values, and employer acceptance. However, the potential benefits of the process were also identified, such as increasing youths' self-confidence, identifying their potential for learning, and using the process to facilitate goal-setting. It was agreed to proceed with a pilot. Over the course of several weeks, PLAR Services staff worked with the CCR/Ranch Ehrlo staff to provide an orientation to PLAR and portfolio development. It was decided that the CCR/Ranch Ehrlo staff would develop their own portfolios first in order to experience the process themselves. They would then facilitate the process with the youth group.

There was a clear level of interest expressed by the youth, and as the pilot proceeded, new tools and strategies were developed, such as a checklist of learning and skills and the use of cameras to create photographic records of skill development. That pilot was the subject of a 75-minute presentation at the national 'Recognizing Learning' conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia October 28-31, 2001. It has also been profiled by the Conference Board of Canada in its 2001 publication "Making the Skills Connection – Labour Market Transitions Models that Work".

### **5.2 PLAR: Applications for Aboriginal Learners Professional Development Sessions**

As noted elsewhere in this Report, the Project had the opportunity to support the delivery of a number of professional development sessions led by Diane Hill, an Aboriginal educator/consultant from the First Nations Technical Institute in Ontario. These sessions drew attention to the importance of cultural considerations in the implementation of PLAR, and were of particular benefit to the Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in the province.

Saskatchewan demographics indicate a growing Aboriginal population and Aboriginal workforce development will continue to grow in importance, as will culturally-sensitive models of learning, teaching, and the recognition of prior learning.

### **5.3 PSEST Initiatives**

In the fall of 2000, the PSEST – PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative was launched to provide support for conducting PLAR pilot Projects in post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan. An opportunity emerged for the PLAR Services Project to partner with PSEST on this initiative. Since a key outcome of the Project was to build long-term capacity for PLAR services, it was agreed that this formalized link would be both timely and beneficial for the advancement of

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PLAR in the post-secondary learning system. Subsequently, PSEST provided funding and preliminary coordination services, while the Project provided ongoing resource support to the pilots.

The Project also led the preparation of the Report attached as Appendix A. This report presents an overview of the 11 PLAR pilot Projects as well as a summary of lessons learned and best practices. The report reflects the rich data obtained through the interviews conducted with the Pilot Coordinators and will serve as a valuable resource for post-secondary institutions, government, and other organizations engaged in capacity-building initiatives.

#### **5.4 Racialized Canadians**

Another unanticipated outcome was that the Racialized Canadians Reference Group was disappointed that the level of capacity for recognizing foreign credentials did not reach their expected level.

The Reference Group “Racialized Canadians” took unprecedented leadership in Saskatchewan by holding forums in Regina and Saskatoon on PLAR. The panels of immigrants with international qualifications relayed their experiences in Canada and the post secondary educational institutions, (SIAS, University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, and the Apprenticeship Commission) presented their PLAR services. International Qualifications Assessment Service, (IQAS) was promoted to all those who attended.

A representative from the Reference Group, was an active participant in all the proposal development and planning sessions for the PLAR Services Project. Presentations were made to the Settlement Agencies and the Reference Group met on several occasions to discuss potential pilots to create challenges for recognition of qualifications. The Racialized Canadians representative reported to the SLFDB (October 2001) that the Reference Group was disappointed that one of the staff positions was not filled by a person with the immigrant experience and that progress was limited for assisting individuals.

A meeting between the Project Staff, the Saskatoon and Regina Open Door Societies, the Racialized Canadian representative and the SLFDB Executive Director was held (November 2001) to develop a plan of action for a pilot project. A proposal has been created and funding is being discussed with the Department of Learning, *formerly the Department of Post Secondary Education and Skills Training*.

### **6.0 Evaluation Results**

Quarterly evaluation reports were provided to the PLAR Services Team and the Management Team in order to successfully move forward into the subsequent quarters. Attached as Appendix G are the quarterly reports.

An evaluation strategy was developed early in the second quarter. Several survey instruments and questionnaires were also drafted for use. They were used throughout the Project to track

individuals participating in or forming part of the Project and to gather statistical information. The instruments developed (Appendix H) include:

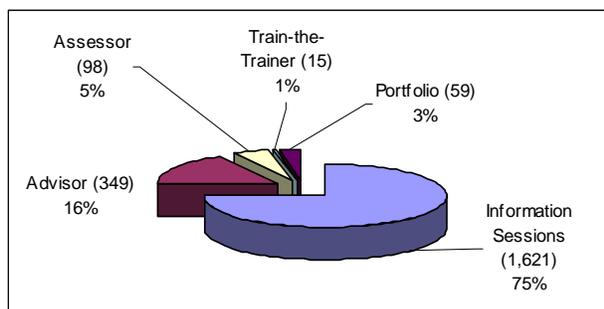
- Consent to be Contacted
- Cover Letter – Attached to Consent to be Contacted
- Client Tracking Form
- Orientation Questionnaire
- Advisor Follow-up Questionnaire
- Management Team Questionnaire (2)
- Education Institution Questionnaire

The changes made throughout the Project to improve the delivery of the Advisor Orientations include:

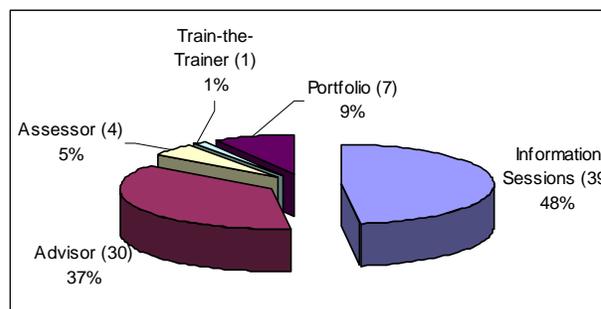
- all handout materials were combined and put into the initial package attendees received so that all handouts are available when needed. Also, a copy of the slides as a handout with room to make notes beside each slide were included in the initial package;
- The evaluations completed by participants clearly indicated in the third quarter a need for additional area (topic) specific orientations, particularly on portfolio development. As a result, the PLAR Services Team, through the latter part of the third quarter, designed and developed specific Portfolio Development for Advisor Orientations.

In order to randomly track those individuals who were being advised outside of the PLAR Services Team (at SIAST, universities, etc.) it was recommended that a follow-up letter be sent to all Advisor Orientation participants, explaining the previously developed Consent Form and its purpose.

In total Orientation sessions were delivered to 2,142 individuals through 81 sessions. The most individuals were reached or informed about PLAR through the PLAR Orientations.



N = 2,142

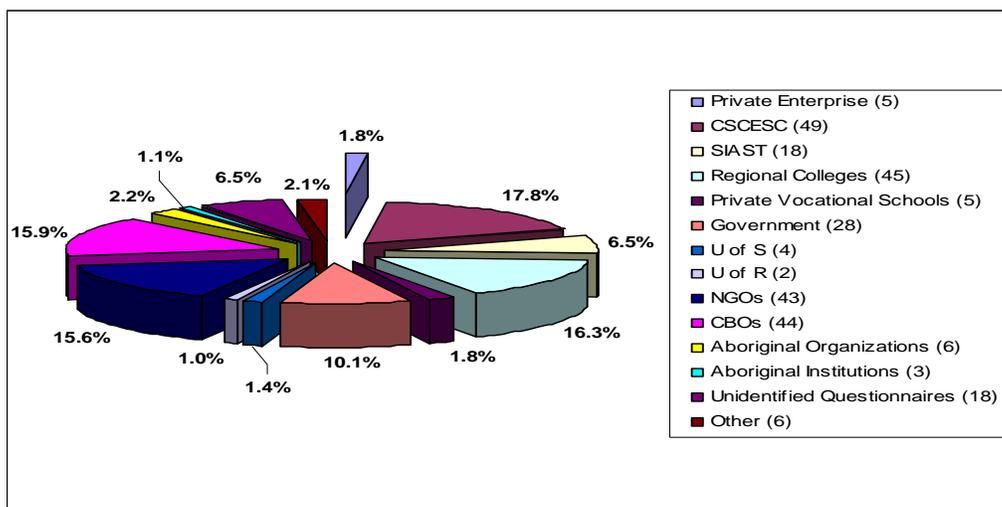


N= 81

The statistics above represent only the Assessor Orientation originally delivered by Susan Simosko. However, two of the PLAR Orientations were designed and geared specifically towards assessment practices within post-secondary education institutions.

## 6.1 Advisor Orientations

The Advisor Orientations reached a wide range of individuals across Saskatchewan. The results below represent 276 individuals who completed an evaluation. The majority of participants were from CSCESC (17.8%), Regional Colleges (16.3%), CBOs (15.9%), and NGOs (15.6%).



N=276

It should be noted that the “other” category includes Crown Corporations, Public and Separate Schools/Boards, Municipal and Unions.

Orientation participants were asked if the session they attended had been satisfactory and/or useful. Almost all (99%) respondents indicated the session was satisfactory and/or useful. Participants were also asked if the session met their expectations. This time, 96% indicated it had, while 3% indicated it hadn't.

Participants provided many suggestions for improvements to the sessions. The most common ones were:

- more physical examples;
- more hands-on;
- more role-playing;
- longer sessions;
- provisions for portfolio samples and development.

Just over three-quarters (76%) of participants felt they required more support to become competent in order to effectively practice the advising techniques learned. Twenty-two (22%) percent indicated they required additional support in the form of:

- active support of institutional departments;
- further training (assessor and portfolio development);
- consistency in evaluation procedures and results;

- more trained staff available;
- a designated PLAR resource person for Saskatchewan;
- frequent up-dates possibly in the form of a newsletter;
- list of resources available;
- practical experience;
- having available to them sample portfolios.

These participants indicated they would get their support from the PLAR Services Team, SLFDB, co-workers, SIAST or the internet.

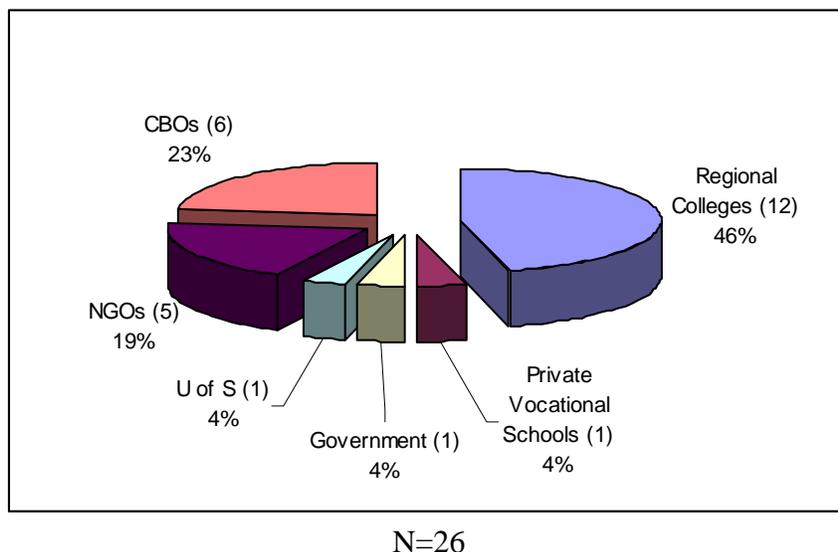
Most participants (96%) indicated they intended to actively apply what they had learned in the session.

## 6.2 Portfolio Development for Advisor Orientations

A pilot Portfolio Development Orientation was held early in the fourth quarter. Evaluation results from these participants include:

- Most participants felt the sessions to be beneficial based on the fact that participants were able to gather in a small group and share experiences and information regarding the compilation of their portfolios.
- The facilitator had very creative approaches and ideas to compiling a portfolio.
- Challenges of developing a portfolio include the extensive time it takes to compile a portfolio and being able to show experiential evidence.
- Fifty (50%) percent of the participants felt well prepared to continue developing their portfolios. The other fifty (50%) felt they would require further assistance.
- The handouts were, for the most part, useful or very useful to the participants.
- It was suggested that meeting once a week for an extended period of time might be beneficial in completing portfolios as more time was required in this respect.
- It was also suggested that a weekly tip posted on the PLAR website regarding portfolio development may be useful.
- All participants enjoyed the portfolio development session.

Following the pilot session, an additional six (6) portfolio, two part sessions were held. These orientations were targeted for individuals who had already completed the Advisor Orientation. A total of twenty-six (26) individuals completed evaluation questionnaires. These individuals are representative of the following groups:



All participants indicated that the session was satisfactory and/or useful and met their expectations. Suggested improvements include:

- more of a "show and tell" (including individual conversations with people about their work);
- more time, possibly a third and fourth session;
- require ongoing support;
- more time for questions and discussion.

Well over three-quarters (84%) of individuals require further support to become competent with portfolio development. Support required includes:

- More familiarization with different types of portfolios. Seeing more physical portfolios;
- Advising and assessing;
- More training/information;
- More orientations in all areas;
- Guidance.

These individuals indicated they would go to other attendees, the PLAR Services Project, books, co-workers, and others who have portfolios or who have taught portfolio development to get that support. It was also suggested they would consider the development of a network for additional support and information sharing.

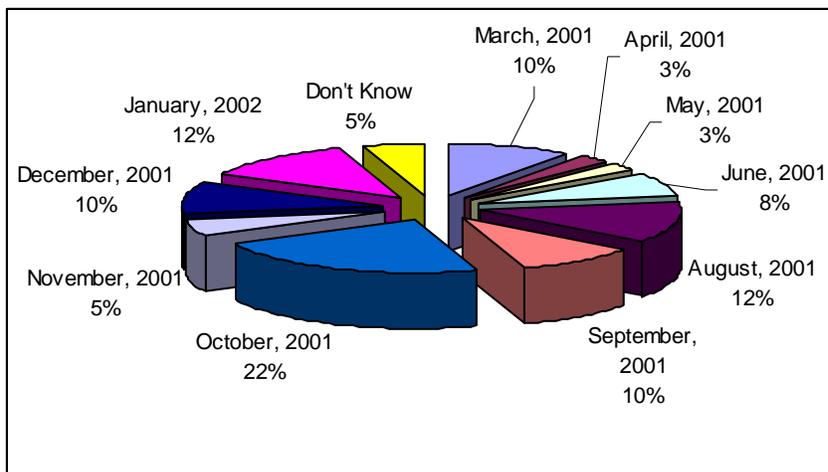
All participants intend to actively apply what they have learned through the Portfolio Development Orientations.

### **6.3 Advisor Follow-up Results**

A database was compiled of those individuals who completed the Advisor Orientation. Following are the results of a random sampling of 40 participants.

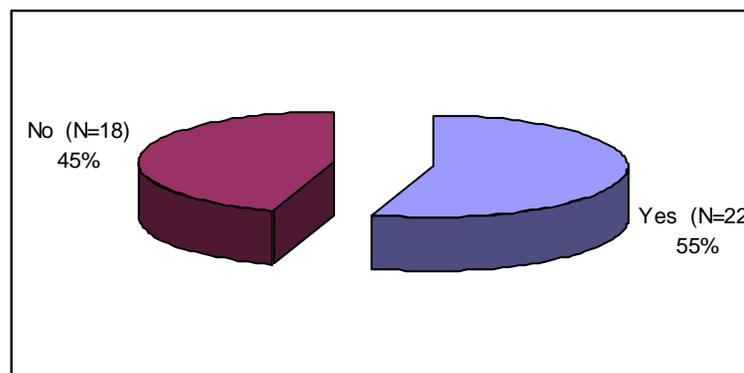
### 6.3.1 *Direct Application*

#### *When did you attend your first advisor Orientation Session?*



N=40

#### *Are you currently using the PLAR advising practices/techniques you learned at the session?*



N=40

#### *Why not?*

Almost one-half (45%) of the individuals surveyed are not currently using PLAR advising practices/techniques because they don't see a lot of it where they work, they only took the orientation to become more aware of PLAR and they don't know enough about the process.

#### *In what manner or fashion are you using the techniques learned?*

Of those individuals who are using PLAR practices or techniques (55%), some of the manners or fashions in which they are using the techniques learned include:

- With clients on a one-to-one basis;
- Career counseling – advanced standing or credit for prior learning;
- Portfolio development;
- Resumes;

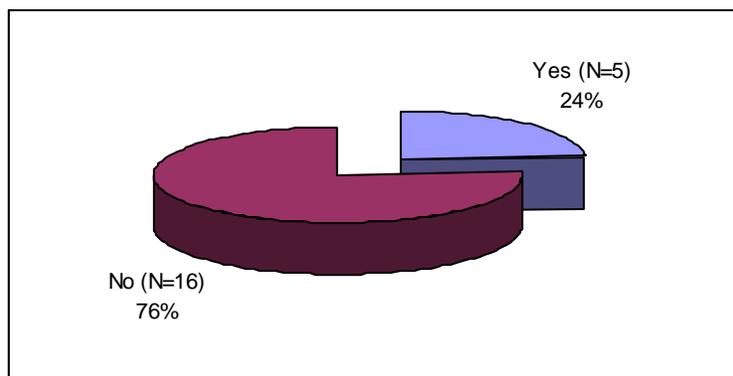
- Make client familiar with process and walking them through the process;
- Give people information that PLAR is an option for them.

***Who are the individuals you are advising?***

Those practicing PLAR are advising many different types of individuals, including:

- Employment insurance recipients;
- Social assistance recipients;
- General public;
- Women;
- Students;
- Business people;
- Working clients looking for career changes;
- Learning disabled;
- Injured workers;
- Farm families;
- Immigrant adult students.

***Have any of your clients advanced further in the PLAR process?***



N=21

***How many?***

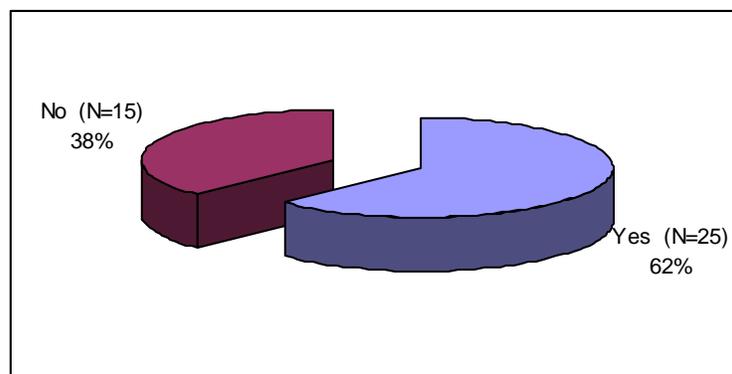
In total, 5 respondents surveyed have seen 49 individuals advance beyond the advising stage in the PLAR process.

***What have they done?***

The type or form of advancement has been:

- “They have applied for and in most cases received credits”;
- “They have developed a volunteer position to paid employment”;
- “Some have received credits within a larger scope of their studies”;
- “Were involved in a Portfolio Development Orientations”.

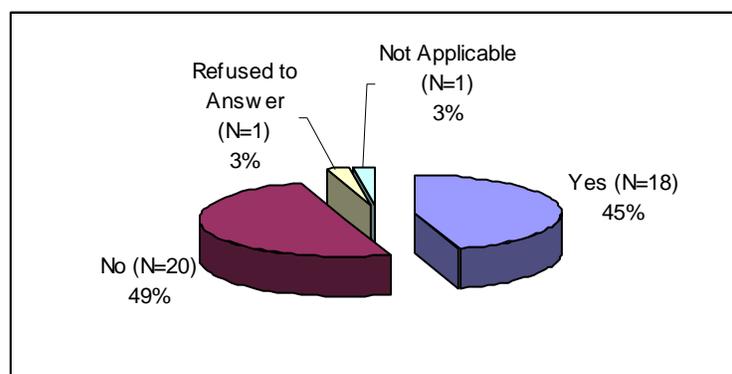
***Has there been any follow-up by the PLAR Services Team since you attended the Advisor Orientation Session?***



N=40

**6.3.2 Personal Development**

***Do you need further support and training to be an effective advisor?***



N=40

***What support/training do you feel you need and where do you believe this support should come from?***

The support or training survey participants feel they need includes refresher orientations and sessions designed specifically for portfolio development and assessing. They believe this support should come from those who originally delivered the orientations and/or SLFDB.

***What further professional development do you require or desire?***

Approximately one-third (33.3%) of respondents do not require or desire further professional development and another 13% are unsure. Those who require or desire further professional development would like the following:

- More time to use it;
- More recognition and funding from outside agencies, employers and educational institutions;

- Professional development in ethics and career development, including counseling and facilitation skills;
- Portfolio development;
- Follow-up to see what everyone else is doing to exchange experiences.

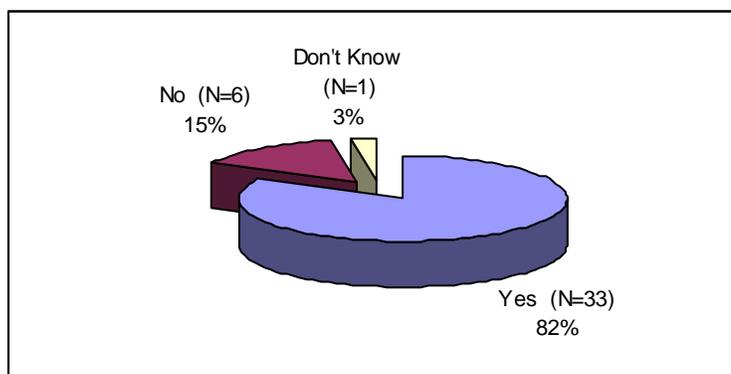
***Identify any barriers or challenges that you have come across in the course of doing PLAR advising.***

Almost one-third (32.5%) of individuals surveyed did not identify any barriers or challenges in the course of doing PLAR advising. Ten (10%) percent indicated they could not comment because they are not actively practicing PLAR advising techniques. Those barriers or challenges identified include:

- Not very practical in employment practices;
- The cost to the individual for having their prior learning accessed and approved;
- Convincing individuals that all learning counts;
- It's not well recognized;
- Portfolios are not practical. They take too much time to prepare;
- General knowledge of PLAR and the use of portfolios;
- There needs to be a provincial structure in place for clients to be able to use the program;
- PLAR is still limited to more academic applications. The system is not quite ready to recognize hands-on learning in the absence of any upgrading learning, especially in rural areas.

### **6.3.3 Organizational Development**

***Do you feel the PLAR Services Project is having any influence on you in regards to raising awareness?***



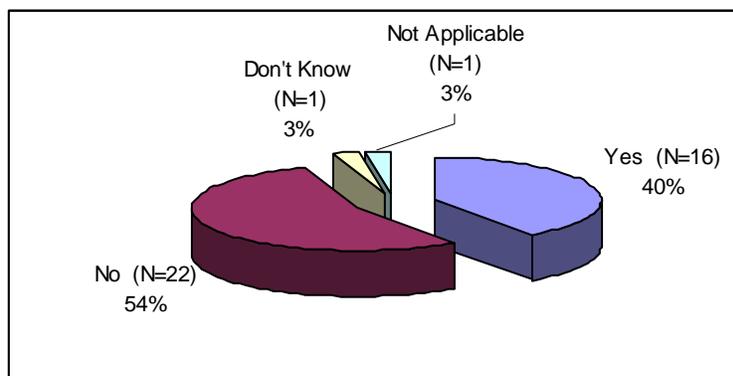
N=40

***If yes, please describe.***

- “The fact that it doesn't just have to do with education but all aspects of prior learning counts. It gives clients hope.”
- “Prior to the services Project I had no knowledge of PLAR.”

- “Lots of individuals have taken the PLAR orientations.”
- “It was very important in seeing the potential of people in the workforce that isn't being recognized right now.”
- “This is a user-friendly tool.”

***Do you feel the PLAR Services Project is having any influence on you in regards to capacity building?***

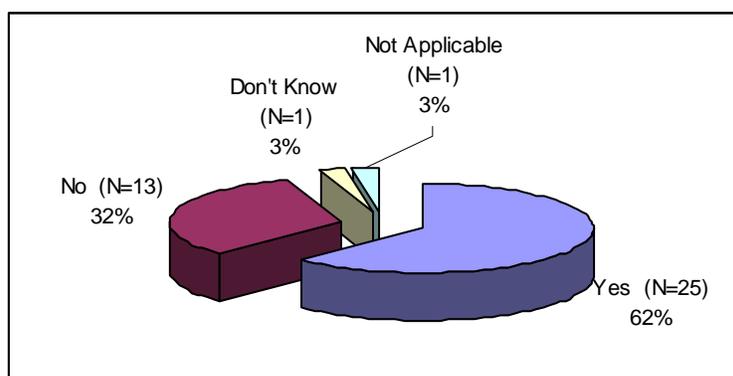


N=40

***If yes, please describe.***

- Provides the opportunity to increase self-confidence and self-worth.
- It helps with identifying where the gaps exist in application.
- The Project created a greater awareness of the potential of the instrument.

***Do you feel the PLAR Services Project is having any influence on your organization in regards to raising awareness?***

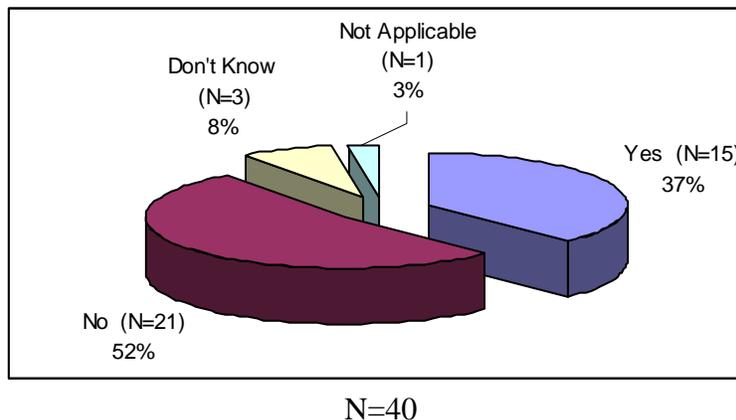


N=40

***If yes, please describe.***

- PLAR provides more options.
- People are talking about PLAR and trying to explain it.
- Staff have become aware and are interested in attending PLAR orientations.

***Do you feel the PLAR Services Project is having any influence on your organization in regards to capacity building?***



***If yes, please describe.***

- Every tool that is available is a benefit.
- In the sense of raising awareness.
- Increasing skill sets of staff and clients.

***How influential are you, or are you in a position to influence change with regard to enhancing a client's career through PLAR?***

Of the individuals surveyed, 37.5% indicated they are very influential in influencing change with regard to enhancing a client's career through PLAR. Only 17.5% are somewhat influential and 25% are not influential or don't know if they are. Another 5% indicated that as an organization they felt they were influential, however as an individual, they were not.

***What support from PLAR Services will increase your ability to influence change?***

The supports required from PLAR Services that will increase respondents' ability to influence change include the following:

- More education among employers and educational facilities;
- Making sure counselors are kept up-to-date regarding referrals and applications;
- An increase in general awareness of PLAR and the changes;
- More orientations or information regarding PLAR;
- Communication on the successes;
- A reduction in the assessment costs and an increase in the assessing process.

Approximately one-quarter of participants indicated they didn't require support from PLAR Services or were unsure of what that support might entail.

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## 6.4 Management Team

During the course of the PLAR Services Project, the members of the Management Team were surveyed and interviewed to obtain feedback and input. This information was also used to serve as a benchmark for follow-up. The qualitative research findings included:

- Project has been successful in providing awareness for PLAR and providing training sessions for Advisors.
- Mixed expectations and views of the Project outcomes.
- There is a need for defining a common vision.
- The Project outcomes have been delayed somewhat due to the decision of growing our own experts.
- There has been active promotion of PLAR within the respective organizations.
- Some Management Team members have identified some of the priorities the Project should be focused on.
- Expectations of the PLAR Services Project:
  - interpretations of the original work plan differ;
  - the Project isn't proceeding as fast as originally intended;
  - communication and awareness need to increase;
  - provide focus and direction to the Project;
  - recognize the diversity both culturally and organizationally of the partners of the Project.

The Management Team very soon into the Project recognized the importance of their role in achieving the Project outcomes and goals. The areas where their role was of great importance were:

- Communication, both internally and externally;
- Planning;
- Establishing a clear vision;
- Working as a team.

The lessons learned by them will greatly aid in their effectiveness in the future. The results of the research can be found in more detail in Appendix G (in both the third and fifth quarter reports).

## 6.5 Post-Secondary Institutions

Members of the post-secondary institutions who were represented on the Management Team provided input and feedback into the evaluation process.

A summary of the findings from the input received included:

- Institutional capacities to respond include:
  - designating specific programs conducive for PLAR services;

- 
- assigning or hiring staff specifically responsible for PLAR services;
  - initiatives to raise awareness and garner support from administration is taking place;
  - formal and non-formal policies and practices taking place within the institutions;
  - developing support for long-term capacity;
  - need to recognize that institutions operate autonomously and quite differently.
- Communication processes need to recognize:
    - role of PLAR Services with each institution;
    - role of the institutions both within and between each other.
- Supply and Demand
    - identify the unmet need;
    - assess employer awareness and support;
    - identify occupations compatible to PLAR;
    - identify the typical PLAR client;
    - identify where PLAR services are needed;
    - address the constraints of building capacity.
- Data Tracking Systems
- Expectations of the PLAR Services Project Team:
    - develop and communicate the awareness of PLAR within the province and with the relevant stakeholders;
    - provide expertise, guidance, leadership and delivery of portfolio development to the Project partners (stakeholders);
    - establish standards to enable access to assessment and recognition by various institutions and accreditation agencies;
    - work with all institutions and agencies to address delivery of services and ensure capacity to deliver;
    - provide workshops on using assessment tools and portfolio development;
    - develop and establish communication processes to keep all stakeholders and partners informed on advances and developments;
    - stay focused on the Project outcomes.
- Issues
    - the professional development time required to bring the Project Services Team “up to speed” has taken time away from achieving the Project outcomes.

The details of the results can be found in Appendix G (see fourth quarter report).

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## 7.0 Key Findings

Following are the conclusions drawn from the qualitative and quantitative research undertaken throughout the term of the Project. They are:

### Administration

- A 15-person Management Team co-chaired by Business and Labour provided leadership and guided the Project. The membership consisted of five (5) Education (University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science & Technology (SIAST)), three (3) Business, three (3) Labour, one (1) Racialized Canadian, one (1) Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) (currently represented by SIFC), one (1) Métis and one (1) SLFDB representative. *Funding partners were ex-officio members.*
- The PLAR Services Team included the Project Manager, Administrative Assistant and two Facilitators. Also closely involved was the PLAR Analyst for Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST).
- The members of the Administrative Team include two (2) Business, two (2) Labour, one (1) FSIN, one (1) MNS, one (1) Racialized Canadian and one (1) Education member.
- Over the course of the Project, the workings of the Management Team have evolved and become increasingly effective. The lessons learned in this phase of the Project will greatly aid the Management Team for the next phase.
- The Management Team needs to examine the structure, make-up and role for the next phase.
- Over the course of the Project there were changes in staffing and location.

### Services & Products

- In total, Orientation Sessions were delivered to 2,142 individuals through 81 sessions. The largest number of individuals were reached or informed about PLAR through the PLAR Orientations (1,621 individuals), with Advisor Orientations reaching 349 individuals, and Portfolio Development Orientations reaching 59 individuals.
- Those attending Advisor Orientations consisted mainly of 18% Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services Centres (CSCESC), 16% Regional Colleges, 16% NGOs and 16% CBOs.
- Two PLAR Orientations having an assessment focus were designed and delivered for post-secondary education institutions.
- Over the course of the Project, 36 individuals were assisted through the advising process by the PLAR Services Team.
- The Project served as a resource to the Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST) PLAR Pilot Initiatives and led the preparation of the PLAR Enhancement Funding Initiative Progress Report.
- A ToolKit was developed providing resources on advising, assessing, portfolio development and general PLAR Orientations.

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## Promotions & Resource Building

- A communication strategy was developed which guided promotion and awareness-building activities.
- A number of effective communication activities and tools were developed, including a website, brochure, tag line, logo and literature sheet.
- An extensive collection of PLAR-related resources has been assembled.
- The omnibus poll conducted in the fall of 2001 revealed that a small percentage of Saskatchewan residents had heard of PLAR (8%).
- The Project, in collaboration with Saskatchewan PSEST, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, co-sponsored three PLAR sessions with an Aboriginal cultural perspective. On March 18, an introductory PLAR session with an Aboriginal perspective comprised part of the Professional Development Day at SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert; the second a three-day (March 19 – 21, 2002) professional development session focused on implementing PLAR within Aboriginal programs of learning; and the third session was (March 22, 2002) a one-day introduction to PLAR within an Aboriginal Holistic Model of Education at SIAST Wascana Campus in Regina.
- The PLAR Services Project also served as a vehicle to initiate and strengthen linkages with inter-provincial contacts to advance the implementation of PLAR on a national level. These linkages led to the development of an information-sharing network, communication and consultative processes, participation in national forums and the identification of potential opportunities for collaboration. These inter-provincial contacts were with British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario.

## Policy Development

- A draft *Provincial RPL Framework and Strategy Recommendations* document has been prepared. Further work is required to develop the implementation strategy so that the document can be submitted to government.

## Forestry

- An Assessment Tool for Sawmill Operators has been developed.
- There is a commitment by SLFDB and the Forestry Training Subcommittee to finalize the Assessment Tool and achieve industry validation.
- The Forestry Training Subcommittee has been instrumental in facilitating the developmental work in this sector.

## Unanticipated Outcomes

- There were a number of unanticipated outcomes that were realized over the course of the Project, which contributed to the success in raising awareness and increasing access to PLAR processes; namely the PSEST PLAR Pilot Initiatives, the youth Project with Construction Careers Regina and Ranch Ehrlo Society, as well as Professional Development opportunities.

- Another unanticipated outcome was that the Racialized Canadians Reference Group was disappointed that the level of capacity for recognizing foreign credentials did not reach their expected level.

### **Evaluation Results**

- The individual advising process done by the PLAR Service Team was found to be very resource intensive.
- 99% of survey respondents indicated the Advisor Orientations and 100% of survey respondents indicated the Portfolio Development Orientations were satisfactory and/or useful. 96% of Advisor respondents and 100% of Portfolio respondents indicated the sessions had met their expectations.
- Many suggestions were given for improvements to the Advisor Orientations, including more physical examples, more hands-on, more role-playing, longer sessions, and provisions for portfolio samples and development.
- Suggested improvements to the Portfolio Development Orientations included more time, ongoing support and a question and answer period.
- 76% of Advisor Orientation participants (hereafter referred to as Advisors) felt they required more support to become competent in order to effectively practice the advising techniques learned in the form of a designated PLAR resource person for Saskatchewan, frequent updates possible in the form of a newsletter, active support of institutional departments, further orientations, more trained staff, list of resources available, practical experience and having access to sample portfolios. These participants indicated they would get their support from the PLAR Service Team, SLFDB, co-workers, SIAST or the internet.
- 84% of Portfolio Development Orientations participants require further support in the form of advising and assessing techniques, more information, more physical evidence, more orientations, and guidance. These participants indicated they would go to Orientation participants, the PLAR Services Project, books, co-workers or develop a network to get that support.
- 96% of Advisor Orientation participants and 100% of Portfolio Development Orientations participants indicated they intended to actively apply what they had learned in the session.
- 55% of Advisors are currently using the PLAR advising practices/techniques learned in the Orientation session. Advising techniques are being used with clients on a one-to-one basis, for career counseling, for portfolio development, resumes, to provide clients with PLAR information and make them aware of the PLAR process.
  - Individuals being advised by Advisors include: employment insurance recipients; social assistance recipients; general public; women; students; business people; working clients looking for career changes; learning disabled; injured workers; farm families and immigrant adult students.
  - 82% of Advisors feel the PLAR Services Project influenced them with respect to raising awareness and 62% feel the Project influenced their organization with respect to raising awareness.
  - 40% of Advisors feel the PLAR Services Project influenced them with respect to building capacity and 37% feel the Project influenced their organization with respect to building capacity.

- The Management Team recognized the importance of their role in achieving the outcomes and goals of the Project. The areas where their roles were of great importance were: communication, both internally and externally, planning, establishing a clear vision and working as a team.

## 8.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

The PLAR Services Project has enabled the SLFDB to facilitate an increase in provincial capacity for PLAR through various avenues, namely post-secondary institutions, employment support services, community-based organizations and industry. A significant number of participants from a large number of communities and organizations from across the province have been introduced to PLAR and connected to initiatives in other provinces. As well, these individuals have been provided with support to not only gain a better understanding of PLAR, but also to develop skills to make a change at several different levels – through policy and programs, in the labour market, in service delivery systems and in organizations.

The various activities undertaken by the Project, including working with stakeholders, delivering orientation sessions, consulting and partnering with government and collaborating with post-secondary institutions have all made a difference. The PLAR Services Project has provided many opportunities for employees, employers and other individuals to become more informed, supported and skilled in recognizing the benefits of prior learning and applying prior learning principles and practices.

The following are observations and recommendations resulting from the evaluation process:

1. At the provincial level, co-ordination and communication was found to be of extreme importance, not only with the PLAR Services Team, but also amongst the stakeholders participating on the Management Team, the Administrative Team, as well as with the large number of government departments, agencies and organizations. Community leaders are accepting leadership for this initiative and have taken a risk.

**Recommendation:** To be effective, strategies for the support required to undertake a project of this nature need to be clearly articulated and documented in order to gain commitment and acceptance.

2. The process of building awareness and provincial capacity takes time. In fact, it takes a **long** time to realize the full potential. The acceptance of the fact that challenges did occur and the commitment to see the Project through was very evident.

**Recommendation:** The nature of a project this size needs to be continually recognized and accommodated with a long-term commitment of resources.

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3. The PLAR Services Project has raised awareness and assisted with some capacity for service in the province. However, for PLAR service to become sustainable, financial support within the employment and training systems and professional development of service providers are required.

**Recommendation:** National leadership is required to maintain standards and resources are required to provide adequate service in Saskatchewan industry and the post secondary education, training and employment systems.

4. A provincial policy is essential to ensuring sustainability and full implementation of PLAR in Saskatchewan.

**Recommendation:** Efforts in the form of leadership and resources to implement the recommendations in the *Provincial RPL Framework & Strategy Recommendations* document are required.

5. There is a need for a fully integrated and adaptable service delivery system within the Province of Saskatchewan.

**Recommendation:** A provincial network of stakeholders and implementation strategy is needed to further develop a service delivery system consistent with the vision.

6. Orientation participants have expressed a desire for an information and “support network”.

**Recommendation:** A contact list of PLAR practitioners was established by the PLAR Services Project in Phase 1. The contact list needs to be maintained and formalized.

7. Practitioner standards are important in all areas of PLAR, including advising, assessment and portfolio development.

**Recommendation:** A partnership should be pursued between the SLFDP and the Nova Scotia PLA Centre for portfolio development certification.

**Recommendation:** Support needs to be provided to achieve the development of practitioner certification programs for provincial and national recognition and accreditation.

8. The Project has worked with a diverse group of stakeholders interested in PLAR and has acknowledged their diverse needs. Resources must be provided for the co-ordination of annual consultations with stakeholders in order to continue to address their needs.

**Recommendation:** Annual consultations with stakeholder groups should be coordinated by the SLFDB in cooperation with the Federal and Provincial Governments.

9. The need for support services in PLAR will continue in Saskatchewan.

**Recommendation:** The SLFDB and PSEST need to address the demand for services by pursuing the resources to implement a strategy for recognizing prior learning in Saskatchewan.

10. Linkages need to be strengthened with professional regulatory bodies to advance PLAR/QR.

**Recommendation:** Processes and mechanisms for the recognition of international qualifications and credentials need to be developed and implemented.