

Executive Summary

Literacy Strategic Plan 2025–2029

Literacy touches every aspect of our lives and has a profound influence on our well-being, especially in our tech-based, knowledge-rich society. Canada's current literacy levels fall short of what is required for success in a knowledge-driven economy.

For this reason, United for literacy has developed the 2025–2029 Strategic Plan to carry out a focused Theory of Change that builds the foundation and tools necessary to refocus our programming on high impact initiatives. Our literacy programs will focus on reading and writing, numeracy, digital and financial literacy skills development as well as English or French as an additional language.

We will intentionally shift our program focus to create tailored virtual and in-person programs explicitly designed to improve literacy skills that support individuals in achieving their goals. We will also support community partners serving the same populations to embed literacy programs favoring wrap around/collective impact models.

As much as possible, United for Literacy will incorporate Indigenous languages in its programming and resources.

Literacy: A fundamental skill

According to UNESCO:

Acquiring literacy is not a one-off act. Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world. Literacy is a continuum of learning and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills.

Who

do we seek to serve?

— The Learner

Over the next 10 years, we are seeking to offer support to children, youth, adults and entire communities who face systemic barriers to learning, which may be social, economic, and/or historical. These include people living in poverty; people with disabilities; newcomers to Canada who want to improve their language skills; and Indigenous, Black, and racialized individuals who have historically been underserved by the formal education systems.

Literacy is understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world. Literacy skills may be necessary to understand a legal document; complete a job application online; read a bus schedule; help a child with schoolwork; or plan a budget.

Learner-centric approach

Did you know that in Canada about **one in five adults has a hard time with reading?** At United for Literacy, we're here to help. We provide **free literacy programs** that are **tailored to your goals**, supporting you every step of the way. From your first meeting, we'll work with you to create a **personalized learning plan that builds skills in a fun and supportive environment**. Whether you're an individual, family, or community need, **we believe in your potential and are committed to helping you succeed.**



Our Values



**We put learners
at the ♥ of
everything we do**

Guided by a philosophy of student-centred learning, we co-design programs that empower individuals and communities to achieve their goals and unlock their potential.

**We are committed
to reconciliation,
inclusion, and
accessibility**

Prompted by the call to action of the Reconciliation Commission, we are committed to addressing systemic barriers and promoting equity by creating learning spaces where everyone can thrive.

**We achieve more
together**

Counselled by our collaborations and partnerships, we build stronger communities and amplify our collective impact across Canada.

**We embrace
agility and
learning**

By continuously reinvesting our key learnings in our practices, we ensure our programs and approaches meet the changing needs of people and communities.

Beyond 2025

The 2025–2029 plan presents thoughtful continuity to the current strategies we are committed to delivering while also redirecting some of our efforts and resources toward new, innovative elements:

● We remain committed to increasing our impact by shifting our focus to higher intensity activities.

● We will refocus our partnerships and interactions with other organizations to co-designing and co-delivering literacy programs. We will also offer training and resources that contribute to making every place a learning place.

● We will continue to expand our influence for a lasting impact on the Canadian literacy landscape. We will do this by raising public awareness and further engaging key stakeholders.

● We will build an agile and innovative learning organization by employing data and key learnings and using a strengths-based approach in all our collaborations.

Environmental trends

The world is experiencing huge transformations. This highlights the critical importance of literacy and its foundational role in shaping educational, economic, and health outcomes. The following environmental trends have been witnessed since we began the last strategic plan (2020–2025):



New Priorities

- Workplace transformations brought about by new technologies.
- The need for financial literacy and digital literacy as essential skills for making informed decisions, accessing opportunities, and navigating a rapidly changing world.
- The learners we reach at times lack the technology to access digital learning which is key to our growth.

Increasing Threats

- The critical importance of literacy and its foundational role in shaping educational, economic, and health outcomes remains largely unrecognized by the public and governments.
- The charitable sector's overwhelming challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers creates pressure.

Current Strengths

- United for Literacy plays a key role in connecting and engaging with the communities we serve and with other literacy organizations for advocacy at the national level.
- United for Literacy has a strong evaluation framework as well as robust data collection which help inform how we co-design our programs with our partners.

Different name, same organization

Our new brand and name is not widely recognized by the public. Previously known as Frontier College, we are now United for Literacy.



Literacy

The facts behind the urgency for Canada

Literacy is connected to the achievement of educational, economic, and health outcomes. In Canada, literacy levels vary widely across regions and demographics.



Children

Over a
million children
in Canada

are not meeting grade-level literacy expectations, a challenge that disproportionately affects lower-income families and is compounded by factors such as race, geography, disability, and family structure.



Adults

Nearly
20%

of adults in Canada

struggle with basic literacy, and **improving adult literacy by just 1% could generate \$67 billion annually**, putting approximately \$1,800 more in each Canadian's pocket.



New Immigrants

With
56–58%

of recent immigrants speaking a first language other than English or French, literacy is essential for navigating life in Canada. However, recent cuts to English as an Additional Language (EAL) and French as an Additional Language (FAL) programs have increased the demand for community-based solutions.

Why United for Literacy?



VISION

All people in Canada have the literacy skills they need to achieve their potential.



MISSION

Each day, we transform lives and strengthen communities through literacy.

United for Literacy's unique value proposition

We believe that every place is a learning place and customize our approach for the individuals or communities. We believe that literacy skills are essential for making informed decisions, accessing opportunities, and navigating a rapidly changing world.

United for Literacy offers country-wide free, inclusive literacy supports with a strengths-based approach to learning. We open the door to transformative learning from coast to coast to coast and ensure every learning space we create is safe and inclusive.

We have historically anchored our activities in the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion—even before they were a widespread concern for society: women tutors in the '20s; newcomers in the '40s; youth leadership roles in the '60s; and learning with and from Indigenous communities in the '80s. At the turn of the 21st century, we embraced the latest technologies to reach the most geographically isolated learners across the country.

Our ability to connect deeply with the individuals, families, and entire communities we serve is what sets us apart.