

***Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Development  
for Immigrants in Rural Alberta Communities - Phase One***

**Public Report Submitted by: Bow Valley College**

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**Project Background**

This project evolved out of an earlier project, also funded by Alberta Learning, delivered in partnership by Bow Valley College and NorQuest College. The first project, which included the development of ERPAC (ESL Resource Package for Alberta Communities), involved mentoring two rural Alberta communities. While the consultants were working with these communities they discovered that often immigrants come to a community because of available jobs. However, the job that originally attracted them was not necessarily something they wanted for long-term employment. Once they got settled they started to search for other, more satisfying employment. They often found that they were limited by their lack of English language skills. In an effort to find both work and English language training they migrated to larger urban centres.

At the same time, industries in less densely populated areas often have a need for an increased labour pool. However, because of training needs and safety issues many of these jobs require a certain level of competency in the English language. Employers would like to hire immigrants but find the communication and safety issues prohibit them from doing so. Rural communities also want to encourage immigrants to stay. They need population growth to maintain their economy, increase their taxation base and fill their schools. But they realize that in order to keep immigrants in their communities they must meet their needs for language training and employment.

The development of Industry Specific Pre-Employment Language Training is an attempt to build bridges between these three groups. It hopes to enable immigrants to acquire the language training they need to obtain jobs and stay in rural communities; provide a competent labour pool for rural industries; and support interested ESL providers in addressing their community's language training programs themselves.

**Project Objectives and Findings**

**Research available current information and document key industries in communities that have substantial immigrant numbers in rural Alberta.**

To identify rural communities with significant immigrant populations, three methods were used: e-mail questionnaires, telephone interviews and web searches.

***Findings:***

The results of this research showing communities that have immigrant populations can be seen in the table below:

### **Northern Alberta, Central Alberta, Southern Alberta**

Westlock, Vegreville, County of Lethbridge, Cold Lake, Lloydminster, Brooks, High Level, Oyen, Medicine Hat, La Crete, Three Hills, Vulcan, Fort Vermilion, Red Deer, Taber, Rocky Mountain House, Crowsnest Pass, Bow Corridor, Cardston, County of Rockview, Claresholm, County of Wheatland, Elk Point, Two Hills, Vermilion, Jasper, Edson, Evansburg

Central Alberta has many communities that have immigrants. However, southern Alberta has a denser immigrant population due to the influx of Low German Mennonites in this area.

The research with communities showed that agriculture, manufacturing and oil and gas were the main employers in many of the areas with immigrants.

Further web based research using the Alberta First.com website at <http://www.albertafirst.com/> showed that every region has business and community services and retail and wholesale as its largest occupational groups. However, employment in these areas requires a high level of language ability so they would not be an option for immigrants with limited language skills. The next largest occupational group is agriculture. This industry already employs many immigrants. The next largest employer in these areas is manufacturing. Based on these findings the consultant decided to focus on southern Alberta.

### **Find out which industries could/would employ immigrants if they had the appropriate language skills.**

The identification of key contact people for industries and communities was made through web search and telephone calls. The consultant developed a guided interview for a telephone survey with industry and community contacts. The initial contact for communities was their employment agency or Chamber of Commerce. These provided industry contacts for manufacturing, trucking and oil and gas. The consultant conducted telephone surveys with a total of four manufacturing companies, three trucking companies, three oil and gas support companies and one oil and gas safety training company. The information regarding job requirements for each industry was also verified by analyzing job listings on <http://www.jobbank.gc.ca/>

#### ***Findings:***

The manufacturing companies all indicated an interest in hiring immigrants if they had adequate communication skills and a prior knowledge of the industry. Some of them used Grade 12 as a minimum requirement but indicated that industry knowledge would be taken into account.

Most of the trucking companies also expressed interest in hiring immigrants. However, they also required additional certification in such areas as Transportation of Dangerous Goods, Class 1 Driver's License, Safety certification, H2S training, WHMIS and First Aid. These additional training courses would not be covered under the scope of this project. One company said they have had a lot of problems, such as fires and major accidents with new drivers and will only hire experienced people now. The Oil and Gas support industry was reluctant

to hire anyone who was not proficient in English. Safety is a huge issue and employees must be trained and be able to react quickly in times of danger. The training company said the courses people need to work in the oil fields are WHMIS, TDG, Detection & Control of Flammable Substances, Confined Space Entry & Rescue, Standard First Aid, H2S Alive, Safe Trenching, Excavating & Ground Disturbance. She said that although they have trained ESL learners in the past, she didn't know if just having this training would ensure people would be considered for a job because the high safety needs really require a good working ability in English. The trainees must understand the safety issues and be able to react and communicate well with others.

After considering the extra training that would be needed for employees in both trucking and oil and gas support services, the consultant decided to pursue manufacturing. Since southern Alberta has a large number of Food Processing Plants this is the sector that was selected for further investigation.

**Select a focus industry. This would be an industry which appears willing to employ immigrants and that has jobs attainable through language development and doesn't necessarily require other training.**

Further research on the Food Processing industry confirmed that it would be a viable selection for this project. Information from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Directory 2004 indicates that in southern Alberta alone there are over sixty food processors. Alberta Careers Update 2003 lists Alberta's food and beverage processing industry as the province's largest manufacturing sector and states that it accounts for about one-quarter of all manufacturing in the province. It employed about 25,000 people in 2003 and employment growth in this industry is expected to be about 1.9 per cent each year from 2003 to 2008. Food Processing also met the criteria in that there are a significant number of employers where there are a significant number of immigrants.

### ***Findings:***

The food processing industry is a viable target industry to pilot this project. While other certificate training would certainly enhance employability in the food processing industry it wasn't a requirement. Most organizations were more concerned with employees having the language skills to access training and to be able to communicate at work. They would also like to be able to promote from within their organization. Their employees must have the language skills to be trainable. These are needs that can be addressed through this training program.

**Conduct a needs assessment of the language needs, vocabulary, workplace documentation and employment expectations of the focus industry.**

An advisory committee was set up which included three members of the Food Processing Industry. Meetings were held with these people to gather information on employment expectations and language needs for the industry.

Agricore, Lamb-Weston and Lucerne participated in a needs assessment of the language needs, vocabulary, workplace document and employment expectations of their industry. The consultant conducted in person interviews with two managers, two supervisors and toured two plants. She had two telephone interviews with another supervisor. She also toured two plants and collected workplace documentation from both plants.

To gather material from the front-line employees' point of view she accessed information from two previous needs assessments conducted with Lucerne, Calgary and Weston's Bakeries Limited, Calgary. A valuable source of information was the Essential Skills Profile for Labourer (Food Processing Facility) NOC 9617

**Use the data from the Needs Assessment to develop a framework/process model for developing an ESL curriculum for pre-employment for a range of industries. The curriculum will be referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks but will use industry specific language, documents and work situations. It will also address employability skills such as Canadian workplace expectations, filling in application forms, resumes, interview skills.**

Besides the data from the needs assessment, the main resources for designing the framework were the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 and The Essential Skills Profile for Labourer (Food Processing Facility) NOC 9617. Several websites were also invaluable sources of information.

Research from all of the above sources led to the decision to include the following topics in the curriculum framework.

- Industry Profile
- Canadian Workforce Expectations
- Workplace Documents
- Health and Safety
- Personal Protective Equipment
- WHMIS
- Industry Specific Training (training that includes specific vocabulary, work on specific types of machinery, certain types of legislation)
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Hierarchy of the Workplace
- On the Job Communication
- Job Search
- Job Applications

The framework/process model developed is presented as a separate document, *Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training: Program Development Framework*

**Use the framework/process model to develop a curriculum for the focus industry.**

Once the framework was developed, its usability was tested by adapting it to the Food Processing Industry. The outline for the modules was followed but they were tailored to the Food Processing Industry. Resources such as documentation, training programs, and safety materials

were found that are used in the Food Processing Industry. Since this program is targeted at a level consistent with the Canadian Language Benchmarks 3 and 4, the Benchmarks were a guide in outlining the language competencies that would be addressed. Competencies from the four language strands: listening, speaking, reading and writing were all included. The essential skills profile Labourer (Food Processing Facility) NOC 9617 was also a guideline. It states that the most important essential skills for a labourer in a food processing facility are document use, numeracy, problem solving, and job task planning and organizing. These skills also needed to be addressed in the modules of the curriculum. The curriculum consists of an instructor's guide and a participant's guide. They are both organized by topic and coordinated to each other. These documents are also presented under separate cover.

## **Recommendations**

The framework and curriculum developed are valuable tools to help community organizations, such as the Community Adult Learning Councils, enhance their capacity to meet their population's needs and form partnerships with local industries. To ensure that these tools are used and supported in rural communities the following recommendations are made.

### **1. Pilot the Pre-employment Language Training Program for the Food Processing Industry.**

Test the applicability of the Pre-employment Language Training Program for the Food Processing Industry by piloting it in an area where there are enough food processors to reap the benefit of an emerging workforce. This also needs to be in an area that has a significant number of ESL learners who cannot access other jobs because of their lack of English skills. The research conducted in this project indicates that southern Alberta is an appropriate location for piloting the program. While the program is being administered, Bow Valley College proposes to provide support in creating liaisons and partnerships with local food processors and to provide professional development to the course instructors.

### **2. Pilot the Framework for the Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training Program.**

It is expected that someone experienced in ESL instruction should be able to devise a specific curriculum. However, most of the rural communities in Alberta do not have experienced ESL providers. ESL is still a relatively new phenomenon in these communities. Yet, it is these rural communities that need to provide industry specific training to support both their immigrants and their industry. This framework is to help them create a curriculum but it needs to be piloted to see if it is comprehensive enough to be of use. Bow Valley College proposes to provide support to a community while they implement the framework to discover their community needs, develop a curriculum and run a program. Once a community has experience following this procedure they will be able to adapt it to other industries as their community needs change.

### **3. Redevelop training such as H2S Alive, First Aid, Transportation of Dangerous Goods and Confined Space Entry and Rescue to make it more accessible to ESL learners.**

Because many industries also require certification in areas such as forklift operation, safety training, H2S Alive, Confined Space Entry and Rescue, Transportation of Dangerous Goods, Detection & Control of Flammable Substances, Safe Trenching, Excavating & Ground Disturbance, these would be good adjuncts to the pre-employment training program. It is suggested that these certifications could be more effectively learned and acquired if the training programs were redeveloped to make them more accessible to ESL learners. Having the preemployment language training program plus certification in the above areas would greatly expand employment opportunities for immigrants.

#### **Conclusion**

It is hoped that this project will be a valuable resource for immigrants, industry, and community ESL providers. It has the potential to engender partnerships within a community between providers such as Community Adult Learning Councils and the businesses that need an increased labour pool. Also, it will provide immigrants with the language training they need to obtain and keep jobs and encourage them to settle in smaller communities outside of the urban centres.

The framework encourages CALC's to have a deeper understanding of their community, its people and its business needs. Its aim is to build capacity in a community by providing support for ESL providers to meet community needs. It will improve the quality of instruction and also allow community providers to stretch into areas they may not have previously ventured. It also provides a vehicle for businesses to become more involved with the community organization and create a partnership that can help address their labour pool requirements. Initially funding will be required to get these programs started in a community but it is hoped that, as industry sees the benefit of them, it will be willing to subsidize them.

The curriculum for language training for the food processing industry is targeted at a specific area and a specific population in Alberta. It is envisioned that it will fill a need and provide both employment for currently unemployed or under employed immigrants, and an increased labour pool for the food processing industry.