e-Channel

Blended Learning 2.0

REPORT
2023 - 24

Literacy Link
South Central
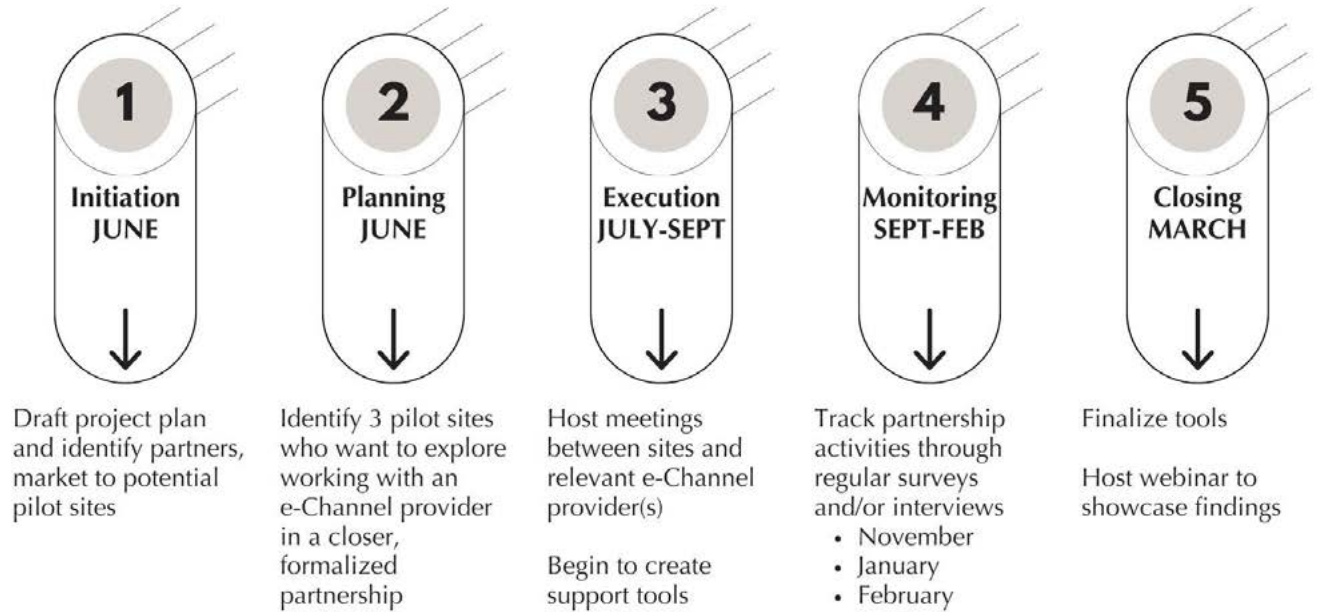
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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Blended Learning 2.0 project was managed by Literacy Link South Central in partnership with Contact North. The project sought to act as a case study to demonstrate the benefits and challenges of strategic partnerships between LBS onsite service providers and e-Channel providers in the delivery of blended learning programs.

The goal was to provide insights and recommendations that could be used by others in the field looking to implement similar programs and partnerships. Pilot sites were selected that wanted to explore working with an e-Channel provider in a closer and more integrated fashion. A final report and webinar were to be created to capture the learnings of the project.

This is the final report and a project webinar was held on March 5, 2024.

BLENDED LEARNING 2.0
JUNE 2023 TO MARCH 2024

1

Initiation
JUNE

Draft project plan and identify partners, market to potential pilot sites

2

Planning
JUNE

Identify 3 pilot sites who want to explore working with an e-Channel provider in a closer, formalized partnership

3

Execution
JULY-SEPT

Host meetings between sites and relevant e-Channel provider(s)

Begin to create support tools

4

Monitoring
SEPT-FEB

Track partnership activities through regular surveys and/or interviews
- November
- January
- February

5

Closing
MARCH

Finalize tools

Host webinar to showcase findings

ABOUT THE CONSULTANT

Ashley Hoath-Murray is Not-for-Profit Management Consultant and owner of Ashley Hoath-Murray & Associates. She is passionate about treating people in a manner that speaks to their needs and experiences. As a former Women and Gender Studies student with more than 15 years of experience serving clients from diverse backgrounds, she believes in client-centered service. She is the former Co-Executive Director of Literacy Link Niagara where she encouraged programs to use innovative approaches to strengthen the experience of learners while reducing administrative burden on practitioners. As progressive practices related to online learning are entering the adult literacy, she feels it is the responsibility of LBS agencies to update the skills of staff to be prepared to serve learners with new and emerging methods.

PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS

The project was supposed to identify and engage 3 adult literacy programs to participate. Because of overwhelming interest, the project was able to engage 6 programs. These included:

- Adult Learning Programs of Perth
- Alternative, Adult & Continuing Education – Greater Essex County District School Board
- Lambton College
- Niagara West Adult Learning Centre
- Niagara Catholic District School Board
- UHC – Hub of Opportunities

LEARNINGHUB

When asked to identify the e-Channel provider they wanted to build strategic partnership with, all programs identified the LearningHUB. The LearningHUB was a vital partner in this project. Materials could not have been created and events could not have been held without their full and active participation.

SURVEYS

Program Surveys

3 surveys were sent to the participating programs. Surveys were completed in November 2023, January 2024 and February 2024. Surveys asked programs to identify if they contacted the e-Channel help desk, how many times they contacted it and if their issue was resolved. No one contacted the help desk during the project

Programs were asked to provide feedback on Pilot Activity 1 - How to be an Online Learner training. All programs that participated said it increased their working relationship with e-Channel and the LearningHUB. All programs except one said it increased their ability to support learners to reach their goals.

Comments on Pilot Activity 1 included:

- Program who did not identify increased ability to support learners stated issues with staffing
- Pilot activity going well except for issue with learner follow-through
- Over summer, all secondary goal path learners took the training
- Tool has been very helpful, plan to use and promote
- LearningHUB has learned a number of new ways to help classrooms blend

Programs were asked to provide feedback on Pilot Activity 2 – Virtual Networking with the LearningHUB. All programs that participated said it increased their working relationship with e-Channel and the LearningHUB. All programs said it increased their ability to support learners to reach their goals

Comments on Pilot Activity 2:

- Having contact with frontline staff helpful to both them and their staff
- The more networking we can do, the more likely we are to utilize services
- I now have a better understanding of the workings of the LearningHUB

Learner Surveys

Programs were asked to promote a learner survey throughout the project to gain feedback on blended learning from a learners' perspective. 5 responses were collected. 4 of 5 learners had not participated in blended learning before. On a scale of 0-5, learners were asked to rate their overall experience with blended learning. 3 learners rated their experience as 3, 1 learner rated their experience as 5 and 1 learner rated their experience as 1. 4 of 5 learners were recommended blended learning to a friend.

TRACKING SHEETS

Programs were asked to track learners who participated in blended learning during the project. Names were removed before programs shared anonymous data regarding service with the project consultant.

20 Learners were included in tracking. 17 learners were included in program learner numbers. Learners were referred to

- The LearningHUB (16)

- Secondary credit (3)

- Good Learning Anywhere (1)

3 learners registered but never accessed blended learning.

PILOT ACTIVITIES

How to be an Online Learner training

Niagara West Adult Learning Centre was already creating an online workshop to introduce learners to blended learning with the support of the LearningHUB. This project helped refine and showcase the tool.

Programs were invited to attend a virtual training session to learn how to adapt the resource for their learners. The tool was also showcased in the final webinar on March 5, 2024.

More information on the tool can be found by contact Jacky Catterick, Executive Director of the Niagara West Adult Learning Centre at exerdir@nwalc.ca.

Virtual Networking with the LearningHUB

From the beginning of the project, rapport and personal connection were discussed as key to building connections with e-Channel providers. To foster "face-to-face" connections, a virtual networking event was held on November 22, 2023 to bring together program partners and LearningHUB staff.

Icebreaker questions were used to build personal knowledge before breaking out into smaller groups. These small groups brainstormed answers to the following questions with main findings highlighted. All responses can be found in the Appendix.

How do we facilitate a better relationship between LBS programs and e-Channel providers?	• Open communication • Standardized referral process • Shared intake assessment results
What's the best way to get in touch?	• Use LearningHUB's toll free number or "info" email address • Connecting to people they already know • Online referral form
Do you prefer asynchronous connections or would you rather set a meeting?	• Initial live meeting • May be difficult if there is a surge of learners all at once • Option to identify type of connection on referral form

Groups were also asked to create the ideal scenario for contact and information sharing at different stages. Here is a summary of the responses.

Initial referral to e-Channel by LBS	In Person Practitioner completes online referral form LearningHUB Registration team emails back with next steps – leads or assists with course selection
Learner permission to share information between agencies	Built into LBS classroom registration AND LearningHUB registration form
Sharing learner milestones	Via email, LBS classroom instructors and/or e-Channel practitioners included in email sent to learner confirming assigning and subsequent completion of Milestone Suggestion of an electronic form, similar to LearningHUB's online Referral form, that can be completed and sent back to either LBS classroom program or E-Channel program, to confirm completion of Milestone
Exiting learner by LBS program	Via email, LBS classroom instructors send email directly to LearningHUB/e-Channel practitioner confirming learner's Exit Includes short-term exits – summer closures – to assist with course planning
Exiting learner by e-Channel	Same as above, only vice versa
Exiting learner by both programs	Same as above Benefit to learners being exited from both programs within the same month so they receive only one set of follow-ups at 3/6/12 months - consent built into Referral/Registration process to share Follow-up responses received by one program with the other
Referring to or including additional providers	Via email, LBS classroom or E-Channel practitioners cc'ed on any Referral communication for learners, would help both programs be more aware of learner's whole upgrading story, and would prevent duplicate referrals to the same program/ provider being made by both

PROJECT LEARNINGS

Challenges

Through formal survey responses, program meetings and informal discussions with partners, challenges of blended learning were identified.

Blended learning is confusing to many practitioners. It has quite a steep learning curve – different registration processes for different partners, lack of understanding of course content, misunderstanding of how courses can be integrated into in-person training (concurrent vs. consecutive training.)

Blended learning can make more work for practitioners. Because of the lack of standardized practices among e-Channel providers, as well as the additional registration requirements for learners to participate, inevitably there can be a lot of work upfront for practitioners. When workload increases for programs, blended learning is often sacrificed.

Blended learning can feel like competition. With misunderstanding of course content, some programs may see offerings as competing for learners.

Benefits/Opportunities

Through formal survey responses, program meetings and informal discussions with partners, benefits/opportunities of blended learning were identified.

Blended learning can be easy to launch once you overcome the learning curve. Through projects like this, new tools and resources can help practitioners understand how to fit Blended Learning into their programs for the benefit of learners and themselves.

After the front heavy workload of registration, blended learning can reduce workload by providing additional support and course content to learners.

5 Ways to Increase Blended Learning

This tool was created to outline 5 ways that programs can increase the use of blended learning in their programs.

It can be found in the Appendix.

Learner Flyer – LearningHUB

After project discussions and the virtual networking event, the LearningHUB created a flyer that showcased their services to learners. It was distributed through the Learning Networks of Ontario.

It can be found in the Appendix.

How to be an Online Learner

This tool was discussed earlier as it was demonstrated as a project training event. It was also showcased in the final webinar.

More information on the tool can be found by contact Jacky Catterick, Executive Director of the Niagara West Adult Learning Centre at exerdir@nwalc.ca.

LearningHUB Registration Process

The LearningHUB created a new registration process to streamline the process for practitioners and learners. It was piloted with the 6 participating programs during the project. It is shared in the 5 Ways to Increase Blended Learning tool.

Webinar

A webinar was held on March 5, 2024. Slides can be found in the Appendix.

32 people attended. At the end of the webinar, participants were asked to respond to 2 statements. 13 people rated the statements. Potential responses for both statements included Completely disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, Completely agree. The results are below.

My overall knowledge of blended learning increased.	Completely Agree – 7 – 54%
	Somewhat Agree – 4 – 31%
	Somewhat Disagree – 2 – 15%
I have a better understanding of how relationships between LBS face-to-face programs and e-Channel providers can benefit LBS programs, e-Channel programs and adult learners.	Completely Agree – 11 – 85%
	Somewhat Agree – 2 – 15%

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

Standardize processes across e-Channel

All parties could benefit from a standardized registration process for all e-Channel providers. This would help programs understand the steps they need to take to share learners with all providers. Naming all e-Channel providers on LBS program referral forms to be signed by learners at intake can help reduce workload on both the practitioner and learner.

Regular Virtual Networking

Since rapport was identified as an important piece of referrals, e-Channel providers or Learning Networks should consider hosting virtual networking opportunities regularly.

More tools/resources to help promote Blended Learning

Promoting the use of tools like Niagara West Adult Learning Centre's "How to be an Online Learner" will allow programs to have turn-key resources that reduce the knowledge burden on practitioners. Dollars should be advocated for to create and refine new tools to better support and streamline all aspects of blended learning for practitioners.

APPENDICES

Break out groups –

Quick reintroductions – What's your name and what's a digital trend you refuse to follow? Assign a note-taker. Answer the following questions:

- **How do we facilitate a better relationship between LBS programs and e-Channel providers?**

    - Encourage open communication between LBS instructors (both E-Channel and classroom LBS) who share learners

    - Having standardized electronic forms that can be used for Referrals Out, Milestones Completed, Learner Exits

    - LearningHUB will continue to offer Lunch'n'Learn opportunities, as well as look for future opportunities to market to LBS classrooms in Ontario

    - LearningHUB will be updating its online Referral form to include a list of bulleted topics that referring partners can check off, to indicate how much communication they'd like to receive regarding shared learners (Ex: All communication, Welcome/Exit emails only, Attendance Reminders, Course Completion, Milestone Completion, etc.)

    - LBS classroom programs confirm that a large barrier to them referring learners to e-Channel LBS services for blended learning, is learners having to complete lengthy registration/ assessment progress again – If LBS classroom programs provided their initial assessments with the LearningHUB when referring learners, that would save time for the learners and practitioners

    - We should be asking the Ministry if there's a way to have one central LBS registration inputted into CaMS that can be used by all LBS programs, rather than requiring each LBS program to have its own separate registration; this would help encouraged blended learning much more frequently!

        o Intake: initial contact is best through a detailed referral (intake form); gives lots of information; or if a program is looking for more information before they make the referral

        o LBS Provider: loves the referral form (sends as much info as can); like to know what they will be offered, ex a reading program that is learning channel based, how much connection they will have with their LH practitioner, some work closely with practitioner, others never hear from their practitioners (seem almost removed because of the program they are participating with). Initial contact, then a more in depth meeting (virtual meeting) about what the LH is planning for the student, to make sure we are not covering the same thing and in tandem with the classroom

        o Susan- added that each prac is different, but that most reach out to build a relationship with the practitioner

        o Shannon- I use 3 platforms but communicate the same way with all learners

        o Classroom- would like a face to face chat, make a plan, what we are doing in the classroom, this is what they need, this is what I am thinking would be helpful, what it looks like

        o Would it benefit from being connected with the same 5 practitioners?

        o Some practitioners have been wonderful practitioners, some have not been good.

        o Jacky thinks we have a good relationship, has great personal relationships with practitioners

o Blair when he was a practitioner, only had 1 response from a classroom practitioner during his time doing that, he would reach out and not receive responses

o Jeanette feels from intake to practitioner had really great communication with Jacky, but it's either all or nothing with some classrooms. We want to include you and this is our plan, but if no communication it's hard to know what's going on with the other side

o Melody – 7 years back had a lot of back and forth with the instructors, but now not even getting the introduction email consistently, sometime getting the contact info from the student

o Previous discussions with Melody and team about issues with communication – no current issues but gave some suggestions on ways to reach out if not getting responses from practitioner

o Ideal situation: Rob – ideally when refer student, they've generally exhausted their curriculum and then think to offer LH, or if student can't attend classroom anymore, if being referred for specific issue, would like to have more communication, could send email with explanation of reasoning behind referral, can alert practitioner on communication frequency

o Possibility of using Teams to create fluid conversation with practitioner's

o Look at best practices for practitioners on communication with classrooms as all practitioner's tweak and operate their own way

o We are not a competition, a lot of classrooms think of us as a competitor instead of helping them and working with them. Communication stifled because they don't want to share learners

• **What's the best way to get in touch?**

- A LearningHUB Program Advisor is now answering the toll-free number and monitoring the LearningHUB's 'Info' email account, so that we can ensure rapid responses to any inquiries that come in from LBS classroom programs

- Reaching out to any LearningHUB practitioners you're currently working with, or any you've worked with in the past, with any program questions – as those inquiries are always directed to the appropriate Program Advisor

- LearningHUB's online Referral form (found on our website) ensures a streamlined way to refer learners into our program, those Referrals are monitored regularly and given priority for communication back from our Registration team

- Initial Email to welcome, then a Zoom call to design a plan, or at least a phone call to discuss the plan, Prefer the learner not on the call

• **Do you prefer asynchronous connections or would you rather set a meeting?**

- LBS classroom instructors have expressed a desire for a live online meeting initially, between the learner/classroom instructor and the LearningHUB practitioner, as they feel putting a face to our program right away would go a long way; asynchronous communication after that is preferred

- LearningHUB discussed the possibility of having Registration team initially connect via video conferencing with learners who are formally Referred In by LBS classroom program, to

complete registration and clarify suitability criteria in real time (could save email follow-up back and forth between the learner and Registration team at the beginning); this, or a Program Advisor with the LearningHUB would take on this task

- Add it as an option on Referral form? Currently the two options listed for Next Steps to Referrals In are "I will help my client register for the LearningHUB" or "Please send my client registration instructions" – could we add a third option, "I would like to set up a time for the LearningHUB to connect with learner via video conferencing to complete registration"? Or something to that effect…

- LearningHUB acknowledges this option could become too time-consuming if there is a large influx of learners being formally Referred In by LBS classroom programs at once

  o Jenna: meeting great at the beginning and then asynch is okay

  o Not sure if others would benefit or want that (teachers are different)

  o Most reach out to Jenna- which is great; can offer the meeting or phone call

  o We need to better promote that the LH has all our courses on the website including syllabus and brief description ** promote better that these are available- no one is going seeking if we may have info. ** Intake is going to add this- ** make sure wording is promotional

  o Include in email to the Prac- the link to the course catalog if any they want to specifically highlight- **promo email instead of specific courses but the actual link to all courses for when it is relevant

  o Don't need a meeting to say we did this Milestone **do all prac understand we can share milestones- LH only needs one per year

  o **Better publicize we can share milestones to classroom practitioners

  o LBS classroom tell LH prac if closing

Work as a group to design the ideal scenario for LBS programs and e-Channel providers to work together. Detail every step/contact point. Note frequency, method(s), contact persons etc. Suggested steps below, but feel free to add/modify.

Initial referral to e-Channel by LBS	• Online Referral Form completed by LBS classroom instructor, with boxes checked off for how much communication LBS instructor would like to receive
	• LearningHUB Registration team emails back to confirm Referral received (within 3 business days), adhering to 'Next Steps' chosen by LBS classroom instructor on Referral form
Learner permission to share information between agencies	• Built into LBS classroom registration AND LearningHUB registration form
	• If not obtained at registration, LearningHUB and/or classroom program obtains before including the other in any communication

Sharing learner milestones	• Via email, LBS classroom instructors and/or E-Channel practitioners included in email sent to learner confirming assigning and subsequent completion of Milestone
	• Not all LBS classroom instructors have access to CaMS, so E-Channel providers can't assume that they'll just be able to check CaMS sporadically for completed Milestones that can be shared between programs
	• Could there be an electronic form, similar to LearningHUB's online Referral form, that can be completed and sent back to either LBS classroom program or e-Channel program, to confirm completion of Milestone (Milestone score sheets to be uploaded as part of this process?)
Exiting learner by LBS program	• Via email, LBS classroom instructors send email directly to LearningHUB/E-Channel practitioner confirming learner's Exit
	• Could there be an electronic form that is used to notify e-Channel program when learners have been Exited from LBS classroom, rather than direct email required?
Exiting learner by e-Channel	• Same as above, only vice versa
Exiting learner by both programs	• Same as above
	• Could there be a benefit to learners being Exited from both programs within the same month? That way learners receive only one set of follow-ups at 3/6/12 months, and consent could be built into Referral/Registration process to share Follow-up responses received by one program with the other; the logistics of streamlining this process could be tricky though
Referring to or including additional providers	• Via email, LBS classroom or e-Channel practitioners cc'ed on any Referral communication for learners, would help both programs be more aware of learner's whole upgrading story, and would prevent duplicate referrals to the same program/ provider being made by both

Initial referral to e-Channel by LBS	• LBS Prac Skills out referral form with lots of info
	• LH Intake replies with reg link for learner and includes link to LH course catalog if any specific courses they are looking for
Learner permission to share information between agencies	• Important, agrees in LH Reg and classroom reg
Sharing learner milestones	• Conversation between LBS Classroom prac and LH prac and better understanding that a classroom can share milestones with LH. A reminder email/info about this shared with practitioners to increase awareness of this process
	• * LH puts own MS in CaMS where classrooms can have a CaMS person, could be part of the break down
Exiting learner by LBS program	• Classroom to communicate with LH (including when closing for the summer)
Exiting learner by e-Channel	• LH communicates to learner and classroom prac
Exiting learner by both programs	• Communication between programs
Referring to or including additional providers	

5 Ways to Increase **Blended Learning** in your Organization

01 **Prepare** your learning space for collaboration

02 **Build Connections** with e-Channel Providers

03 **Pilot** The LearningHUB seamless registration

04 **Use** "How to be an online learner" training

05 **Identify** the easiest route to add blended learning to your practices

CONTACT **NORTH**
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1 Prepare your learning space for collaboration

Watch the video about Blended Learning (less than 5 minutes!) on the e-Channel LBS practitioners website
https://e-channel.ca/practitioners/

Update your forms to allow better movement and communication between your program and an e-Channel provider.

Name all providers you may refer to specifically on your forms to minimize the learner having to sign again.
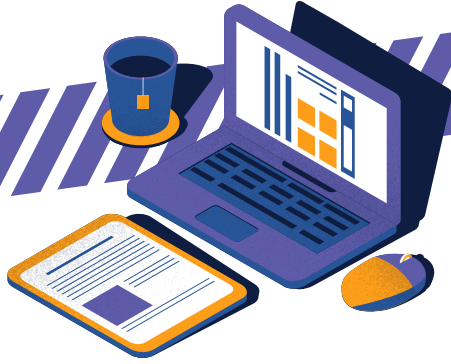
2 **Build Connections** with e-Channel Providers

Ask to meet with e-Channel providers to introduce your program and discuss how you can work together.

Questions to ask
- What is your intake process? Can we streamline it for learners if they are already registered with us?

- How can we best communicate? Email, phone or other method?

- What courses do you offer that can supplement our offerings?

Contact info for specific providers
https://e-channel.ca/practitioners/about-us/e-channel-partners/
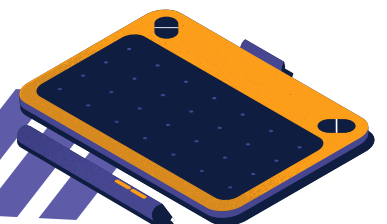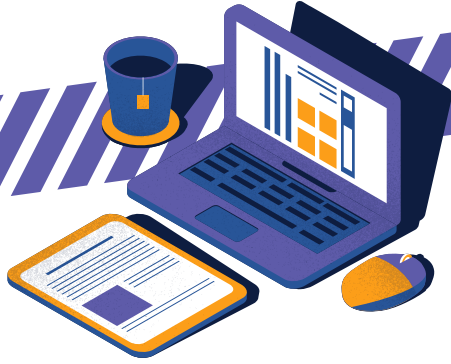
3 **Pilot** the LearningHUB's seamless registration

The LearningHUB is piloting a new registration process for learners who are being referred by LBS classroom providers. The goal is to prevent the duplication of registration and assessment in order to provide a streamlined process that benefits both LBS learners and staff.

Steps to register

1) LBS practitioner sends a referral email that includes the learner's full name to the LearningHUB's Intake team to registration.learninghub@ed.amdsb.ca
The practitioner should attach the LBS classroom registration and initial assessment.

Please Note - If the learner's initial assessment no longer reflects their current Reading/Writing skills, an updated sample of their Reading/Writing should be included.

2) LBS practitioner completes the LearningHUB's online Referral form - https://survey.alchemer-ca.com/s3/50069043/referralform
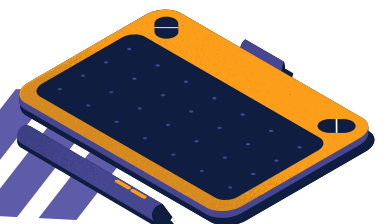
3 Pilot the LearningHUB's seamless registration

3) The LearningHUB's Intake team will email the LBS practitioner to confirm they've received the referral and to ask further questions.

4) Once all the information has been received, the LearningHUB's Intake team will email the learner to welcome them into the program and let them know what comes next.

If you have any questions about this new process, please free to reach out to either of the following LearningHUB Program Advisors anytime:

Rachael Wood – rachael.wood@ed.amdsb.ca, (519) 482 1700 Ext. 2105
Amanda Davila – amanda.davila@ed.amdsb.ca (519) 527 2288 Ext. 2508
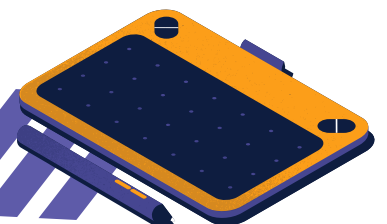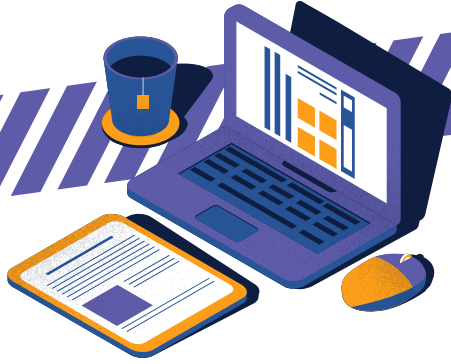
4 Use "How to be an online learner" training

Utilize a tried and true training session to teach learners how to participate in blended learning.

These resources can help you get your learners ready for blended learning without requiring staff to create new materials.

These tools were built and tested by Niagara West Adult Learning Centre with support from The LearningHUB.

More information can be found about these tools can be found by contacting

Jacky Catterick, Executive Director
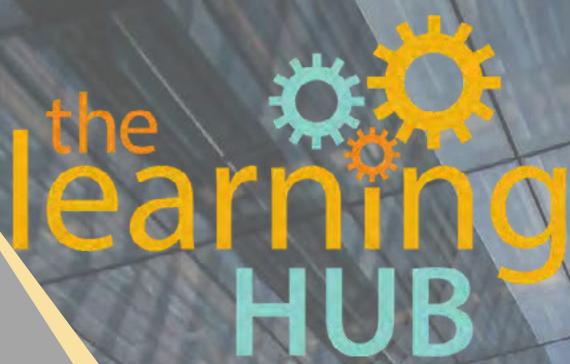Niagara West Adult Learning Centre
www.nwalc.ca
execdir@nwalc.ca

5 Identify the easiest route to add blended learning to your practices

Consider all the ways that blended learning may work for your organization. Choose the easiest option to start incorporating strategies into your work.

Some options include
- selecting one blended learning course that can be incorporated into a boutique training session (fixed start and end date)

- transitioning clients during program closures (holiday breaks, summer) with a plan to transition them back at a specific time

- using blended learning when human resources are stretched/limited or when new staff are being trained to relieve staff stress