Numbers and Narratives:
Adding up Stories of Success in Adult Literacy

Final Report

Alberta Action Research Team

Team Members
Audrey Gardner, Bow Valley College
Ian Kennedy, Bow Valley College
Jeannie Finch, Calgary Learns
With the support of Merrill Cooper, social research consultant

Participants
The project team is grateful to the eight participants for their contributions to this project — five staff members currently or previously in the two adult literacy and basic education programs at BVC (Academic Preparation- Part time Evening and Lifeline to Literacy), and three staff and volunteers from Calgary Learns

Introduction

Research Question

The Alberta Action Research Team explored the concept of mutual accountability. We looked for characteristics of mutual accountability within an existing working relationship between a community-based funder and two adult literacy/basic education programs in a community college.

We did not begin this local action research project with mutual accountability in mind. We began with the assumption that the working relationship between the funder and service provider was positive and effective and we wanted to know why. We agreed to explore and challenge our assumptions and practices about what made this relationship good. Our initial conversations, research and reflection led us to mutual accountability.

Our research question was:

"What characteristics of the relationship between Calgary Learns (funder) and two Bow Valley College adult literacy/basic education programs (service provider) support mutual accountability and how can these characteristics be strengthened or nurtured?"

Mutual accountability is an approach that values relationship, continuous improvement through learning (systems and people), participation of all stakeholders, flexibility, shared responsibility, conscientious use of information and acknowledgement of inequalities of power.

Funder and Service Provider

Mandated by the provincial government as a community adult learning council, the funder Calgary Learns is a local granting agency for adult foundational learning. Calgary Learns organizational values are Relevance, Inclusion and Community Participation, Collaboration and Due Diligence. It provides one and three-year funding to a range of programs in adult foundational learning (literacy, basic education, upgrading, ESL, and essential skills) for Calgarians who have financial barriers.

The service provider, Bow Valley College (BVC) has a strong history of providing innovative and relevant adult foundational learning programming. Two programs (see Appendix A) that participated in this action research project (Academic Preparation-Part-time Evening and Lifeline to Literacy) have been funded by Calgary Learns for over ten years. BVC receives funding from Calgary Learns for six programs and also, from time to time, initiative funding for development and research projects.

Project Goals

Our objectives were:
- ➢ To demonstrate the advantages of a collaborative approach to improving accountability
- ➢ To strengthen relationships and communication between delivery programs, Calgary Learns and the provincial funder, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology

➢ To identify areas of strength in the accountability system and build upon them
➢ To offer an example of a constructive accountability model to province-wide adult literacy and learning networks and to the provincial government

Assessment Tool

We developed and tested an assessment tool based on mutual accountability. Through participating in this action research we learned more about our own assumptions about accountability and increased our understanding about each organization's accountability obligations. Although the tool was piloted with a small number of participants, all of them recommended further testing and revision as this tool has strong potential to contribute to improving accountability in the adult literacy field and the larger voluntary sector.

Research Action Team

Our action research team included Bow Valley College staff (coordinator and educator) and a staff member from Calgary Learns (funder). A social research consultant acted as a research friend, providing research methodology support and drafting the mutual accountability assessment tool. The action research project manager was a former coordinator of one of the BVC programs and the practitioner-researcher was an adult literacy educator with both volunteer (tutor, board member) and recent instructing experience. During the research, the educator worked in both programs. The funder managed the grants program at Calgary Learns. The team met eight times over the ten months and the project manager and practitioner-researcher met an additional four times for data collection and analysis.

We experienced both challenges and successes as a team. During the research process, new staff assumed the program coordinator role in both programs at BVC. Other challenges included time constraints on planning and trying out the mutual accountability assessment tool, and the multiple roles of team members (e.g. the funder was interviewed and reviewed the final report; the project manager was reassigned and no longer coordinated one of the BVC programs, conducted interviews and was interviewed, and conducted data analysis and report writing). Successes included positive responses to the assessment tool and a deeper understanding of accountability within our programs and in relations between funder and service provider (see Learning section for further discussion on challenges and successes).

Summary of Action Research Project

Methodology

The action research project involved the following steps:
➢ Meetings to explore and discuss accountability and mutual accountability
➢ Meetings to determine our research method
➢ Meetings throughout the project to determine next steps, dialogue and reflect
➢ Ethics Review application and approval
➢ Development of the assessment tool
➢ Invitation to participate in the project
➢ Interviews with participants before testing the tool

- ➢ Testing of the tool
- ➢ Interviews with participants after testing the tool
- ➢ Data analysis
- ➢ Report draft and review by team
- ➢ Final report completed and submitted

Team Member Roles
As a team, we developed and designed the participant selection (See Appendix B for invitation and consent form), the assessment tool, and the method of data collection (see Appendix C) and analysis. The program coordinator and educator conducted the interviews with current and former program staff, funder staff and volunteers.

Participants
Participants were invited through non-random selection. Ten participants were interviewed, four staff and volunteers with Calgary Learns, and six program staff and managers from the two BVC programs. Of the ten, two were also team members of the action research project. Participants were individually interviewed before testing the assessment tool, then they tried out the tool as a group (funder staff with volunteers; BVC program coordinators) or individually. Participants focused on the sections of the tool that applied to their program (funder OR service provider). After trying out the tool, participants were interviewed individually. Participants also provided feedback about the design and content of the tool while they tried it out.

In interviews during pre- and post-testing the tool, participants (including team members) were asked about their perspectives on accountability and mutual accountability, funder-service provider relationships, and their experience and impressions of the assessment tool and its potential for the adult literacy field.

Assessment Tool — Design and Use
The tool was initially drafted by the team's research friend, who reviewed literature on accountability, particularly in the non-profit sector. A series of self-administered questionnaires, it was developed as a self-assessment tool to provide a baseline from which improvements could be measured. The concept of program self-assessment for the purpose of improving working relations with a funder or service provider was informed by Literacy Alberta's 'Opening Doors: A Literacy Audit Tool Kit for Customer Service Excellence'. This tool kit was developed for agencies and programs to assess the quality of their services to adults who struggle with reading and writing.

The tool emphasizes mutuality, encouraging both funders and service providers to share their results and intentions for improvement with one another in order to build and strengthen constructive relationships. It was shared with three other action research teams in the Connecting the Dots project, the provincial funder to Calgary Learns, municipal government and foundations. Although they did not test it, they liked the idea of being able to assess where their programs (funder and service provider) stand regarding accountability and learner assessment. Those that participated in the Alberta project brought a critical eye to the tool. They tried it out and provided feedback via review notes and post-test interviews.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by the project manager and educator as follows:
- ➢ Educator compiled participant responses from pre- and post-interviews and created tables per question to compare funder and service provider responses
- ➢ Educator and project manager individually read through the compiled responses to each question and noted key words or phrases, then discussed their initial impressions
- ➢ Project manager then reread the compiled responses with mutual accountability characteristics in mind
- ➢ Project manager produced draft of report for feedback from educator and funder
- ➢ Project manager revised and completed the report

FNDINGS

The findings from the interviews are organized into three areas:
- ➢ Participants' understanding of accountability and mutual accountability
- ➢ Characteristics of mutual accountability
- ➢ Potential of the mutual accountability assessment tool

Participants' Understanding of Accountability and Mutual Accountability

Funders and service providers provided similar responses on what accountability and mutual accountability means to them.

Participants indicated that accountability means responsibility, that we depend on accountability to demonstrate that the work is being done within the parameters of what was committed to, and that it is done ethically, conscientiously, and for the benefit of learners.

Regarding mutual accountability participants emphasized that responsibilities are shared, there is a partnership, and that respect, trust and open communication are critical:

> *(Mutual accountability is) shared responsibility, a relationship of respect and collaboration towards the betterment of the community.* (funder)

> *Mutual implies two people, me to them and respect between the two. They will listen to input from me. I like to try to think like a funder. We have mutual roles and responsibilities. The funder is responsible for providing guidelines and for listening to feedback or input from the programs they fund.* (service provider)

> *Accountability is the responsibility to create positive impact for users of the services (learners), the supporters of the work (ourselves, our government funder, taxpayers and our colleagues and coworkers) and the community at large – who benefit from the increased capacity of society.* (funder)

Mutual accountability highlights the ethics of fairness. You clarify in relation to others. You can't judge the other's role without first clarifying your own. (service provider)

After testing the tool, the majority of participants indicated that they had greater understanding of mutual accountability. One participant indicated that the tool would likely be easier to use among non-governmental organizations (non-profit, foundations) than government granting programs that have more stringent requirements within a political context. Another participant stated that it was timely because there has been a noticeable increase in accountability requirements over the past ten years.

Characteristics of Mutual Accountability
Participants were asked to name characteristics of a good relationship between funder and service providers. Their responses are presented in relation to characteristics of mutual accountability outlined in Merrifield's "Contested Ground: Performance Accountability in Adult Basic Education":
   a. It is negotiated between the stakeholders in a process that engages all the players in clarifying expectations, designing indicators of success, negotiating information flows, and building capacity.
   b. Each responsibility is matched with an equal, enabling right.
   c. Every player knows clearly and agrees to what is expected of them.
   d. Every player has the capacity to hold others accountable.
   e. Efficient and effective information flows enable all players to hold and be held accountable and act to improve services. (Merrifield 1998: 60)

a. *Negotiated between Stakeholders*
The majority of participants said that communication, flexibility, respect and trust are necessary for successful negotiation about expectations, indicators of success, information flow and capacity building:

> *Openness, respect, opportunities for joint dialogue, being proactive & responsive, understanding our work, asking them to explain what we don't understand.* (funder)

> *Communication and respect for one another's decisions and their impact on each other. For communication you have to be open-minded to other people's opinions and decisions and instructions. Don't judge people.* (service provider)

Some participants spoke about varying perspectives on indicators of success, as well as real limitations in negotiating how to measure learner progress and program results:

> *When I think about the funder and accountability I think about what they might measure differently from the service provider. We may have different views of success.* (service provider)

We need to couch assessment in adult learning principles where we honour student safety and comfort regarding assessment…We should not put responsibility for the program on learners. (funder)

Softer outcomes are highly valued by (funder.) (service provider)

All participants stated that flexibility and being able to communicate openly allows for negotiation within the parameters of the program (both the funder and funded program). Most of the service providers indicated that the funder was open and flexible.

b. *Responsibility Matched with an Equal Enabling Right*
While this question was not asked directly, all the participants indicated the importance of knowing and fulfilling one's accountability responsibilities. Regarding enabling rights most participants referred to learners:

My own thought on mutual accountability is that each side has responsibilities and rights. In a similar way I have to make the best match for the student but also look at what the volunteer needs to get out of the experience. I'm looking at both needs. (service provider)

All of the people/organizations that I am accountable to are also accountable to me, to help me do my job well by keeping me informed and providing me with the knowledge and tools to do my job. (funder)

c. *Clear and Agreed upon Expectations*
In response to questions about roles and expectations some participants indicated the importance of knowing one's own role in order to know what to expect of others in a mutual accountability relationship. Most participants stated that respect, trust, and open communication are necessary to establish clear expectations:

You have to be clear about your role. It is unrealistic to think that all relationships are good/easy. You have to work with what you've got. The roles in the relationship set the parameters of the relationship. …. I feel strongly that you have to learn that you are in a professional role. (service provider)

Transparency, honesty, respect, compassion, the ability to impart education or knowledge around expectations. (funder)

Participants spoke about how personal relationships and individual and organizational reputations influence the service provider-funder relationship. Some participants indicated that, ideally, personal relationships should not affect accountability. However, they acknowledged that how people relate personally and the organization's reputation does indeed influence the funder-service provider relationship:

There is a personal presence in your professional relationships…. It is a good thing to use your personal strengths in your professional role & see how that contributes to the professional relationship. It is very unethical to not know the

difference and to base your professional behaviour on personal connection.
(service provider)

*….because understanding of the leadership of a program is partly built on my
impression of who I am working with, their level of comfort with me likely has
bearing on how much sensitive information they share with me, and ask of me.*
(funder)

The majority of participants indicated that communication is crucial to clarify
expectations among stakeholders. One participant stated that *wording is critical* and that
people interpret words like accountability and assessment very differently. It is important
to communicate such interpretations. Such dialogue has the potential to address
inequalities of power in accountability systems.

d. *Capacity to Hold Others Accountable*
Some participants indicated that they appreciated the efforts made by the funder to build
capacity:

*…(the funder) has good communication, provides information, a real willingness
to answer questions and help you through the maze…. It is hands on often
enough and it made you feel you could do your job without being overburdened
with accountability details, so having midpoint and end reports is very sensible
compared to weekly or monthly. They have a newsletter, provide opportunities to
meet, are very approachable, work with you when there's trouble. They are also
willing to tell why you didn't get funded.* (service provider)

Other participants stated the need to improve their practices in accountability:

*We don't train people, we say complete this (report) and call me for help. The
tool would work well in preparing for the following year with upfront planning. As
a new coordinator you can then think about what's coming and what you need to
put in place.* (service provider)

Overall, most of the participants indicated that flexibility and open communication
(dialogue) are assets both organizations have and that these factors contribute greatly
to capacity building.

e. *Negotiated Information Flows to Improve Services*
Merrifield argues that information is a central issue in mutual accountability and
information flows need to expand from the traditional upward direction (learner to
instructor to program manager to funder). She states that it is critical that stakeholders
negotiate what information is essential to whom and how to best gather and use
information. Some participants indicated that trying out the tool helped them question
their assumptions about the direction of information flows:

*…the whole concept of what you count and how it is counted and the value that
the funder and service provider place on the learning that occurs so the*

information that is collected does not just to go up the food chain. (service provider)

I'd like to offer a richer reporting back to the service providers on what we learn from their reports to us – aggregating the report data and returning it to them. From service providers: I'd like a more clear sense of the specific impact of our funding that we can then report to our funder and to the community in general. (funder)

Although participants spoke about information, only a few indicated how stakeholders (learner, instructor, program manager, funder) might negotiate what information is required by each:

Within the field, as a funder, we think we need to own the evaluation, we don't want the agencies to have to worry about it. We want them to focus on the program. But the more we think about it we realize that evaluation has to emerge from them. We need to be part of that conversation; we need to help them understand why we need it (information) and how we use it. (funder)

If attendance is important to the funder then the learners have to understand why it is important. Funders have to be cognizant that they request information that also meets program and learner needs not just their needs. It's a principle that should work across the system. Also the mutual accountability relationship could be addressed in the classroom…discussed with learners in the classroom so they understand the funding issues for the program they are taking, and why for example, attendance is important to them as learners but also as part of the mutual accountability of their program. (service provider)

One participant had a persistent question about the link between learner assessment and what is counted to meet program accountability. Another participant was concerned about measuring program success based solely upon learner progress and another stated that *people have different interpretations of the meaning of words such as assessment*. This question was not easily answered through participating in the research. Others reflected this concern as well:

If you are going to report outcomes of your program you have to be able to assess your students. It will help you understand the need to assess in good ways and put those in place. (funder)

… literacy learner's progress is not necessarily grade levels or whether they get a job. That's the wrong focus in literacy. One question (in the tool) looks at tracking the progress of the organization and not students. The tool doesn't speak to measuring service provided to students specifically or directly. (service provider)

On the other hand, a few participants felt that learner assessment was addressed in the tool.

Some questions are directly related to students and the information that is tracked. From the funder's point of view that information is extremely important for making decisions. (service provider)

Participants' responses indicate that the issue of information continues to be an area that requires greater focus as well as discussion of how it relates to indicators of success.

Potential of the Mutual Accountability Tool
Participants liked the tool. They said it highlights the importance of relationship and increases awareness and appreciation of each other's workload and responsibilities (funder-service provider). They indicated that with further testing and revision the tool has the potential to offer benchmarks or standards not only for the adult literacy field but across the voluntary sector:

…(the tool) really clarifies roles and responsibilities on both sides. I'm pleased that service providers would get a sense of how much we do behind the scenes. Our work is really onerous. It's difficult and it's complicated but it's very, very thoughtful. We don't make our decisions lightly… Because it is so comprehensive both sides can see the difficulty of both side's jobs. I'm sure funders and providers have said I don't know what you do all day…

It would enhance the relationship. They should talk about the questions together. It would keep the relationship more grounded and flexible to the needs of the clientele… dialogue gives opportunities to brainstorm solutions, each on their own and between the two, it provides an opportunity for change. (service provider)

Over half of the participants stated that trying out the tool expanded their understanding of mutual accountability and some suggested that it could be used for new program planning and staff training. One participant described the tool as a feedback mechanism and another liked that the tool instigates change and improvement:

The most valuable things about this tool were to review funder responsibilities and up the ante on places where we could be doing it better. (funder)

There were so many questions about things I wouldn't have expected to be on that kind of tool. The tool would be a catalyst for making sure you document the kind of information for how the funding was being used and how effective it was. (service provider)

While all participants indicated that they liked the tool, some felt it was lengthy, too detailed and contained some leading questions. Others noted the need for careful consideration of how the tool should be used. One participant cautioned that it should

not be used as a screening tool for proposals and another emphasized that using the tool must be voluntary:

> *If I didn't have a good relationship with the funder I might feel a little self-defensive using the tool. It's the degree of detail in the tool. It is one thing improving, and another being graded, adding more work... I'm worried this involves too much for literacy programs... a literacy coordinator has high expectations on them already, they might be overwhelmed by the tool.* (service provider)

Some participants recommended that the tool should include questions on program changes and measuring qualitative learner impacts. One participant suggested adding a section on how to achieve results:

> *Sometimes there is a disconnect between learner assessment and the program. You could build on the tool with a how to achieve results section.* (funder)

All of the participants thought this tool has the potential to improve practices and understanding of accountability. Along with self-assessment, participants felt the tool could assist with staff training and program planning. They all recommended further revision and testing of the tool, and saw the potential for a use beyond the adult literacy field.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We learned from this challenging project that mutual accountability, and particularly the assessment tool, offers a constructive approach to learning how to improve mechanisms for selecting, counting, reporting and applying information about program and learner success. Merrifield argues that an organization with a robust learning environment engages in continuous improvement. Engaging in this action research was a means for our organizations to attend to continuous improvement.

Regarding the project's goals, team members agreed that this collaborative approach to better understanding accountability has helped us look at our own programs and accountability systems to see where improvements can be made. Participants identified areas of strength: respect, trust and communication being the most significant, which validated our original assumption about the importance of the working relationship between funder and the two programs. Through this project, we have increased our understanding of the complexities in accountability systems. We also learned that the concept of mutual accountability aligns with our program/organization values. We believe that, with further revision and testing, the assessment tool can contribute to the development of a constructive accountability model.

Recommendations:
Based on the findings from the research, we recommend the following:
  ➢ Continue to revise and test the tool in the adult literacy field and voluntary sector
  ➢ Continue to facilitate and encourage dialogue on accountability and assessment

➢ Further explore the interconnections of learner assessment and program accountability

Learning and Working Together

In this section, team members share their individual learning about mutual accountability, and our working relationship with each other.

Team Learning and Next Steps

On the whole, this action research project was a learning process for all the team members as well as other participants. As team members, we had not worked together in this way and some of us had not worked together much before. Our original work plan was continually being adjusted, partly because accountability can be quite nebulous as a concept and practice, but also because of changes in coordinators in both programs during the research. Changes in individual participant schedules prompted adjustments as well.

According to the practitioner/researcher:
➢ The project built a stronger awareness among participants of the various roles and responsibilities in mutual accountability relationships. The general belief is that better understanding on these various levels will lead to better service delivery in the adult literacy field.
➢ The project helped the team learn about the variety of interpretations and applications of accountability, strengthening our awareness of accountability. As a result, accountability will probably play a larger role in our practice in future.
➢ Greater clarification of research methodology is needed.
➢ A test protocol for documents supporting the research questions should be designed and the wording of these documents should be clarified before they are used.

According to the funder:
On formal research —
➢ The protocols or "rules" of formal research were somewhat unfamiliar, for example, ethics review, keeping preliminary findings closed in order not to corrupt the data coming in, and the ownership of the project. The experience showed how the protocols work towards achieving project goals, by keeping it evidence-based.
On the reflection stage —
➢ The first draft of the tool, combining seminal literature and the team's musings, was a great anchor for the rest of the project. It modeled what it is to listen well, review the literature, and jump in and create something that we could then fine-tune as a team and with focus group feedback.
➢ The theory of change concept introduced in the project was very impressive. Calgary Learns needs more reflection on this at a strategic, organizational level in order to incorporate this more effectively into our grant-making accountability.

On the testing stage —
- The funder felt quite removed from this stage — it was outside his/her experience. The funder's participation here was basically to arrange the funder focus group sessions.
- Again, research protocols were stricter than anticipated.

On timing/ownership —
- The funder thought that the project's findings would be presented at fall 2009 conferences. But, since Calgary Learns was not the funder in this project, it doesn't have control over when the research is released.
- The funder had not considered what would happen after the project wrapped up and the team disbanded. If the project is to be carried forward and the tool used and promoted, someone has to take that on. The funder is interested in doing so – but again, could use some guidance in how to roll that out effectively and with appropriate protocols.

On dissemination —
- Family and Community Social Services (FCSS) funders at the City of Calgary are interested in seeing the tool and comparing their own granting processes with what the project has determined are 'promising practices'. There has been some talk of seeing if FCSS or another funder/fundee group, possibly outside the adult learning field, might be interested in testing and refining the tool.
- The funder is confident that the project research and tool are something of interest that can be presented at a later conference, but it is unclear who would do the presenting. The funder is not sure of being able to do so, at least not without some support.

According to the project manager:
- The project helped build a deeper understanding of systemic beliefs and values about success in adult literacy, and what information becomes evidence of success.
- … in adult literacy counting attendance and completion or passing of courses must be balanced with counting learners' descriptions of success and instructors creating tools and approaches that contribute to learners/ success. The project manager believes that this balancing act of counting numbers and counting narratives is central to mutual accountability.
- A major challenge was the difficulty of pinning down the concept of mutual accountability. "Mutual" might imply a relationship between two parties, but it really has to be multiple accountabilities to work.
- A major insight to emerge from the project is the realization that mutual accountability can be understood as a simple idea about fairness, that it has an ethical foundation with concern about the voice of the other (primarily learners).
- Possible next steps: There is interest in the tool among organizations in the voluntary, community services sector. The project manager recommends a follow-up project to further test and develop the tool.

Appendix

Numbers and Narratives: Adding up Stories of Success in Adult Literacy

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

The Calgary action research project is a partnership between Calgary Learns and two adult literacy/basic education programs at Bow Valley College; Lifeline to Literacy and Marlborough Evening. Calgary Learns is the funder, and Bow Valley College is the service provider. The Calgary Action Research project team has developed an assessment tool on Mutual Accountability. You are invited to try out or review this tool and provide us with feedback.

The purpose of creating a Mutual Accountability assessment tool is to improve the working relationship between funder (Calgary Learns) and service provider (Bow Valley College Marlborough Evening and Lifeline to Literacy programs).

For this project Mutual Accountability means "an accountability system based in the concept of mutuality [that] has several characteristics (Merrifield, J. 1998):

- It is negotiated between the stakeholders in a process that engages all the players in clarifying expectations, designing indicators of success, negotiating information flows, and building capacity
- Each responsibility is matched with an equal, enabling right: the right to a program that meets one's learning needs with the responsibility to take learning seriously, for example.
- Every player knows clearly and agrees to what is expected of them
- Every player has the capacity to he held and to hold others accountable
- Efficient and effective information flows to enable all players to hold others accountable

There are **four steps** to completing the Mutual Accountability Tool review. Interviews can take place in person (preferred), by phone, or by email if outside of Calgary.

1. Read, and complete the attached **consent form** and fax page 3 within the next four (4) days to 403-297-4949 Attention: Ian Kennedy & Audrey Gardner. Consent forms are required from each member of a focus group and individuals.

2. Complete the pre-test interview **before** testing or reviewing the tool.
3. Test or review the Mutual Accountability Tool.
4. Complete the post-test (10 question) interview.

You can participate in a way that suits your program or organization. It will take about 20-30 minutes for the orientation and pre-test/review questions, then depending on how you want to go through the tool you may spend anywhere between 30 minutes and a couple of hours (30 minutes to review alone, or if you want to work through or try out as a group, it may take up to 2 hours). After you have reviewed/tested the tool the practitioner-researcher and participant(s) connect for a post test/review interview which will take approximately 45 minutes.

Thank you for participating in the Calgary Action Research project. Your input will serve to improve funder / service provider working relationships and provide a better understanding of mutual accountability in the adult literacy field.

Numbers and Narratives: Adding up Stories of Success in Adult Literacy

Connecting the Dots: Improving Accountability in the Adult Literacy Field in Canada
Year 2: September 2008 – May 2009

Consent Form   Date

What is the purpose of this research project?
This is a two-year project funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources Development Canada and sponsored by The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, Movement for Canadian Literacy, Literacy BC, and Research in Practice for Adult Literacy – BC (RiPAL-BC).
In the first year, (Sept 2007 – May 2008) field reviewers interviewed literacy practitioners and funders to identify what is currently happening in the field regarding accountability policies and practices and what has been published about the topic. In the second year, five action research projects have been implemented to develop, adapt and test innovative accountability models. The Calgary action research project is a partnership between Calgary Learns and two adult literacy/basic education programs at Bow Valley College. Calgary Learns is the funder, and Bow Valley College is the service provider. Staff from BVC programs and the funder have created a team with support from a Research Friend (independent researcher to guide and support the action research project). The Calgary Action Research project team has developed an assessment tool on Mutual Accountability.
 The project provides an opportunity for funders and practitioners to examine the impact of accountability on the adult literacy field across the country and explore new ways of approaching it. Ultimately we aim to increase understanding among practitioners, policy makers, and funders of the impact of accountability on the field and options for improvement

How will the research be conducted?
The practitioner –researcher will collect data from BVC program staff in the Lifeline to Literacy and Marlborough Evening programs and staff from Calgary Learns who volunteer to try out or review the tool. I will provide orientation on how to use the tool, and ask you some questions about mutual accountability. When you review/test the tool I will be available for questions.

Once you have tried or reviewed the tool, I would like to ask you several questions about the Mutual Accountability Tool. After interviews (and/or focus groups) with participants the research project team will compile and analyze this data. The primary purpose of the interview is to gather information about how useful the mutual accountability tool is, and your suggestions for improvement. We will write a final report as well as post information on the project's web site. We might also publish the results in scholarly and/or non-academic publications as well as do presentations at professional development events.

What are the risks?
Individual Interview: Your interview will be confidential. I will keep notes of what you say.

Focus group: You will be participating in a group process, where you will be sharing your perspectives and experiences. The group will be reminded to respect group process and maintain the confidentiality and privacy of fellow participants. The risks involved, therefore, are of a social nature, in that your thoughts and feelings will be shared in a group environment with your peers. I will keep notes of/tape what people say.

I will produce a summary of our conversation (interview or focus group) and upon your request send it to you so you can add/delete or make any changes you would like. The

document you send back to me will be used as data. Only the practitioner-researcher, project manager and research friend) will have access to the data.
We will not use your name (unless you say we can).

What are the benefits?
By participating in this research you will be contributing to developing tangible ways to improve funder and fundee working relationships and a better understanding of accountability, particularly mutual accountability in the adult literacy field. If you are interested in receiving updates and/or the final report we will gladly send a copy to you after June 2009.

Can I change my mind and withdraw?
Yes – you may withdraw without consequence, and your information will not be used in the research project. You can withdraw prior to the writing of the final report (April 20, 2009). To withdraw, you must inform me, or the project manager who will document your withdraw request.
If at any point you would like more information about this project or about the data collection process, you can contact me at ikennedy@bowvalleycollege.ca or the project manager, Audrey Gardner at agardner@bowvalleycollege.ca, 403-410-1502

How will my information be kept private?
Your name and information will not be identified in the research report or other materials without your written permission. At the bottom of this consent form, you have the right to select how and if you would like the project publications to include quotes from what you say and your name.

If I sign this form, what am I consenting to?

By signing this form, you are acknowledging the following things:
1. You have been informed of the purpose of the research.
2. You are aware of how the information will be used.
3. You are aware of the risks and the benefits of the research.
4. You are aware of who to contact for additional information.
5. You are aware of your right to withdraw from the research and how to do so.
6. You are giving the Centre for Literacy permission to include your responses in the final research report.
Please check the applicable boxes below to give your permission to the Centre for Literacy to use the information from the project you will participate in:

I grant permission for the Centre for Literacy to:
Use the information (including quotes) **without using my name** or any identifying information:
☐ Yes ☐ No
Use the information (including quotes) **using my name**:
☐ Yes ☐ No
I'd like to have an opportunity to **see how my quotes are being used** before giving consent for my name to be used:
In this case, we will send you a paragraph with your quote so that you can make a decision about your name being connected to the information provided.
☐ Yes ☐ No

_____
Name (please print)
_____   _____
Signature   Date

Please fax to 403-297-4949 Attention: Ian Kennedy & Audrey Gardner