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Environmental Scan Report

RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada

April 2025

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Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



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Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



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Executive Summary

Overview of the Project

On March 28, 2024, the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) signed an agreement with the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) to undertake a pan-Canadian, multi-sectoral Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR training in Canada. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of identifying, assessing, and recognizing the skills, knowledge, and competencies individuals have acquired through work, education, or life experiences, irrespective of how or where the learning was achieved.

Supported by the grant from ONCAT, work on the research project began in April 2024 and involved the existing members of CAPLA's Certificates and Certification (C&C) Working Group as an Advisory body. One of the first project activities undertaken by the C&C was a face-to-face Focus Group Discussion among RPL practitioners. This was conducted in Belleville ON at the Loyalist RPL Conference in May 2024 as a preliminary snapshot into the insights of current RPL/PLAR practitioners from across Canada and to help inform CAPLA's subsequent ONCAT research. The Summary Report can be found in Appendix C.

In July 2024, the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) launched the next initiative to assess the training and professional development needs within the field of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition across Canada. CAPLA engaged North Pacific Metrics Inc. (North Pacific) to execute this project. The following report describes the scope, methodology, and activities of the project executed by North Pacific. It includes an overview of the project objectives and phases, details of data collection, and data analysis. It presents key findings from surveys and focus group discussions with RPL/PLAR practitioners; and outlines the implications and recommendations for developing structured professional development (SPD) for RPL/PLAR workers.

This project aimed to conduct a comprehensive environmental scan to identify the need for and potential value of training and other structured professional development (SPD) initiatives for RPL/PLAR Workers in diverse sectors across Canada. As a part of this research, it was also important to gather insights from individuals representing the employer and leadership perspective including employer needs and potential employment opportunities for trained or certified RPL/PLAR practitioners. One of the key objectives of this project was to gather insights that would inform future initiatives, including the possible development of a national RPL Certificate or voluntary certification program.

Central to this effort were surveys targeting both Employer/Leaders and workers, supplemented by focus group discussions. Secondary research was conducted to develop the survey instruments along with stakeholder engagement activities to ensure a holistic understanding of current challenges and opportunities related to SPD. The project was spearheaded by CAPLA's Certificates and Certification (C&C) Working Group, which was responsible for overseeing the project from start to finish.

The key activities in this project included designing the research, crafting research instruments, gathering and analyzing data, and synthesizing findings. The key deliverables for the project include the following report as well as gathering and consolidating current RPL/PLAR courses, certificates, frameworks, and competency models to be made available on CAPLA's website/platform.

Key Conclusions:

Based on the combined findings from the **RPL/PLAR Worker** and **Employer/Leader** surveys, as well as the follow-up focus group sessions, the C&C identified several key conclusions:

- Survey results identify a strong demand and data-driven need for the development of structured professional development programs including training and certificates for RPL/PLAR practitioners in Canada.
- There is a clear consensus that RPL/PLAR activities involved in identifying, recognizing, and assessing prior learning are not only relevant but often *central* to organizational objectives and workforce development strategies.
- The results indicate a clear and growing demand for structured professional development for RPL/PLAR practitioners across sectors.
- Survey respondents recognize the value of structured professional development for RPL/PLAR activities, at the organizational as well as the individual level. Respondents value the idea of structured training and recognition pathways.
- There is a readiness and willingness to invest time and money in RPL/PLAR competency development, especially if it leads to clear performance outcomes.
- Respondents prefer that RPL/PLAR structured professional development be provided by educational institutions, a professional membership organization, or an industry association.

Taken together, these findings constitute a compelling case for implementing structured professional development for RPL/PLAR practitioners to reflect the realities of their work, value their existing experience and support their growth and recognition as competent professionals.

Recommendations:

Based on the above conclusions and drawing further on the results from the surveys and focus group discussions, the following recommendations and next steps are proposed to guide the development of structured professional development initiatives for the RPL/PLAR sector in Canada:

1. Develop a Professional Competency Framework

Establish a professional competency framework that defines the knowledge, skills, and attributes required for RPL/PLAR roles. The framework will provide a shared understanding of RPL/PLAR roles and competencies, and how competencies differ across contexts. The competency framework will be an essential component of advancing professionalism in the field.

2. Conduct a Training Needs Analysis

Gather insights from a wider group of RPL/PLAR practitioners, employers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders via a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) process. TNA will validate and refine the findings from this environmental and reveal the competency gaps and practice areas that require focused professional development interventions. The TNA will prioritize key areas for development, ensuring that program offerings are targeted, relevant, and aligned with both worker needs and organizational objectives.

3. Design Flexible and Tailored SPD Programs

Design and develop structured professional development opportunities that align with both the specific needs of RPL/PLAR workers and the goals of their organizations. Focus on practical, role-specific training and competency development that enhances assessment accuracy, operational efficiency, and career growth opportunities. Design flexible structured professional development programs based on identified preferences and blending delivery formats.

4. Build Tiered and Role-Specific Learning and Recognition Pathways

Based on the diverse needs of RPL/PLAR practitioners at various stages in their careers, develop tiered learning and recognition pathways that offer clear and structured progression opportunities. These pathways will offer clear progression and recognition routes for practitioners across experience levels and sector contexts. The learning and recognition pathways should be built on RPL principles by exploring the recognition of all learning, including work-based learning, towards ongoing continuing professional development. In addition to tiered pathways, sector specialization should also be incorporated to address the diverse contexts in which RPL/PLAR professionals work.

Introduction

The CAPLA RPL/PLAR Research Report captures the results of the pan-Canadian environmental scan to gather insights about the need for and potential value of training and other SPD from RPL/PLAR Workers who engage in RPL/PLAR activities and from RPL Employer/Leaders including business owners/operators and managers who support or oversee RPL/PLAR-related activities within their organizations. Funding to support this report was provided by ONCAT (Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer). The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ONCAT or the Government of Ontario.

The outcomes of this environmental scan and research will be used by CAPLA to inform potential future initiatives, including the design and development of SPD such as training, courses, and/or a national RPL/PLAR Certificate or voluntary certification program.

Early on in the process of conducting our research and analysis work, we identified the need to clarify and define key terms:

Structured Professional Development (SPD): Courses, webinars, training, education, certificates, certification, and professional credentials.

Certificate: Documents proving a candidate's completion of academic programs of study, a specific sequence of courses, or a diploma.

Certification: Industry recognition of skills or knowledge, often after an assessment, that verifies that a candidate has the required skills, knowledge, and ability to perform a specific job.

Credential: Qualifications or licenses that demonstrate expertise and/or legal authority to work in a specific profession.

RPL/PLAR Workers: Employees whose job/role involves (at least to some extent) identifying, assessing, and recognizing the skills, knowledge, and experiences that individuals have gained through work, education, or life experiences.

- These employees may or may not consider themselves to be an RPL or PLAR worker and their job role may not have the words “assessing prior learning” or “prior learning assessment and recognition” explicitly included in the job title or even in the job description. However, they may be engaged in work related to advising adults and/or assessing and recognizing their skills and competencies.
- It was understood that, unlike managers or supervisors who conduct annual performance reviews to assess the skills and performance of their team members within current jobs, RPL/PLAR Workers look at how a person's existing skills, knowledge, or experience align with academic or occupational requirements or professional standards.
- This work often starts with supporting the individual on an affective level, since many adults feel insecure about what they know and can do. The goal is often to support the individual's

entry into new roles or careers, obtain credits/certifications/qualifications, or build pathways for career growth.

RPL Employer/Leaders: Employers, business owners/operators, leaders, and managers who support or oversee RPL/PLAR-related activities within their organizations and those who were responsible for hiring RPL/PLAR Workers or managing their work.

RPL/PLAR Activities: Tasks and duties that are often ‘hidden’ within a vast number of paid and unpaid occupations. RPL/PLAR Workers typically work in roles where helping individuals reach their full personal and professional potential is an integral part of their everyday working lives.

Some examples of key RPL/PLAR Activities include:

- Identifying/assessing what individuals have learned through work, community involvement, or life experiences
- Assisting individuals to help uncover their skills and competencies to facilitate professional growth and recognition
- Helping individuals identify transferable skills through prior learning and experience acquired via work, community involvement, or life experiences
- Advising on learning opportunities, career development, and/or pathways based on existing skills or experience
- Assessing existing skills for job requirements, professional membership requirements, and/or occupational standards
- Assisting individuals in creating records or portfolios that capture their skills, experiences, and achievements
- Facilitating access to training or development programs based on skills or experience
- Helping individuals prepare for assessments that will qualify them for certifications or credentials based on their previous experiences and competencies
- Recognizing learning that could count as credit towards certifications/qualifications/credentials, for example, receiving a certificate or a diploma, etc.

Some organizations/environments where RPL/PLAR Activities may take place include:

- Career development services
- Professional bodies
- Academic institutions
- Community and workforce development groups, etc.
- Social service agencies
- Immigrant-serving agencies/settlement services
- Indigenous programs and organizations
- Canadian Armed Forces
- Human resources departments, etc.

Some occupations where RPL/PLAR Activities may take place include:

- Workforce Development Specialists
- Employment or Skills Development Counselors
- Vocational Rehabilitation Consultants
- Credentialing or Certification Officers
- Professional Membership Coordinators/Advisors
- Accreditation Specialists
- Academic Advisors
- Recognition of Prior Learning/Prior Learning & Assessment Coordinators
- Continuing Education Program Coordinators
- Career Development Practitioners
- Case Managers
- Employment Advisors
- Job Coaches/Life Coaches
- Employment Advisors
- Career/Workforce Mentors
- Settlement or Integration Workers
- Credential Recognition Advisors
- Skills Assessment Consultants
- Skills Development Trainers
- Skills Translation Specialists
- Youth Workers/Women’s Employment Counselors
- Reintegration Case Managers
- Correctional Educators
- Military Career Transition Advisors
- Veterans Affairs Counselors, etc.

Project Methodology

Project Activities and Timelines

The project methodology was structured around key phases and activities aligned with CAPLA’s objective of assessing the need for SPD initiatives for RPL/PLAR Workers. All project activities were systematically planned and executed to ensure stakeholder engagement, comprehensive data collection, and meaningful analysis to support decision-making.

1) Phase 1 - Project Initiation with CAPLA (July 2024)

The project was initiated with formal agreements, including a service contract between CAPLA and North Pacific Metrics Inc. (North Pacific) to outline project deliverables, scope, and activities. North Pacific submitted, and CAPLA approved a project work plan detailing project milestones, methodologies, and timelines to ensure effective execution.



2) Phase 2 – Draft Surveys and Resource Collection (August 2024 – January 2025)

This phase involved the development of two survey instruments and the outreach to collect existing RPL/PLAR resources from key informants and stakeholders including CAPLA Members and the general public.

- **Survey Draft:** North Pacific drafted two different but overlapping surveys to gather insights from both RPL/PLAR Workers and RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders, ensuring alignment with the key project outcomes. The surveys were drafted and shared with the C&C Working Group and the CAPLA Project Lead to gather review feedback and input.
- **Scan of Existing RPL/PLAR Resources:** During this phase, a wide outreach was also conducted to gather and consolidate information on existing RPL/PLAR courses, certificates, competency frameworks, and related materials.

3) Phase 3 - Survey Distribution (February 2025)

The survey distribution phase involved the launch of the survey, specific outreach activities (including regular email reminders from CAPLA), and specific engagement strategies to maximize participation.

- **Survey Tool Setup:** North Pacific used an online survey platform (Survey Monkey) to facilitate online data collection using the finalized survey instruments.
- **Mailing List Development:** CAPLA assisted by the C&C Working Group prepared a distribution list targeting RPL Workers, Employers, and Sector leaders.
- **Survey Launch:** Surveys were officially launched on February 3, 2025 (to close on March 03, 2025).

4) Focus Group Discussions and Data Analysis (March 2025)

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their willingness and availability for participation in a follow-up discussion. North Pacific conducted three focus group discussion workshops as a follow-up to the survey data collection phase.

Upon the completion of the focus group discussions, North Pacific conducted an analysis and synthesis of all findings including both the data collected through the two surveys and the focus group discussions.

In this phase, a preliminary (Draft) report was prepared, outlining key findings, and was shared with the C&C Working Group and the CAPLA Project Lead for review and input.

5) Final Project Deliverables (April 2025)

The project concluded with the finalization of the key deliverables. A comprehensive report was prepared to present the research findings, key insights, and recommendations to guide CAPLA's decision-making regarding future SPD initiatives and potential RPL/PLAR certificate program(s).

North Pacific also consolidated all information that was collated on existing RPL/PLAR courses, certificates, competency frameworks, and related materials and shared an “Inventory of RPL/PLAR Resources” with the C&C Working Group and the CAPLA Project Lead.

Project Coordination and Stakeholder Engagement

Throughout the project, North Pacific conducted regular meetings with the CAPLA Project Lead (Andy Brown) and with the C&C Working Group to ensure alignment of activities with the project goals and objectives. Meetings with the C&C Working Group meetings were held on September 19, 2024, October 31, 2024, November 28, 2024, January 16, 2025, February 20, 2025, and April 8, 2025. Meeting notes/recordings were shared with all members of the project team. Regular check-ins and ongoing collaboration with the CAPLA Project Lead ensured continuous feedback and project refinement.

Data Collection

Target Audiences

Data collection employed mixed methods, including two online survey instruments and three focus group discussions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the professional development needs and challenges. The research tools were designed to collect information and insights from the two key stakeholder groups as described previously – RPL/PLAR Workers and RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders.

Surveys

The surveys aimed to assess professional development needs, current practices, and the potential value of SPD initiatives from the two target audiences. The surveys were designed using a structured format to facilitate both quantitative and qualitative data collection and presented as online questionnaires via the *Survey Monkey* tool.

- **Question Types:** A mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions was designed to allow for both structured responses and qualitative insights. The survey instruments were customized for the two audiences but included several common questions to highlight areas of convergence/divergence between RPL/PLAR Workers and RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders.
- **Survey Length:** The survey was designed to take approximately 15-20 minutes to maximize completion rates while gathering detailed input.
- **Survey Distribution:** Surveys were distributed via CAPLA’s mailing lists, via personal emails to personal and professional networks of the C&C Working Group and the CAPLA Board, through social media posts, and sent directly to key stakeholder organizations.

The development of the mailing list focused on regional distribution across the Provinces and Territories and the range of sectors including career development, settlement and integration, Indigenous populations, national sector councils, industry associations, Canadian Armed Forces,

professional associations, etc. The surveys were also shared on social media including CAPLA's LinkedIn feed and individual LinkedIn posts by C&C Working Group and other CAPLA Members with engaging visuals and incentives for those responding.

Key Survey Areas

The survey items focused on multiple dimensions of RPL/PLAR SPD and were broadly organized into five main sections or survey areas.

1. **Background and Demographics:** This section was designed to gather basic demographic information including current work role; organization name, location, size, type, industry sector, etc.
2. **RPL/PLAR Roles and Activities:** This section focused on collecting information about the years of experience in RPL/PLAR, key RPL/PLAR activities performed, and the nature of formal or informal roles that engage in these activities.
3. **Structured Professional Development Needs for RPL/PLAR Workers:** This section included questions related to the SPD needs of workers involved in RPL/PLAR Activities including the types of training they currently receive or might need to better perform their roles. This section also collected information about what type of SPD activities are preferred and what factors influence the choice of SPD. In the RPL/PLAR Worker survey, the focus was on individual training and professional development needs, including frequency and accessibility of structured learning. The RPL/PLAR Leader Employer survey examined organizational priorities for professional development and capacity building.
4. **Perceived Value and Benefits of SPD:** This section was designed to explore perceptions of the value and benefits of SPD opportunities from both individual RPL/PLAR Workers' and RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders' perspectives. This section also explored perceived barriers to participation in SPD and how willing the respondents may be to pay for SPD activities.
5. **RPL/PLAR Follow-up and Resources:** The final section checked for respondents' availability for a follow-up conversation such as a short interview or a focus group discussion. It also encouraged respondents to share the survey within their network of relevant employers, leaders, and RPL/PLAR Workers to broaden the data collection and ensure diverse perspectives. Finally, it invited them to share RPL-related courses, frameworks, and best practices to support CAPLA's objective of collecting RPL/PLAR resources and making them available on their Website/platform.

Focus Group Discussions

To complement the survey data, targeted focus group discussions were conducted to capture deeper insights into the professional development landscape for RPL/PLAR Workers. The focus group discussions were facilitated by North Pacific, focusing on key challenges, opportunities, and best practices related to professional development in RPL/PLAR.

The key objective of the focus group discussions was to explore themes emerging from the survey responses, gather qualitative insights, and identify nuanced perspectives on SPD needs. Selected RPL/PLAR workers, employers, and sector leaders representing diverse industries and experiences participated in the focus group discussions. The focus groups provided a qualitative complement to survey findings, allowing for a richer analysis of SPD needs.

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the data collected through surveys and focus group discussions. The combination of the two different surveys and the three focus group discussions enabled a more comprehensive analysis and assessment of the SPD needs of RPL/PLAR workers.

The RPL/PLAR Worker Survey received **72** valid responses. The RPL/PLAR Employer Leader Survey received **32** valid responses. The Focus Group Discussions had a total of **16** participants across three different workshops.

- **Quantitative Data Analysis:** Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify trends and patterns including response distributions and recurring themes in SPD needs.
- **Qualitative Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis was conducted on open-ended survey responses and focus group discussion transcripts. Responses were analyzed based on categories related to the key survey areas.

Survey Results

Participant Background and Demographics

RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders were asked to identify their current employment status. (n=32)

- 56.3% were employed full-time,
 21.9% were employers,
 12.6% were business owners or freelancers, and
 9.4% were volunteers or retired.

RPL/PLAR Workers were asked to identify their current employment status. (n=72)

- 86.1% were employed full-time,
 8.3% were employed part-time,
 4.2% were freelance contractors, and
 1.4% were between jobs or seeking employment.

For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify the location of their organization.

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)

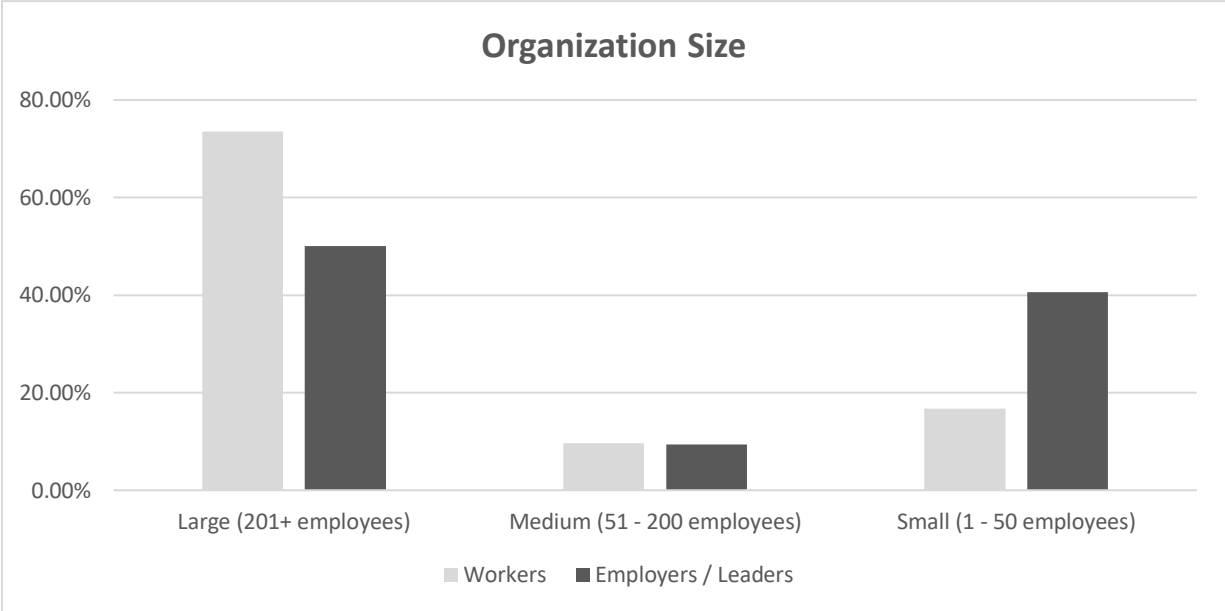


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For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify the size of their organization.

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)

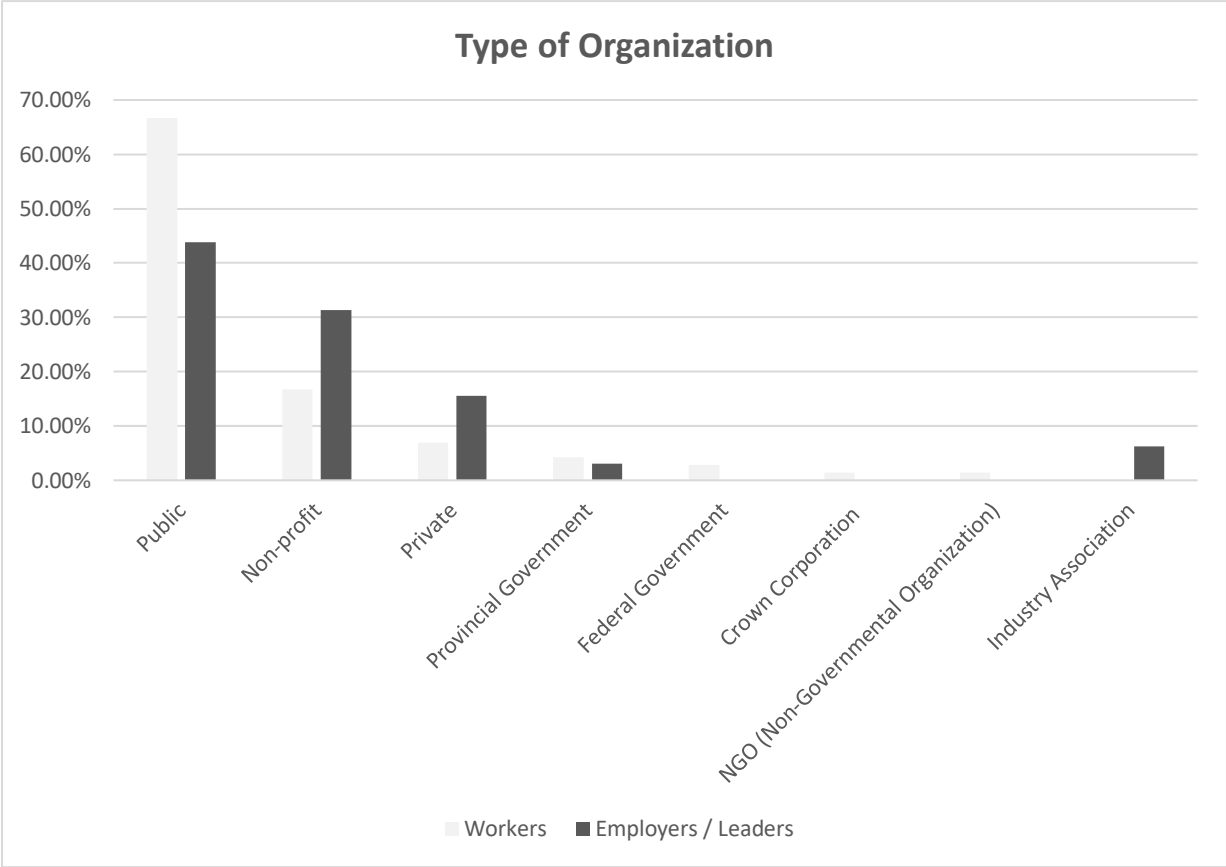


Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify the type of their organization.

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)

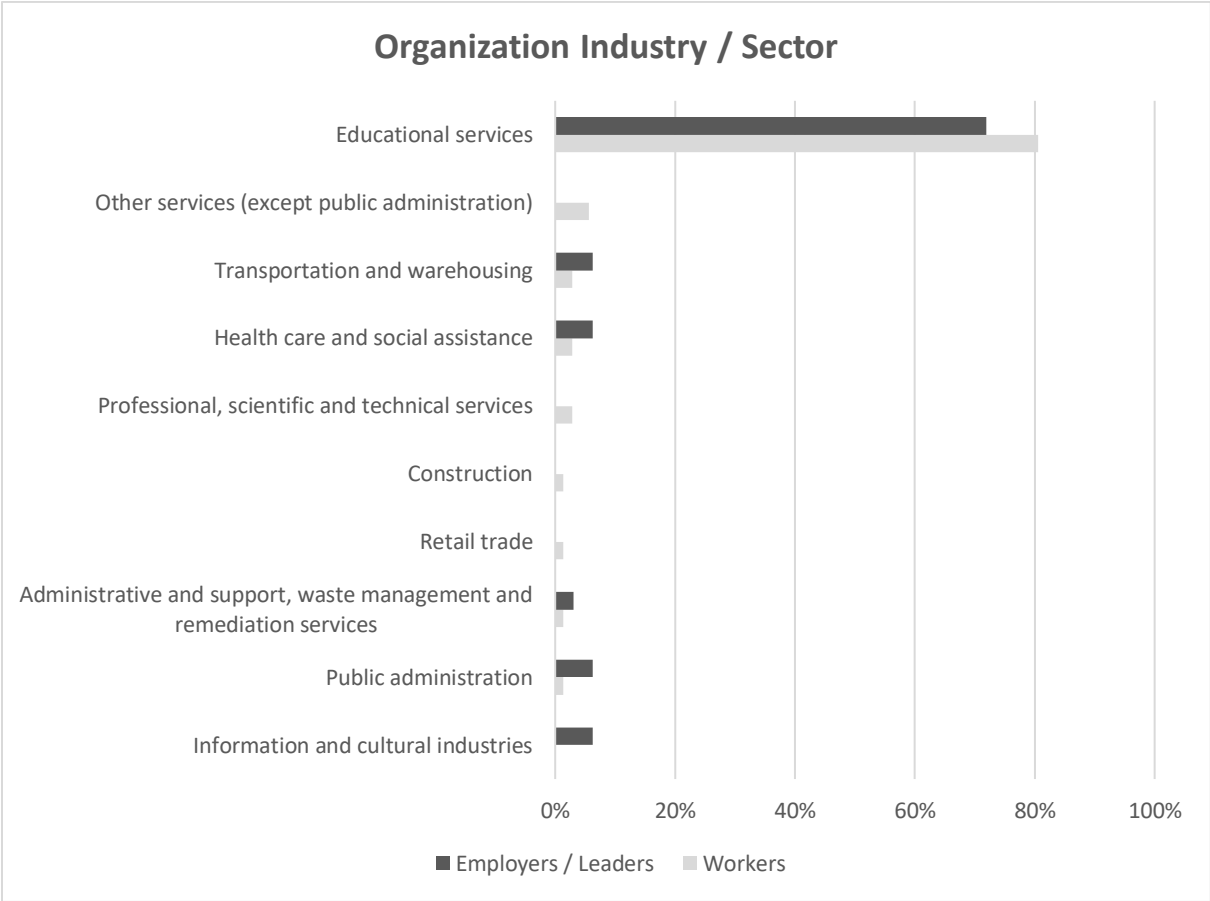


Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify the industry / sector type of their organization, based on NAICS.

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)



Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



RPL/PLAR Workers were asked to identify their current role. (n=72)

Current Role	Workers
RPL-PLAR Advisor/ RPL Trainer/Assessor/Credentials Evaluator/Membership Coordinator, etc.	47.2%
Educational Administrator/Program Coordinator/Program Assistant, etc.	18.1%
Workplace Mentor/ Academic Advisor/ Student Services Associate/ Trades Coordinator / Apprenticeship Coordinator/ Vocational Education Coordinator, etc.	11.1%
Training and Development Specialist/ Workforce Development Specialist/ Organizational Development Manager, etc.	8.3%
General Manager/Senior Manager/Operations Manager, etc.	8.3%
Career Development Practitioner/Social Service Worker/Employment Counsellor/ Rehabilitation counsellor, etc.	4.2%
Quality Assurance Lead/Compliance Officer/Standards Leader, etc.	1.4%
Line Manager/Team Leader/Supervisor, etc.	1.4%

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RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders were asked to identify their current role. (n=32)

Current Role	Employers / Leaders
General Manager/Senior Manager/Operations Manager	31.3%
Educational Administrator/Program Coordinator/Program Assistant	25.0%
RPL-PLAR Advisor/RPL Trainer/Assessor/Credentials Evaluator/Membership Coordinator	15.6%
Chief Executive Officer/ Chief Operating Officer/ Chief Learning Officer	9.4%
Business Owner/Operator/Small Business Manager	6.3%
Workplace Mentor/ Academic Advisor/ Student Services Associate/ Trades Coordinator / Apprenticeship Coordinator/ Vocational Education Coordinator	3.1%
Career Development Practitioner/Social Service Worker/Employment Counsellor/ Rehabilitation counsellor	3.1%
Line Manager/Team Leader/Supervisor	3.1%
Director of Workforce Development/Workforce Strategy Leader/Policy Advisor	3.1%

RPL/PLAR Roles and Activities

RPL/PLAR Workers were asked if they were involved in advising, skills identification, assessment and/or recognition activities. (n=69)

- 71.0% indicated it was a formal part of their job, performed daily or weekly, 24.6% indicated it was an informal part of their responsibilities, performed less frequently, and 4.3% were not formally involved, but interested.

RPL/PLAR Workers were asked how many years they have been performing RPL/PLAR activities. (n=68)

- 5.9% indicated less than one year, 25.0% indicated one to two years, 33.9% indicated three to ten, and 35.2% indicated ten years or more.

RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders were asked if they had employees involved in skill advising, identification, assessment and/or recognition activities. (n=32)

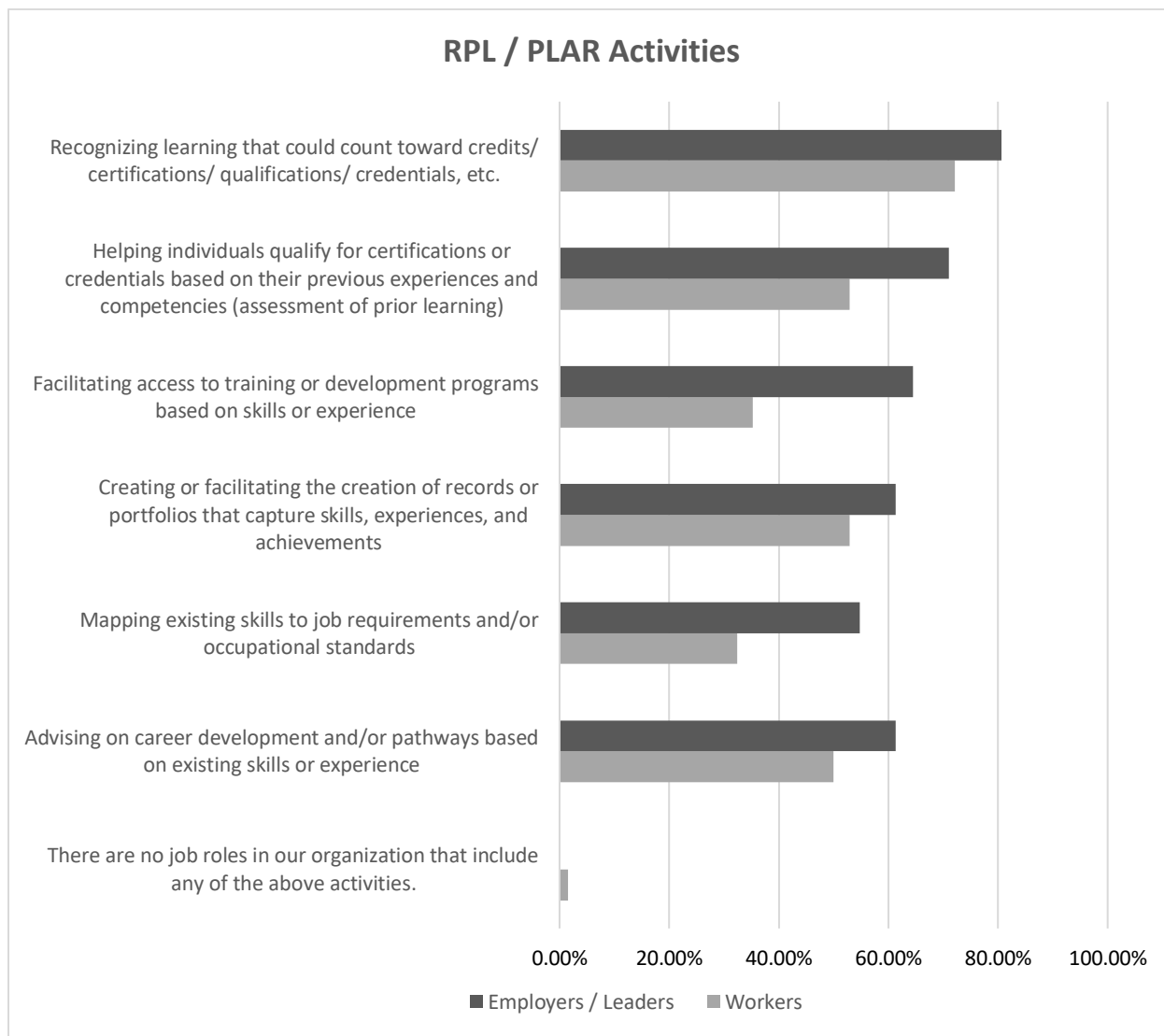
- 65.6% indicated it was a formal element of employees' jobs, performed daily or weekly, 28.1% indicated it was an informal part of employees' responsibilities, performed less frequently, and 6.3% did not have employees who were formally involved but anticipated a need for this role in the next 2 – 5 years.

RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders were asked if their organization saw value in creating or formalizing job roles that focus on advising, skills assessment and/or recognition activities. (n=31)

- 54.8% indicated that their organization had already implemented such roles, 12.9% indicated that their organization was considering implementing such roles, and 9.7% indicated that their organization would need more information or support before proceeding.

For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify specific RPL/PLAR Activities being performed (by themselves or by their employees).

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)



Other, please specify:

Employers / Leaders:

- Designing and developing RPL systems and practices
- Research
- Recruiting mature and transfer students
- Gap training for reassessment

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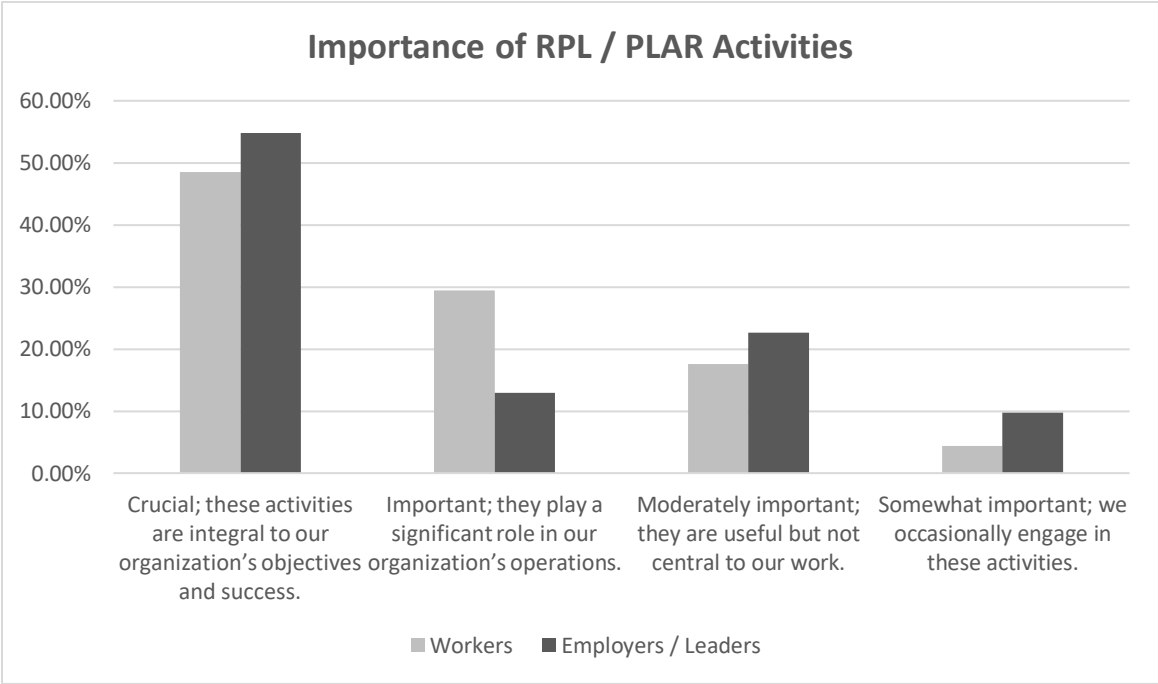
- Supporting educational activities based on assessment results
- Updating RPL policies and procedures
- Training RPL assessors

RPL Workers:

- Program development and management (x4)
- Conducting evaluations and research (x2)
- PLAR / RPL consultant (x2)
- Developing PLAR policies and processes and training employees (x2)
- Training RPL Assessors re candidate-centred processes and practices
- Advising training providers on how to comply with RPL legislation
- Facilitate and coordinate community / post-secondary PLAR
- Conduct research

For both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate the relative importance of RPL/PLAR Activities to their organization’s goals and objectives.

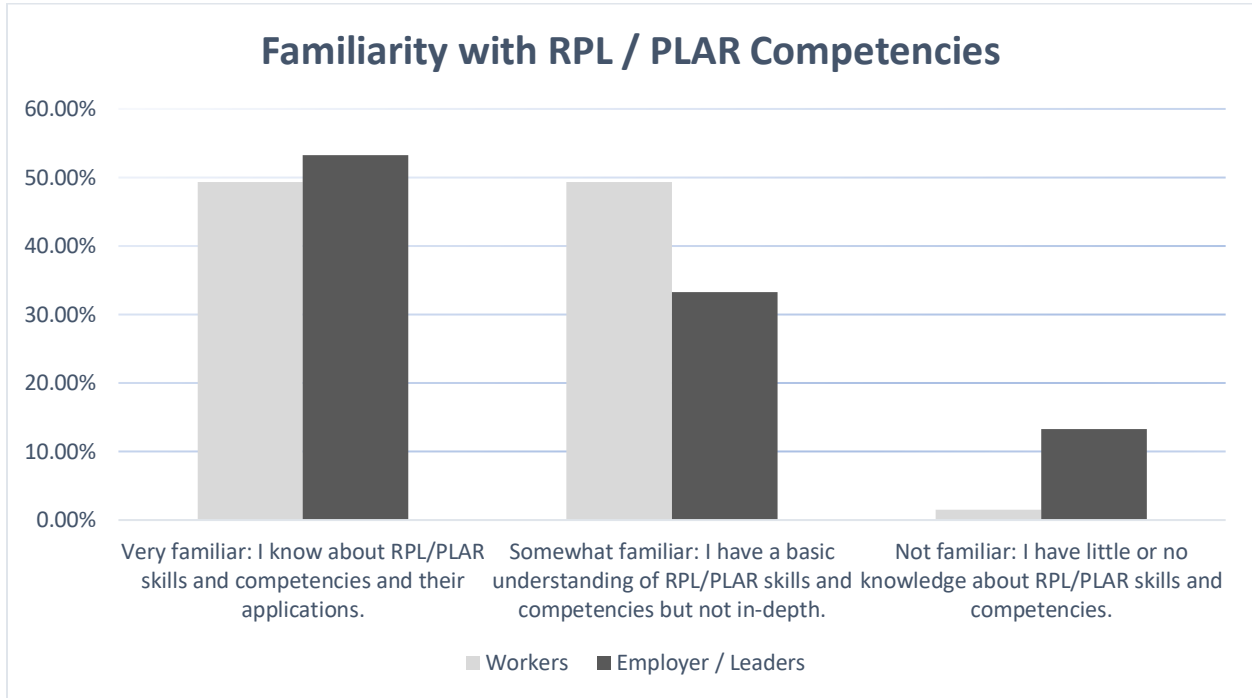
Workers: (n=68) Employers / Leaders: (n=31)



Structured Professional Development Needs for RPL/PLAR Workers

For both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate their familiarity with RPL/PLAR skills and competencies.

Workers: (n=67) Employers / Leaders: (n=30)



RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders were asked if their organization currently needed employees better trained in RPL/PLAR activities. (n=30)

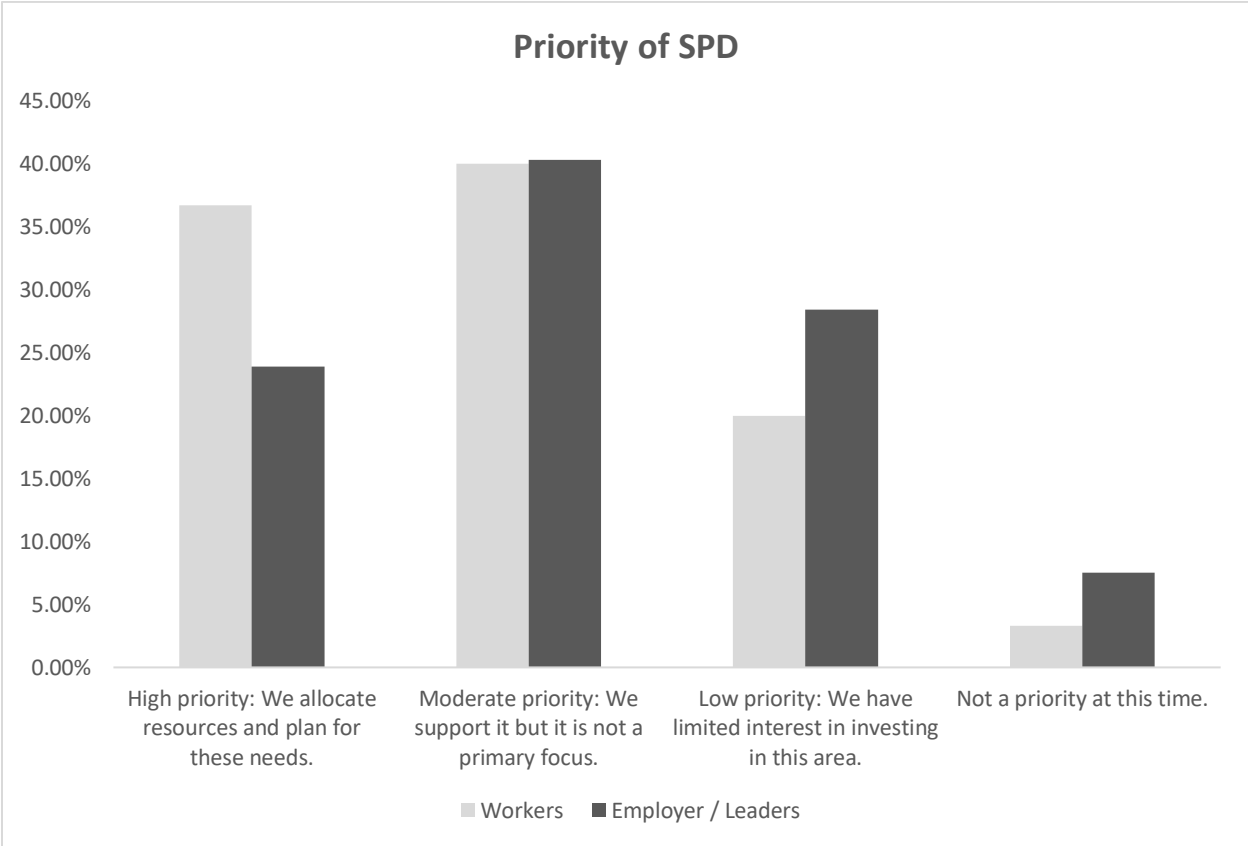
- 33.3% indicated they actively needed trained RPL/PLAR Workers, 53.3% indicated they could benefit from trained RPL/PLAR Workers, but it was not an immediate need, 3.3% indicated they didn't see a need for trained RPL/PLAR Workers at this time, and 10.0% indicated they were not sure.

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



For both surveys, respondents were asked about the extent to which their organization prioritizes structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers.

Workers: (n=67) Employers / Leaders: (n=30)

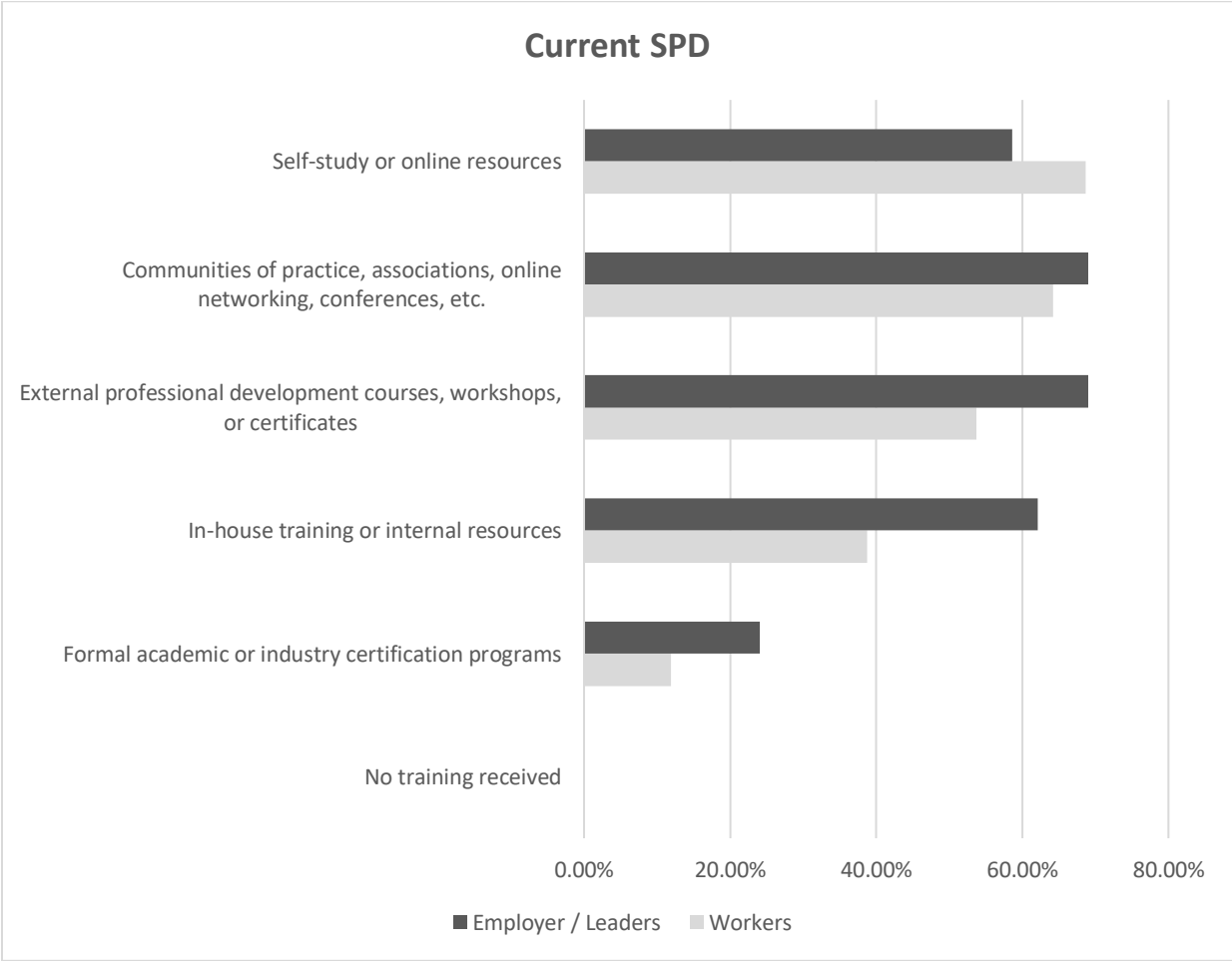


RPL/PLAR Workers were asked if they currently participate in structured professional development (such as courses, webinars, training, qualifications, certificates/academic programs of study/diplomas or certification programs/professional credentials, etc.) related to RPL/PLAR? (n=69)

- 19.4% indicated they participated monthly,
 25.4% indicated they participated quarterly,
 31.3% indicated they participated annually, and
 23.9% indicated they participated only rarely or never,

For both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate how RPL/PLAR training was provided.

Workers: (n=67) Employers / Leaders: (n=29)



RPL/PLAR Workers were asked if they would benefit from (additional) structured professional development opportunities that enhance your ability to do RPL/PLAR Activities? (n=67)

- 47.8% indicated they were actively seeking or would invest in RPL/PLAR structured professional development opportunities,
40.3% indicated that (additional) structured professional development in RPL/PLAR tasks would be beneficial, but not an immediate need,
10.4% indicated possibly, if it aligned with their current goals or needs, and
1.5% indicated they didn't see this as a priority at the moment.

RPL/PLAR Employer/Leaders were asked if their organization would benefit from (additional) structured professional development programs that enhance employees' ability to do RPL/PLAR Activities. (n=30)

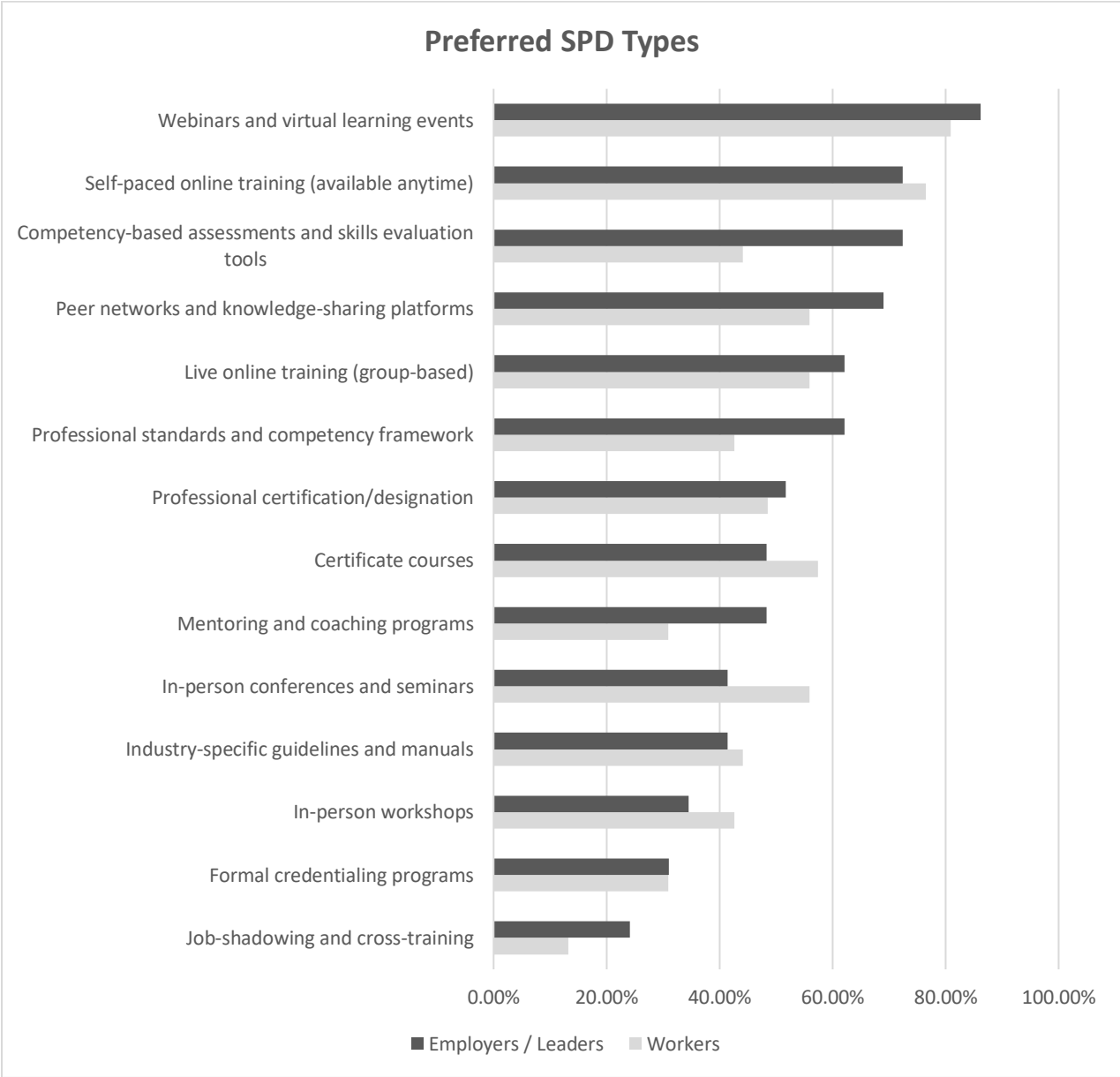
- 30.0% indicated they were actively seeking or would invest in RPL/PLAR structured professional development programs,
33.3% indicated they would need to understand the specific benefits before deciding, and
36.7% indicated possibly, if it aligned with current organizational goals or needs, and

RPL/PLAR Workers were asked what factors most influence their choice of structured professional development (n=67)

- 70.1% indicated they were most influenced by relevance to their specific tasks or sector,
68.7% indicated they were most influenced by timing and scheduling flexibility,
59.7% indicated they were most influenced by affordability and accessibility
55.2% indicated they were most influenced by the potential to enhance their ability to support their clients
49.3% indicated they were most influenced by opportunities for networking and knowledge-sharing with peers, and
40.3% indicated they were most influenced by opportunities to gain new certifications or credentials.

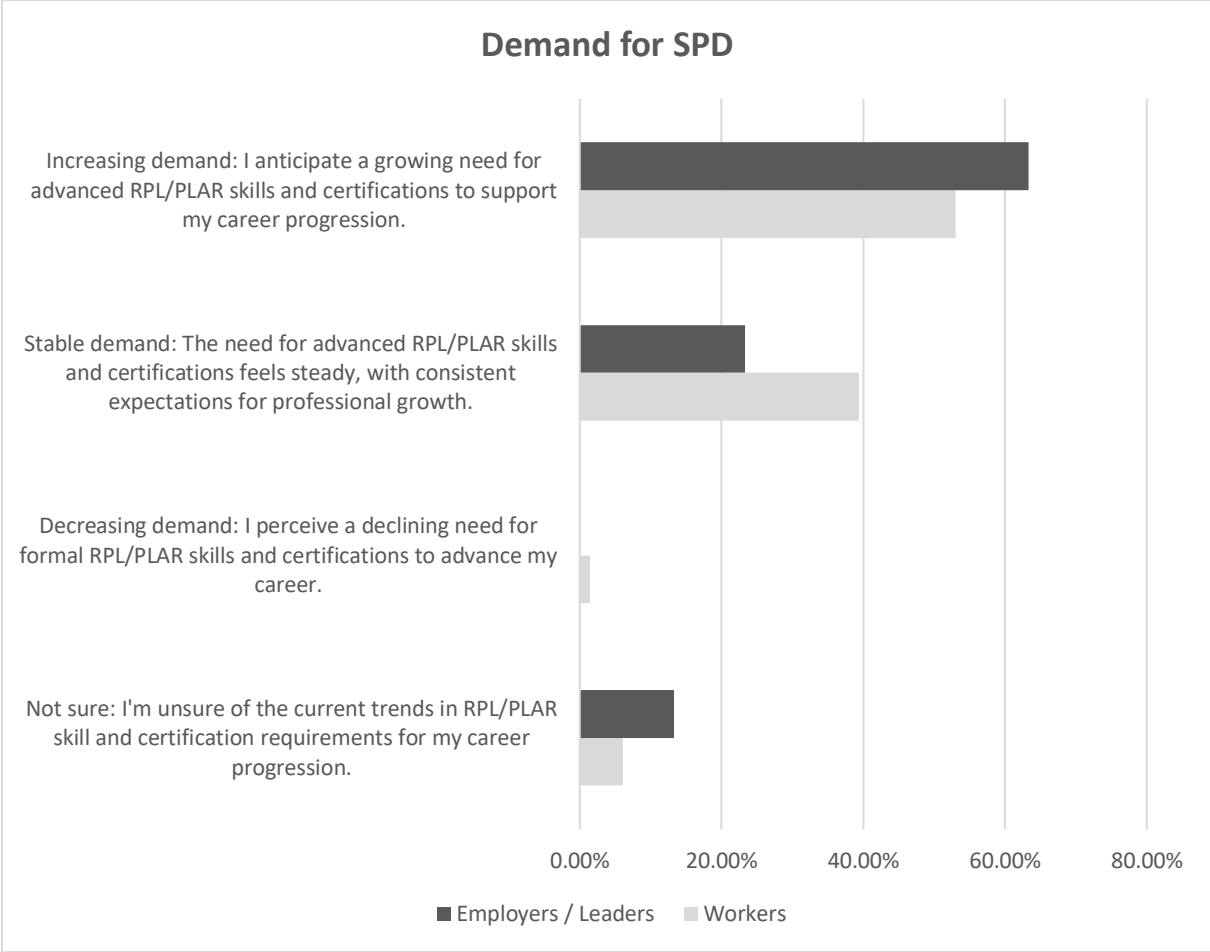
For both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate their preferred types of structured professional development resources for themselves or for people in their organization who perform RPL/PLAR Activities.

Workers: (n=68) Employers / Leaders: (n=29)



For both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate trends in the demand for RPL/PLAR-related structured professional development for their industry or sector.

Workers: (n=66) Employers / Leaders: (n=30)



RPL/PLAR Workers were asked about any emerging skills or competencies that RPL/PLAR Workers in their industry or sector now require that were not previously essential (e.g., digital literacy, cross-cultural assessment skills, specialized industry knowledge, data analysis, and reporting on RPL outcomes, policy development and advocacy in RPL/PLAR, etc.)

- Digital / AI literacy (x15)
- Cross-cultural assessment skills (x13)
- Policy development and advocacy (x6)
- RPL assessment practices, tools and rubrics (x6)
- Specialized industry knowledge (x4)
- Accessibility, inclusion and equity in RPL (x3)
- Data analysis, data science, machine learning (x3)
- Foreign skills and credential assessments (x2)
- Adult learning theory/instructional design skills (x2)
- Competency-based RPL
- RPL professional standards
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- LMI and its relevance to future work
- The intersection of RPL/PLAR with badging and micro-credentials
- Document authentication and verification
- RPL for education versus RPL for career development

“A recognized standard of competence for a RPL professional which includes some form of certificate/ badge that the professional is recognized as having competence in the skills and knowledge required.”

“Anything to do with AI and scalability of programs are imperative emerging skills and competencies. Cross cultural assessment skills that have to do with conscious and unconscious bias, epistemology, and ontology. As well, skills and competencies related to the intersection of RPL/PLAR with badging, micro-credentials, labour market changes, and career development are emerging. Lastly, there seems to have been a decrease in the understanding of adult learning theory and how we learn at work. I suspect (or hope) these skills become more important.”



RPL/PLAR Employers / Leaders were asked about any emerging skills or competencies that RPL/PLAR Workers in their industry or sector now require that were not previously essential (e.g., digital literacy, cross-cultural assessment skills, specialized industry knowledge, etc.).

- Cross-cultural assessment skills (x6)
- Digital / AI literacy (x6)
- Specialized industry knowledge (x2)
- Data analysis, reporting, evidence-based policy development (x2)
- Competency development
- Evaluation for economic development
- Understanding RPL barriers or challenges
- Development of assessment tools.
- Need for training human resource recruiters and job description writers
- Advising skills
- Leveraging transferable skills from different types of learning
- Difficult to answer as there is a growing interest/need, but not necessarily for formal programs.

RPL Workers were asked to describe their ideal structured professional development experience to support their role as an RPL/PLAR Worker.

- Online, flexible, and accessible learning formats (x10)
- Hands-on, experiential learning including simulations, case studies, examples, and group work (x10)
- Collaborative, community-based, peer-to-peer learning (x8)
- Includes conferences, professional meetups, discussion forums, networking opportunities, and continuing education opportunities (x7)
- Structured professional development that leads to recognition, credentialing, and designation (x7)
- Includes foundational and advanced RPL/PLAR knowledge/theory (x6)
- Tailored to specific roles/sectors/regions (x6)
- Includes specific topics of interest such as competency-based PLAR, Indigenization and decolonization PLAR, inclusive and equitable PLAR, etc. (x6)
- Provides access to experts and mentors (x3)
- Driven by a certification body
- Structured, cohort-based

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment
...supporting the recognition of prior learning since 1997
Association canadienne pour la reconnaissance des acquis
...œuvrant à la reconnaissance des acquis depuis 1997



oncat
Ontario Council on
Articulation and Transfer

- In-person, on-campus training
- Recognizes existing learning and skills via portfolio
- Free or minimal cost
- Supported by my institution

“Something that includes hands-on, experiential learning opportunities to work with experienced RPL/PLAR professionals in real-world assessment scenarios, to give a better understanding of the more specific aspects of PLAR. It would also involve cross-cultural literacy, and give a better understanding of the benefits of PLAR to be able to better convey the value to the organization.”

“Core Knowledge & Practical Application: Provide in-depth training on adult learning theory, assessment frameworks, and real-world scenarios to build practical skills in evaluating prior learning and applying assessment tools effectively.”

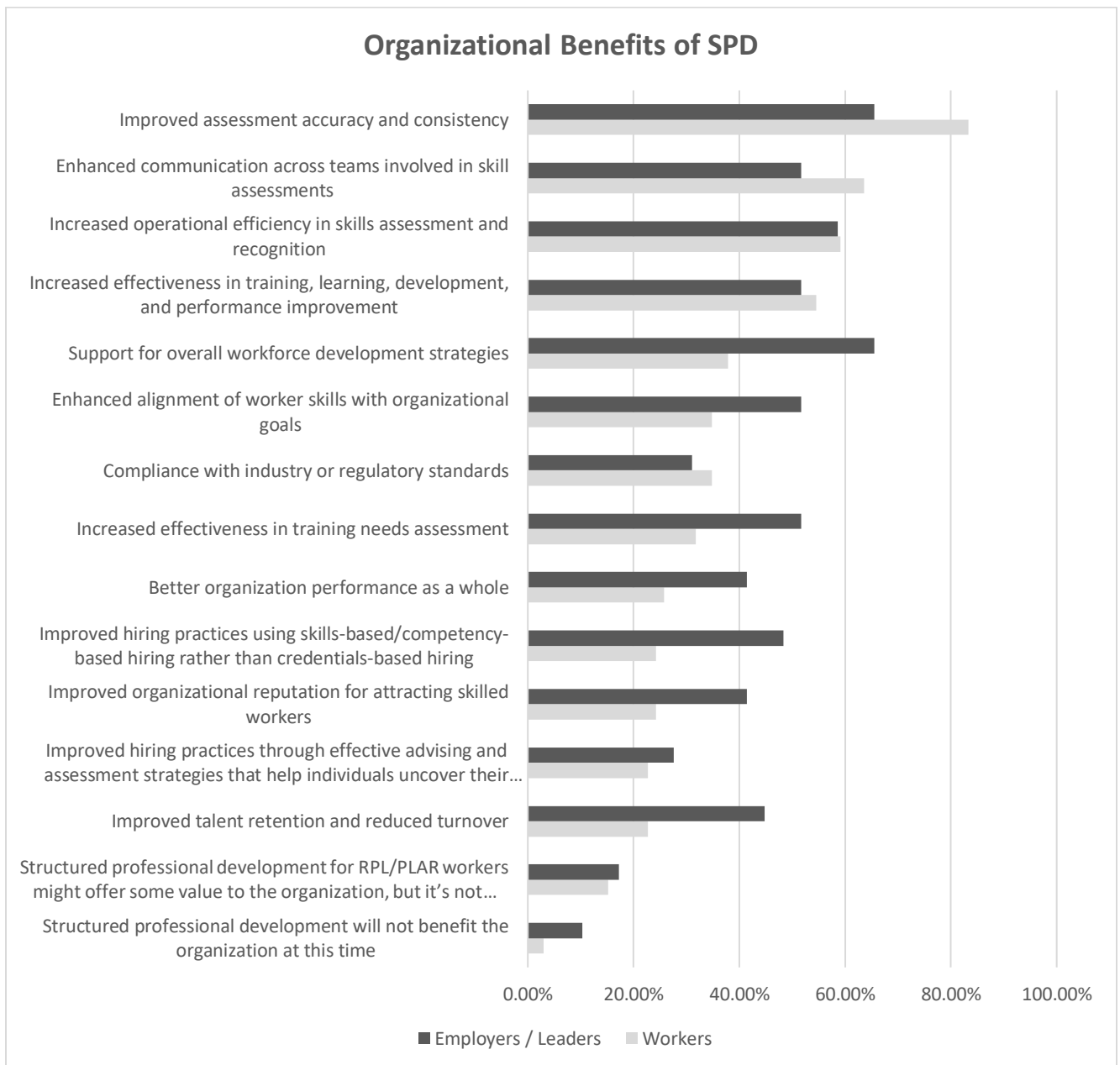
“A certificate , that included mandatory courses for basic/standard RPL knowledge and then elective courses you could choose based on your role or position or desire to learn i.e. QA, policy and process, advising, assessment etc.”

“A microcredential with transparent and authentic demonstrable skills required for competence in the role. Submissions to be assessed by experts in the field.”

Perceived Value and Benefits of SPD

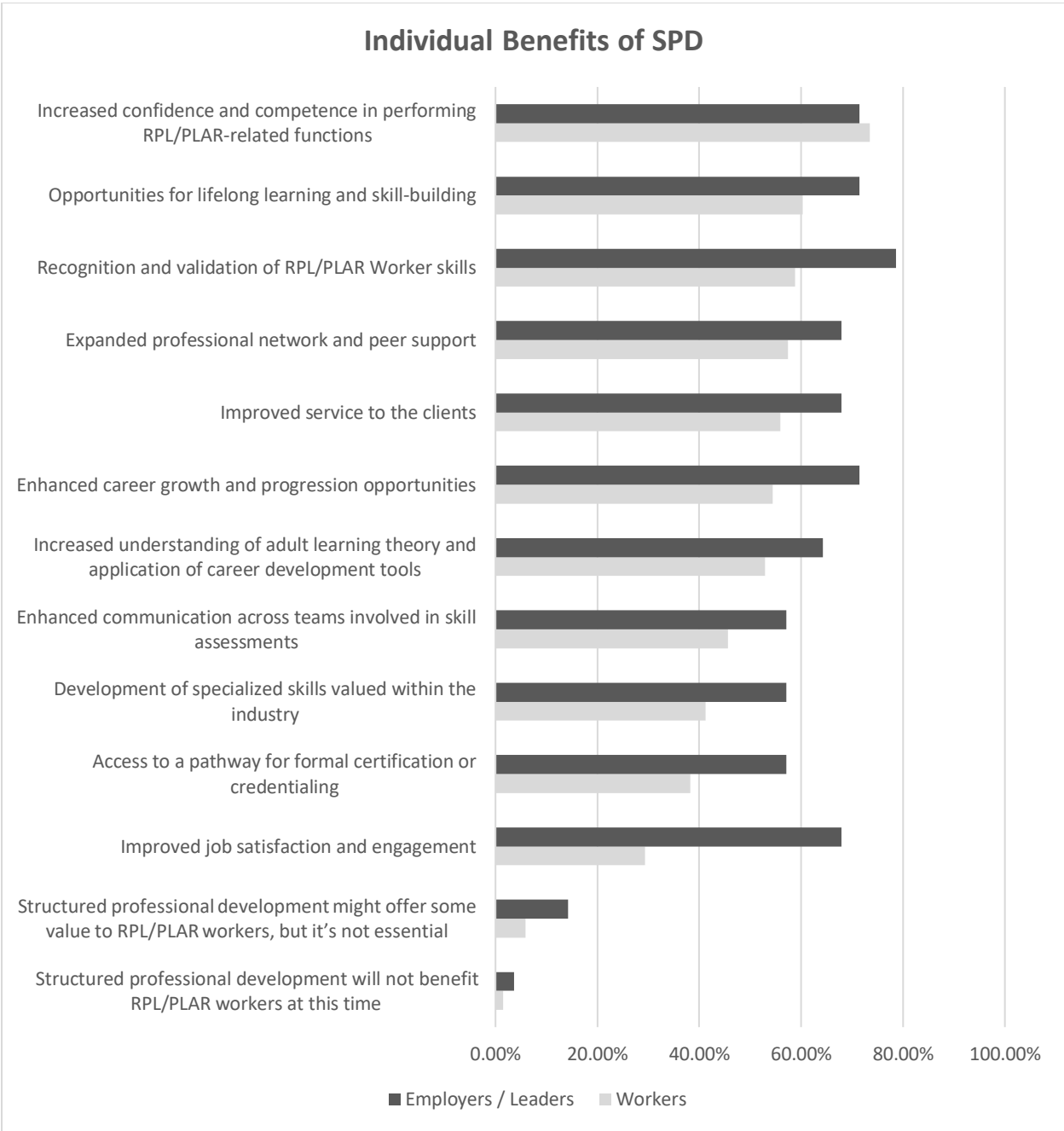
For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify potential benefits to their organizations from providing structured professional development programs for employees involved in RPL/PLAR Activities.

Workers: (n=66) Employers / Leaders: (n=29)



For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify potential benefits to RPL/PLAR Workers from participating in structured professional development.

Workers: (n=68) Employers / Leaders: (n=28)



RPL/PLAR Employers / Leaders were asked the potential value that structured professional development could bring to their industry / sector.

- Awareness and education about RPL/PLAR as a way to recognize all types of learning (x6)
- Streamlined and enhanced professional development/upskilling/reskilling for RPL/PLAR practitioners (x6)
- Consistency, reliability, scalability, credibility and validity of RPL work (x5)
- Enhanced career growth, job satisfaction, team cohesion, expanded network (x4)
- Professionalization, standardization and recognition of RPL/PLAR Work (x4)
- Confidence and trust in RPL processes (x2)
- Better resources and awareness to support learners
- Added value to other sectors such as career development

“Raising awareness of RPL and entrenching it in institutional policy.”

“The ability to scale up RPL activities with more skilled practitioners embedded in various roles.”

“Greater awareness of validity of RPL in higher education & greater acceptance of the practice.”

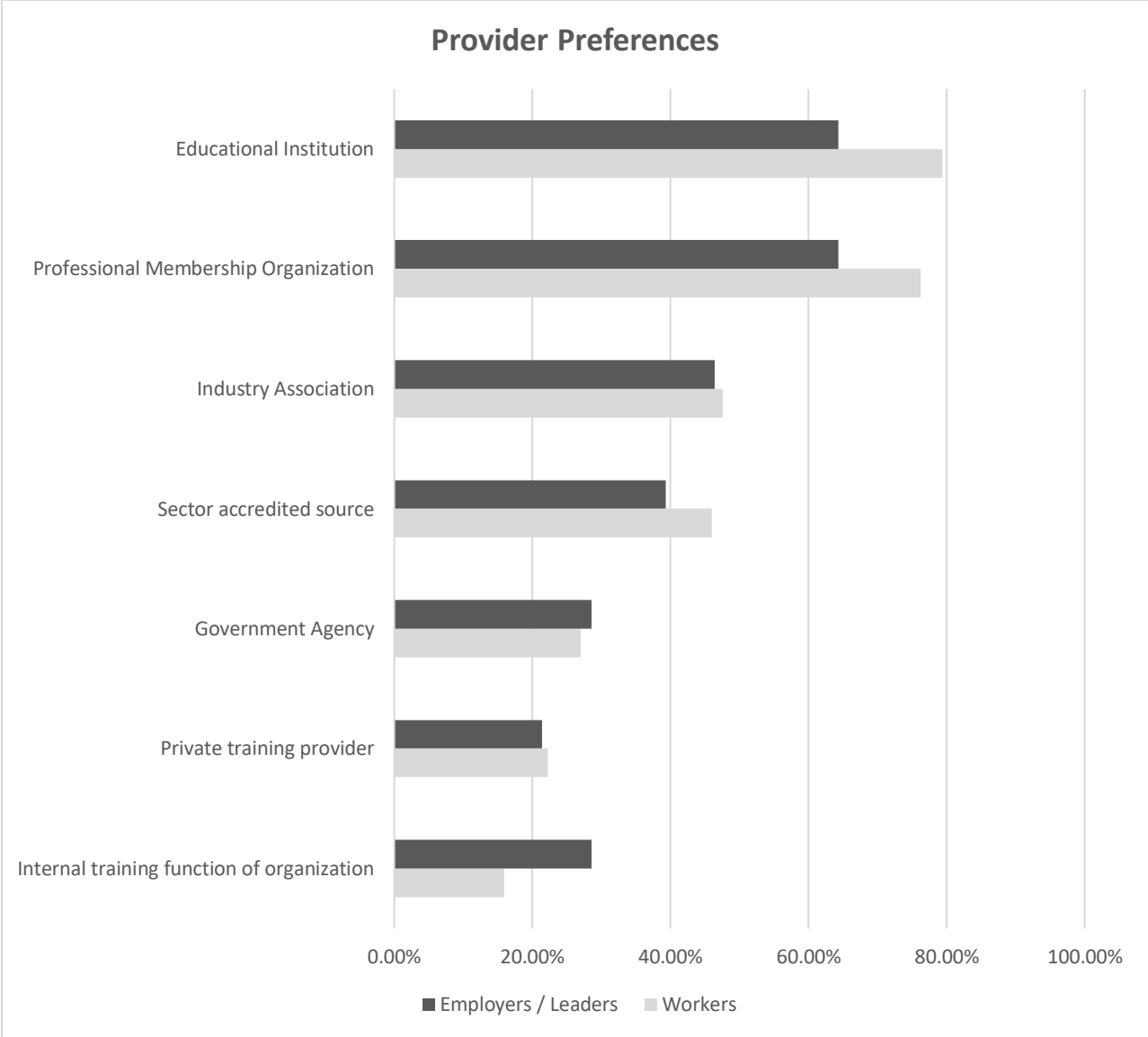
“Confidence that PLAR process and practices are consistent.”

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



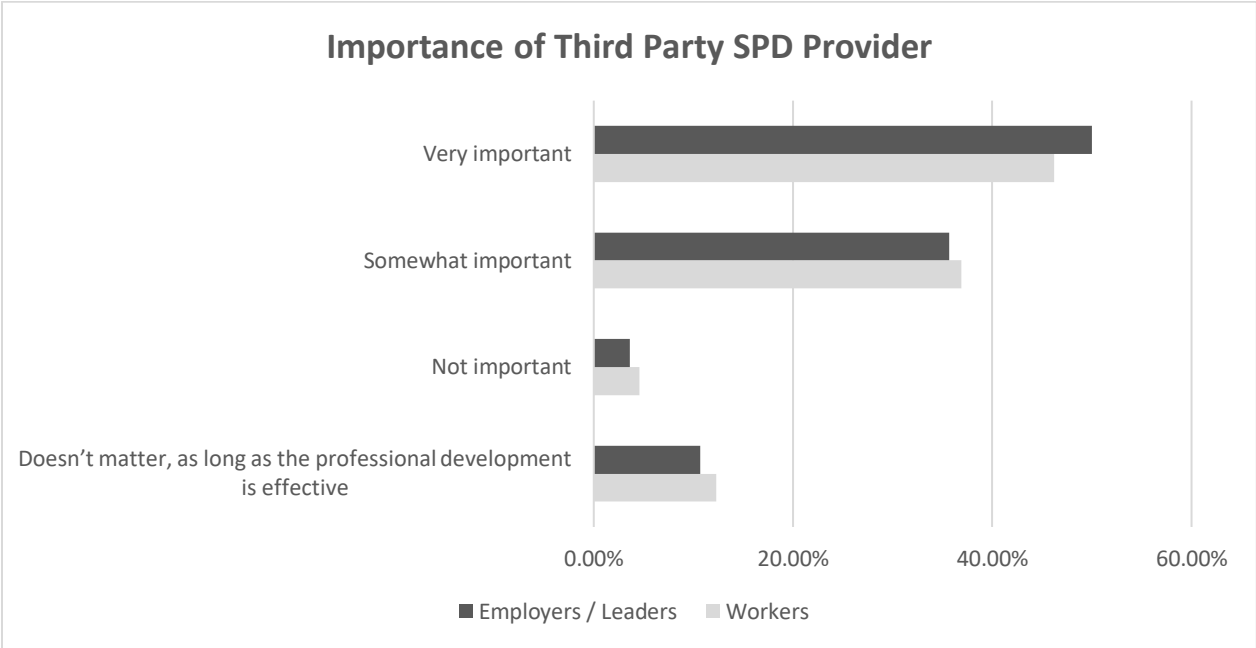
For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify preferred providers of structured professional development programs for RPL/PLAR Workers.

Workers: (n=63) Employers / Leaders: (n=28)



For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify the importance of structured professional development being provided by a recognized third party (e.g., government, professional body).

Workers: (n=65) **Employers / Leaders:** (n=28)

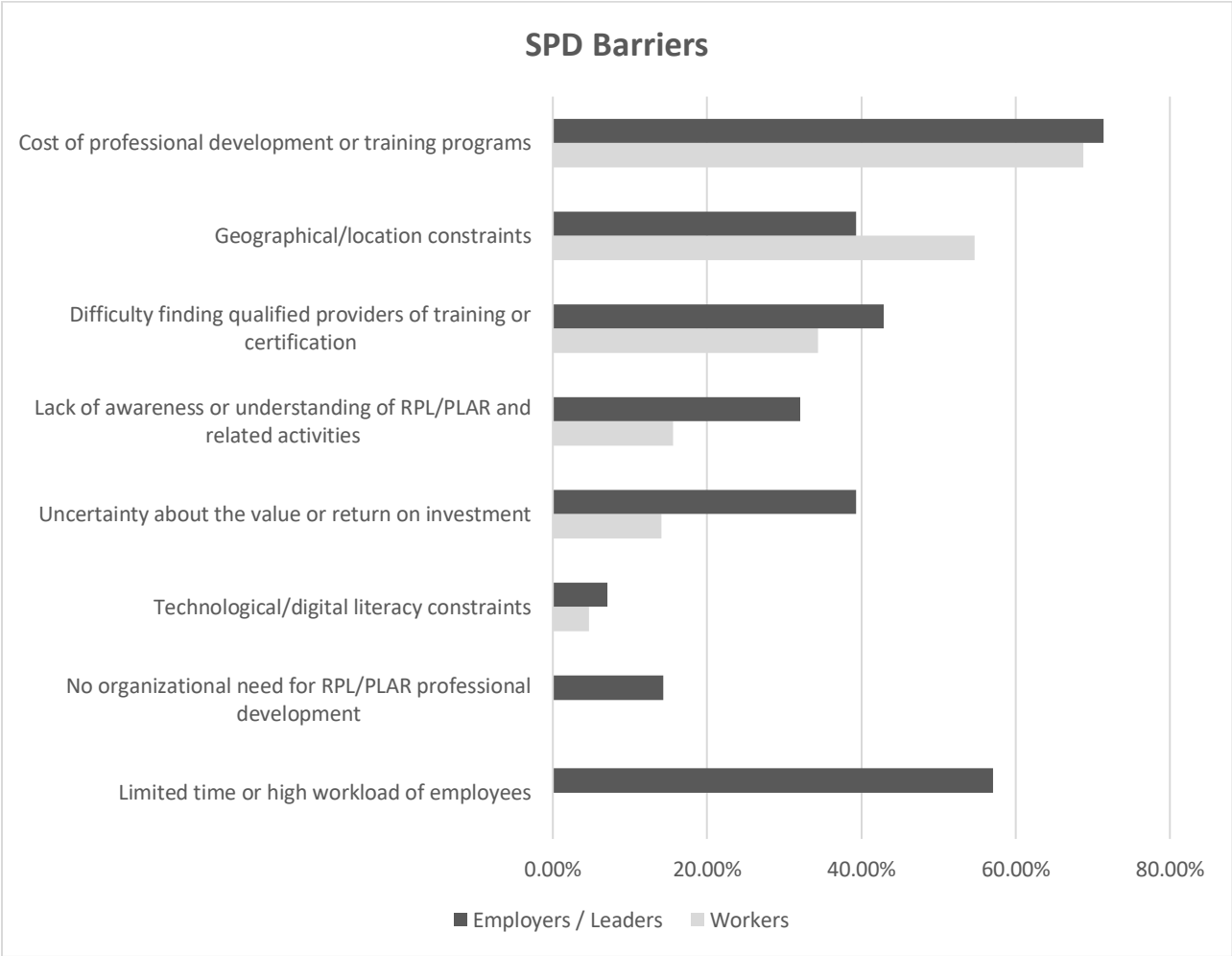


Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



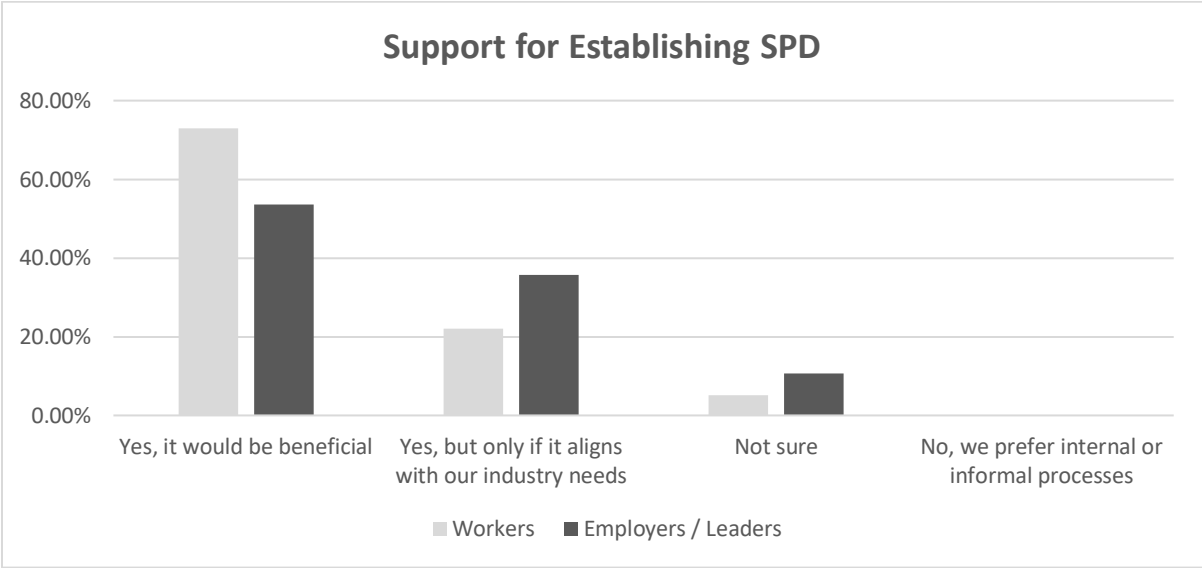
For both surveys, respondents were asked to identify barriers to participation in structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers.

Workers: (n=64) Employers / Leaders: (n=28)



For both surveys, respondents were asked if they would support the establishment of structured professional development, such as competency standards, training, and/or certification for RPL/PLAR Workers.

Workers: (n=59) Employers / Leaders: (n=29)



For both surveys, respondents were asked to indicate their willingness to invest in or financially support structured professional development programs for RPL/PLAR Workers.

Workers: (n=65) Employers / Leaders: (n=28)



Focus Group Discussion Results

To provide a more complete understanding of the insights gathered from the focus group discussions, it was essential to first contextualize the background and experiences of the focus group participants. The **RPL Worker Survey** responses of these select participants offered valuable insights into their roles, responsibilities, and engagement with RPL activities, as well as their perceived challenges and professional development needs.

By interleaving their survey responses with the focus group findings, we felt we could better understand how their individual and collective experiences shaped their perspectives during the discussions. This approach ensures that the qualitative feedback from the focus groups is grounded in real-world experiences and data, making the findings more relevant and actionable in terms of informing future training and professional development opportunities. The following section is based on the responses that the Focus Group Discussion participants provided within the **RPL Worker Survey**.

Focus Group Participants' Background and Demographics

There were a total of 16 participants in the focus group discussions:

- 14 were employed full-time and 2 were employed part-time.
- 8 participants worked in Ontario, 2 in British Columbia, 2 in New Brunswick, 1 in Nova Scotia, 1 in Quebec, 1 in Manitoba, and 1 in Prince Edward Island
- 14 participants worked in a large size organization (201+ employees), 1 worked in a medium size organization (51 - 200 employees), and 1 worked in a small size organization (1 - 50 employees).
- 13 participants worked at a public organization, 2 in the non-profit sector and 1 in a crown corporation.
- 14 participants worked for educational services (universities and public colleges), 1 for health care and social assistance and 1 for other services (except public administration).



Focus Group Participants' RPL/PLAR Roles and Activities

- Approx 40% of participants worked in educational administrator/program coordinator/program assistant roles, 25% in RPL-PLAR advisor/ RPL trainer/assessor/credentials evaluator/membership coordinator type roles, and 35% in other roles such as career development practitioner, workforce development specialist, academic advisor/ student services advisor, etc.
- 90% of the focus group participants were formally involved in advising, skills identification, assessment, and/or recognition activities as part of their job and did this work often (daily/weekly).
- 50% were very familiar with the skills and competencies required by RPL/PLAR Workers.
- 44% of the participants had 6 - 10 years of experience in the RPL/PLAR or a related field performing skills assessment and recognition activities, and 20% had 16 years or more of RPL/PLAR experience.
- The key RPL/PLAR activities that focus group participants were involved in were:
 - Recognizing learning that could count toward credits/ certifications/ qualifications/ credentials, etc.
 - Assessing what individuals have learned through education, training, work, community, or life experiences
 - Helping individuals identify transferable skills to facilitate professional growth and recognition

Focus Group Participants' Need for Structured Professional Development

- 38% of the participants currently participate annually in structured professional development (such as courses, webinars, training, qualifications, certificates/academic programs of study/diplomas or certification programs/professional most of which happens through communities of practice, associations, online networking, conferences, etc. communities of practice, associations, online networking, conferences, etc. or via self-study or online resources.
- 37% of the participants' organizations place a 'moderate' priority on structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers.
- 44% of the participants believe that they would benefit from (additional) structured professional development opportunities to enhance their ability to do RPL/PLAR activities and that they would actively seek or would invest in RPL/PLAR structured professional development opportunities.
- Regarding participants' preferred SPD initiatives, their top three choices are:
 - Webinars and virtual learning events
 - Self-paced online training (available anytime)
 - Certificate courses



- The top three factors that most influence their choice of SPD are:
 - Time and scheduling flexibility
 - Relevance to my specific tasks or sector
 - Affordability and accessibility
- In general, as they envision advancing their careers in RPL/PLAR, 56% see a growing need for advanced RPL/PLAR skills and certificates/certifications to support their career progression.
- When asked about the emerging skills or competencies that RPL/PLAR Workers require, their responses included:
 - *Cross-cultural assessment skills & specialized industry knowledge*
 - *Digital literacy, policy development, advocacy*
 - *RPL and international education; document authentication/verification; cross-training with regards to RPL and education vs RPL and career advising.*
 - *Anything to do with AI and the scalability of programs*
 - *Skills and competencies related to the intersection of RPL/PLAR with badging, micro-credentials, labour market changes, and career development*
 - *Understanding of adult learning theory and how we learn at work*

Focus Group Participants' Perceived Value and Benefits of SPD

- Participants believed that the top three benefits that their organizations would gain by providing SPD for RPL/PLAR Workers were:
 - Improved assessment accuracy and consistency
 - Enhanced communication across teams involved in skill assessments
 - Increased effectiveness in training, learning, development, and performance improvement
- Their top three benefits that structured professional development could offer them as an RPL/PLAR Worker were:
 - Increased confidence and competence in performing RPL/PLAR-related functions
 - Improved service to the clients
 - Opportunities for lifelong learning and skill-building
- If they were to pursue structured professional development programs for themselves, their top three preferred service providers were:
 - Educational institution
 - Professional membership organization
 - Sector accredited source
- 50% of the participants identified that it was important that SPD be provided by a recognized third party (e.g., government, professional body).



- In terms of barriers that might prevent them from participating in structured professional development, their top three barriers were:
 - Cost of professional development or training programs
 - Geographical/location constraints
 - Difficulty finding qualified providers of training or certification
- Approx 70% of the participants would support the establishment of structured professional development, such as competency standards, training, and/or certification for RPL/PLAR Workers, and agreed that it would be beneficial.
- 50% indicated that they would be “somewhat willing to pay” and 38% would be “very willing to pay” for SPD programs for themselves.
- When asked what their ideal structured professional development experience to support their role as an RPL/PLAR Worker would look like, their key responses included:
 - *Online, collaborative*
 - *There would be specific online stand-alone modules that may be worked on at your own pace.*
 - *online, at your own pace, free or minimal cost*
 - *Blended learning program*
 - *Foundational knowledge of PLAR/RPL, assessment techniques, technology integration, curriculum planning and design, making it equitable, inclusive and diverse, quality assurance*
 - *In house support, top down encouragement and support of PLAR, student centered approach and employee and faculty friendly model*
 - *Learning communities within the public post-secondary environment*
 - *One that doesn't only focus on RPL for academic credits for a post-secondary course*
 - *A certification body or process so that people get the training they need to understand the RPL/PLAR process and who/where to connect to for more support*
 - *Would look for something that leads to a professional designation or credential resulting in a certificate or diploma.*
 - *Develop it as a micro-credential with 4 - 5 courses.*
 - *A microcredential with transparent and authentic demonstrable skills required for competence in the role. Submissions to be assessed by experts in the field.*
 - *A certificate, that included mandatory courses for basic/standard RPL knowledge and then elective courses you could choose based on your role or position or desire to learn i.e. QA, policy and process, advising, assessment, etc.*

Focus Group Key Discussion Themes

The focus group discussions with RPL Workers provided in-depth insights into their experiences, needs, and expectations regarding professional development in the RPL/PLAR field. Participants shared their perspectives on the gaps in existing training, the skills and knowledge they feel are essential, and the barriers that hinder access to structured learning and recognition.

Through these conversations, several key themes emerged, highlighting the current state of RPL/PLAR training, desired features of professional development opportunities, the benefits of SPD, and the challenges faced particularly around organizational support and buy-in.

Their reflections, supplemented by *direct quotes in italics*, offer a deeper understanding of the realities of professional development for RPL Workers and the critical factors that must be addressed in the design of future training, professional development, certificates or micro-credentialing opportunities.

Current State of RPL/PLAR Training:

Participants shared that they had limited or no formal RPL/PLAR training at the onset and most learning has been informal and via on-the-job experience.

“I've had no formal RPL or PLAR training, and I've been working in this area for approximately 15 years and really would like some training. I think I have a lot of knowledge at this point about it, but something formal would be really, really helpful.”

- Most participants had limited or no formal RPL/PLAR training. Some had attended workshops, conferences, or short courses, but felt they lacked comprehensive training.
- Self-directed learning, peer guidance, and learning on the job were the common approaches mentioned regarding skill development.

“I have no formal training. I inherited PLAR as part of my job duties and really didn't get a lot of training even from my predecessor. And that was about four years ago. So what I have been doing is a lot of my own independent study, participating in networking things through CAPLA, just bouncing ideas off people and trying to figure out our own best practices.”



- Some participants shared how their institutions have had to develop their own RPL/PLAR training resources and mentoring processes because of a lack of formal RPL-specific degree programs or courses.
- Participants observed that existing RPL/PLAR training or resources are often piecemeal with limited standardization and typically inconsistent across institutions.

Desired Features of RPL/PLAR Professional Development:

“There would be some hard work, not just sitting there absorbing the knowledge and actually doing some things to prove that you're competent. That leads to the credibility stuff, right? I want to make sure that when I come out of this training, that I do have additional skills, attitudes, behaviors. So for me, it's not just that I'm sitting and listening and trying to absorb. I want to actually do stuff.”

“I would love it (SPD) to be structured and tailored so that it was done through the organization and not individually.”

- Participants described a strong interest in structured, recognized professional development for RPL/PLAR practitioners which is flexible, modular, online learning with options for synchronous components and peer interaction. They also highlighted that SPD needs to be customized, tiered, and practical.
- Most preferred online, blended learning with both asynchronous and synchronous components as their preferred format for SPD. The recurring theme was the need for modular, asynchronous, online delivery with optional synchronous components. There was a strong desire for structured, interactive online training with practical components and case studies.

“I would like to add that seminars or even practice communities would be very interesting and would add much value.”

- In terms of the training content, participants acknowledged the importance of training new practitioners on the foundational concepts and underlying knowledge of RPL/PLAR but actively advocated for more practical, hands-on training with case studies, real-life scenarios, and interactive workshops.

“We probably need things that cover both sort of theoretical knowledge as well as something that is recognizing practical experience.”

- Participants spoke about the importance of demonstrable skills development, more than a collection of theoretical knowledge, and the need for some formal recognition of completed training and acquired competencies through micro-credentials.

“I think a microcredential would be really valuable.”

- There was agreement about having some level of segmentation for various RPL/PLAR roles within organizations including more customized content for people engaged in different RPL activities across different sectors. Participants also spoke about segmentation and customization to address a range of experiences including novices and experts and the need for a tiered approach with introductory to advanced levels.

“I would love to see like different areas concentrated on in different courses so that you can tailor your learning to what's relevant to you.”

“I think it would be not just necessarily having one person at an organization participate in RPL/PLAR training. For us, it would be beneficial to not only have the certification team, but also the training department go through a process like this, because it may help how they design some of the training that we offer to the practitioners.”

- There was also some discussion of a standardized competency framework (not overly prescriptive) that recognizes the range of RPL activities and types of RPL Workers across various industry/sector contexts. They also mentioned the value of aligning RPL/PLAR competencies with existing professional development frameworks.
- Participants highlighted the importance of establishing communities of practice that offer platforms and spaces to share ideas and best practices and have access to networking opportunities with experienced practitioners. (e.g., CAPLA COL, NB PLAR Action Group)



Benefits of Structured RPL/PLAR Professional Development:

“For me, working in student services and being the first point of contact for our applicants, it (RPL/PLAR PD) would allow me to have more credibility and demonstrate a more solid understanding of the process of especially when advising students, the assessors, and the faculty. Oftentimes, you know, when they're assessing, they're looking to us for guidance, and having something like this would help a great deal.”

“Certification also allows for more standardization. I think having somewhat of a uniform process is key and will help us all to have, like, tools and strategies to streamline the whole assessment process and how to assess for PLAR with students”

Participants saw value in RPL/PLAR certificates for credibility, standardization, and career advancement and spoke about the following benefits of SPD for RPL/PLAR workers and organizations:

- **Credibility:** Enhances practitioner and process legitimacy within institutions
- **Standardization:** Promotes consistent practices and understanding across the field and can help standardize practices and terminology
- **Career advancement:** Provides recognized credentials for RPL/PLAR professionals
- **Networking:** Facilitates connections with peers for ongoing learning and support
- **Knowledge transfer:** Ensures continuity when experienced practitioners leave roles and can be very useful for onboarding new staff

“Having a formal recognition credential of some type or designation would really help to lay that foundation so that people can see the importance of RPL/PLAR.”



Organizational Support and Buy-in

“We seem to always have the same issues, right? The buy-in from the faculty or the buy-in from the top or the how do I get enough people to help me to do this so it's not off the side my desk, it can be part of a real job.”

Participants discussed how organizational buy-in remains a challenge, requiring a strong business case highlighting strategic benefits.

- Participants discussed the importance of strategic alignment and linking RPL/PLAR to institutional goals (e.g., strategic enrollment management) and mandates. They highlighted the need for a convincing business case that demonstrates ROI and clear value, for example, the potential for increased student enrollment and retention and program competitiveness.
- Participants suggested broader participation for gathering organization support including involving departments (e.g., student services, faculty) in RPL/PLAR training and ensuring that SPD is tailored to administrative staff and faculty assessors and diverse RPL/PLAR practices across institutions and sectors.
- Finally, participants spoke about cost considerations and resource constraints that might pose as barriers to accessing SPD including limited budgets and reduced funding. They suggested using an online format for training and SPD delivery to reduce travel expenses and increase accessibility.

Conclusions

The combined findings from the RPL/PLAR Worker and RPL/PLAR Employer/Leader surveys, as well as the follow-up focus group sessions, identify a strong demand and data-driven need for the development of structured professional development programs including training and certificates for RPL/PLAR practitioners in Canada.

Clear and Growing Demand

There is a clear consensus across both Workers and Employer/Leaders that RPL/PLAR activities involved in identifying, recognizing, and assessing prior learning are not only relevant but often *central* to organizational objectives and workforce development strategies. The results of the surveys and focus group discussions, indicate a clear and growing demand for structured professional development for RPL/PLAR practitioners across sectors.

- When asked about the importance of RPL/PLAR-related activities such as advising, skills identification, and assessment; over **75% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **68% of Employer/Leaders** agree these as either *crucial* or *important* to their organization's goals and objectives. (Table 13)
- RPL/PLAR Workers and Employer/Leaders report that there is very little formal training available for RPL/PLAR activities and only limited structured opportunities for professional development in the field. Most RPL/PLAR-related learning currently takes place via self-study and online resources and through communities of practice, associations, online networking, conferences, etc. (Table 19)
- **48% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **30% of Employer/Leaders** are actively seeking OR would invest in RPL/PLAR structured professional development opportunities (Table 20). **33% of Employer/Leaders** are actively seeking additional *trained RPL/PLAR workers*, and another **53%** acknowledge they will need additional workers in the longer term. (Table 16)
- **53.0% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **63.3% of Employer/Leaders** predict growing demand for *advanced RPL/PLAR skills and certifications*. (Table 24)



Value of SPD

Both **RPL/PLAR Workers** and **Employer/Leaders** recognize the value of structured professional development for RPL/PLAR activities, at the organizational as well as the individual level. Participants value the idea of structured training and recognition pathways, expressing that it would not only strengthen their own practice but also help establish credibility and encourage consistency in how RPL/PLAR programs and activities are implemented across all participating learners and organizations.

- In terms of potential benefits to the organization from providing structured professional development for employees involved in RPL/PLAR activities, both groups agree that *improved assessment accuracy and consistency* would be a key benefit (**83.3% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **65.5% of Employer/Leaders**).
- Both groups acknowledge the value of structured professional development in increasing operational efficiency in skills assessment and recognition, with **59.1% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **58.6% of Employer/Leaders** identifying this as a key benefit. (Table 25)
- Both groups highly value *increased confidence and competence in performing RPL/PLAR-related functions* (**73.5% of RPL Workers** and **71.4% of Employer/Leaders**), agreeing it would be a key benefit of providing structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers.
- Additionally, *enhanced career growth and progression opportunities* are valued by **54.4% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **71.4% of Employer/Leaders**, signaling a shared recognition of SPD's potential to foster professional development. (Table 26)

These results emphasize that both **RPL/PLAR Workers** and **Employer/Leaders** see structured professional development as a crucial factor in improving RPL/PLAR outcomes, advancing individual careers, and enhancing organizational performance.

Willingness to Invest Time/Money

Both **RPL/PLAR Workers** and **Employer/Leaders** express strong support for the establishment of structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers. They also indicate a readiness and willingness to invest time and money in RPL/PLAR competency development, especially if it leads to clear performance outcomes.

- **72.9% of RPL/PLAR Workers** and **53.6% of Employer/Leaders** support the establishment of structured professional development, such as competency standards, training, and/or certification for RPL/PLAR Workers, demonstrating shared recognition of the value of formalized development in the RPL/PLAR field. (Table 30)
- **88.1% of RPL/PLAR Workers** report they would benefit from structured professional development, with **47.8%** stating they are actively seeking or would invest in such opportunities. (Table 20)
- Among **Employer/Leaders**, **30.0%** are ready to invest in structured professional development opportunities now, while another **33.3%** expressed an interest pending a clearer understanding of the specific benefits. These results indicate there is a strong foundational demand for developing and implementing structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers. (Table 21)
- **83.1% of RPL/PLAR Workers** are *very willing* or *somewhat willing* to pay for structured professional development, indicating a significant portion of the workforce sees the value of investing in their own further professional development. (Table 31)
- **46.4% of Employer/Leaders** are *very willing* or *somewhat willing* to financially support structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers, suggesting a moderate but strong level of support. (Table 31)

Who Should Deliver Structured Professional Development Programs

Respondents to both surveys expressed clear preferences regarding providers of structured professional development.

- Educational Institution, Professional Membership Organization, and Industry Association are the top 3 choices for both **RPL/PLAR Workers and Employer/Leaders**. (*Table 27*)
- **47% of RPL Workers** and **50% of RPL Employer/Leaders** emphasize the importance of structured professional development being provided by a recognized third party (e.g., government, professional body). (*Table 28*)

How Should SPD be Designed & Delivered

In terms of design and delivery of structured professional development, flexibility and accessibility are key factors.

- A combination of online, self-paced modules, live facilitated sessions, community of practice-style learning, and scenario-based application workshops are recommended to meet the needs of practitioners working in varied contexts and roles. (*Table 22 and Focus Group Discussions*)
- There is also interest in tiered learning pathways, sector/role-specific training, micro-credentials, and the ability to build toward formal recognition via certificates.
- The following factors most influence **RPL/PLAR Workers'** choice of structured professional development (*Table 23*):
 - Relevance to their specific tasks or sector
 - Timing and scheduling flexibility
 - Affordability and accessibility

Taken together, these findings constitute a compelling case for designing and implementing credible and accessible structured professional development for RPL/PLAR practitioners that reflects the realities of their work, values their existing experience and supports their growth and recognition as competent professionals.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions and drawing further on the results from the surveys and focus group discussions, the following recommendations and next steps are proposed to guide the development of structured professional development initiatives for the RPL/PLAR sector in Canada:

Develop a Professional Competency Framework

Establish a professional competency framework that defines the knowledge, skills, and attributes required for RPL/PLAR roles. Such a framework will provide a shared understanding of what RPL/PLAR roles are, what competencies are required, and how competencies differ across contexts. The competency framework will be essential component of advancing professionalism in the field.

A competency framework will articulate the professional profile of RPL/PLAR workers, support the design of targeted training initiatives, and promote consistency of practice. It will also enable alignment with existing professional development frameworks and systems and elevate the recognition of RPL/PLAR practice as a specialized area of expertise.

Conduct a Training Needs Analysis

Gather insights from a wider group of RPL/PLAR practitioners, employers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders via a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) process. TNA can help validate and refine the findings from this environmental scan in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of current needs, priorities, and preferences for structured RPL/PLAR professional development.

Based on the RPL/PLAR Competency Framework, TNA will reveal the specific competency gaps and practice areas that require focused professional development interventions. This will help prioritize key areas for development, ensuring that any program offerings are targeted, relevant, and aligned with both worker needs and organizational objectives.

Design Flexible and Tailored SPD Programs

Based on the RPL/PLAR Competency Framework and TNA results, design and develop structured professional development opportunities that align with both the specific needs of RPL/PLAR workers and the goals of their organizations. Focus on practical, role-specific training and competency development that enhances assessment accuracy, operational efficiency, and career growth opportunities.

Design structured professional development programs with flexibility in mind. Given the clear preferences for online, self-paced modules, live facilitated sessions, and practical / hands-on approaches; emphasize these design and delivery methods to accommodate the diverse needs and roles of RPL/PLAR practitioners. A blend of delivery formats, including community-based learning and scenario-based workshops, will ensure that learning is accessible and relevant.

Build Tiered and Role-Specific Learning and Recognition Pathways

To cater to the diverse needs of RPL/PLAR practitioners at various stages in their careers, develop tiered learning and recognition pathways that offer clear and structured progression opportunities.

The Competency Framework will provide the structural foundation for building tiered and role-specific learning and recognition pathways. By mapping learning opportunities, micro-credentials, certificates, etc. to the competencies outlined in the framework, these pathways can offer clear progression and recognition routes for practitioners across experience levels and sector contexts.

The learning and recognition pathways should be built on RPL principles by exploring the recognition of *all* learning, including work-based learning, towards ongoing continuing professional development. These pathways should be designed to reflect the varying levels of experience, expertise, and responsibility that workers may have within the RPL/PLAR field. By integrating micro-credentials and certificates and other forms of recognition, these pathways will provide foundational, incremental and advanced learning opportunities that enable practitioners to continuously build their competencies. In addition to tiered pathways, sector specialization should also be incorporated to address the diverse contexts in which RPL/PLAR professionals work.

Appendix A – Survey Results Tables

RESPONDENTS:

Workers: What is your current employment status? (n=72)

Table 1

Employment Status	Workers
Employed full-time	86.1%
Employed part-time	8.3%
Freelancing or working on contracts (e.g. Consultant)	4.2%
Currently between jobs or seeking employment	1.4%

Employers / Leaders: What is your current employment status? (n=32)

Table 2

Employment Status	Employer / Leaders
Employed full-time	56.3%
Employer (person, business, or organization that hires employees or contracts workers)	21.9%
Owner/Operator (owns and actively manages a business and employs others)	6.3%
Freelancing or working on contracts (e.g. consultant)	6.3%
Volunteer	6.3%
Retired	3.1%

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



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RESPONDENTS:

What is your organization’s location?

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)

Table 3

Organization Location	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Ontario	34.7%	21.9%
British Columbia	18.1%	15.6%
Nova Scotia	9.7%	21.9%
Quebec	8.3%	3.1%
Alberta	6.9%	6.3%
Saskatchewan	6.9%	9.4%
Manitoba	5.6%	12.5%
New Brunswick	4.2%	0%
International	2.8%	0%
Northwest Territories	1.4%	0%
Prince Edward Island	1.4%	0%
Pan-Canadian	0%	9.4%



RESPONDENTS:

What is your organization’s size?

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)

Table 4

Organization Size	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Large (201+ employees)	73.6%	50.0%
Medium (51 - 200 employees)	9.7%	9.4%
Small (1 - 50 employees)	16.7%	40.6%

What type is your organization?

Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders: (n=32)

Table 5

Organization Type	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Public	66.7%	43.8%
Non-profit	16.7%	31.3%
Private	6.9%	15.6%
Provincial Government	4.2%	3.1%
Federal Government	2.8%	0%
Crown Corporation	1.4%	0%
NGO (Non-Governmental Organization)	1.4%	0%
Industry Association	0%	6.3%

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



RESPONDENTS:

What industry / sector is your organization, based on NAICS?

RPL Workers: (n=72) Employers / Leaders (n=32)

Table 6

Organization Sector	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Educational services	80.6%	71.9%
Other services (except public administration)	5.6%	0%
Transportation and warehousing	2.8%	6.3%
Health care and social assistance	2.8%	6.3%
Professional, scientific and technical services	2.8%	0%
Construction	1.4%	0%
Retail trade	1.4%	0%
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	1.4%	3.1%
Public administration	1.4%	6.3%
Information and cultural industries	0%	6.3%

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



RESPONDENTS:

RPL Workers: What is your current role? (n=72)

Table 7

Response	Workers
RPL-PLAR Advisor/ RPL Trainer/Assessor/Credentials Evaluator/Membership Coordinator, etc.	47.2%
Educational Administrator/Program Coordinator/Program Assistant, etc.	18.1%
Workplace Mentor/ Academic Advisor/ Student Services Associate/ Trades Coordinator / Apprenticeship Coordinator/ Vocational Education Coordinator, etc.	11.1%
Training and Development Specialist/ Workforce Development Specialist/ Organizational Development Manager, etc.	8.3%
General Manager/Senior Manager/Operations Manager, etc.	8.3%
Career Development Practitioner/Social Service Worker/Employment Counsellor/ Rehabilitation counsellor, etc.	4.2%
Quality Assurance Lead/Compliance Officer/Standards Leader, etc.	1.4%
Line Manager/Team Leader/Supervisor, etc.	1.4%

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



RESPONDENTS:

Employer / Leaders: What is your current role? (n=32)

Table 8

Response	Employers / Leaders
General Manager/Senior Manager/Operations Manager	31.3%
Educational Administrator/Program Coordinator/Program Assistant	25.0%
RPL-PLAR Advisor/RPL Trainer/Assessor/Credentials Evaluator/Membership Coordinator	15.6%
Chief Executive Officer/ Chief Operating Officer/ Chief Learning Officer	9.4%
Business Owner/Operator/Small Business Manager	6.3%
Workplace Mentor/ Academic Advisor/ Student Services Associate/ Trades Coordinator / Apprenticeship Coordinator/ Vocational Education Coordinator	3.1%
Career Development Practitioner/Social Service Worker/Employment Counsellor/ Rehabilitation counsellor	3.1%
Line Manager/Team Leader/Supervisor	3.1%
Director of Workforce Development/Workforce Strategy Leader/Policy Advisor	3.1%

RPL / PLAR ACTIVITIES:

Workers: Are you involved in advising, skills identification, assessment and/or recognition activities (even if they aren't explicitly called RPL / PLAR Activities)? (n=69)

Table 9

Activities	Workers
Yes, formally as part of my job / I do this work often (daily/weekly)	71.0%
Yes, informally as part of my responsibilities / I do this work only sometimes (monthly).	24.6%
Not formally, but I am interested in incorporating RPL/PLAR activities in my role.	4.3%
No, I don't do this type of work (If selected, the survey will end here)	0.0%

Employers / Leaders: Does your organization have employees involved in skill advising, identification, assessment and/or recognition activities (even if they aren't explicitly called RPL/PLAR Workers)? (n=32)

Table 10

Activities	Employers / Leaders
Yes, formally as part of their job / they do this work often (daily/weekly)	65.6%
Yes, informally as part of their responsibilities / they do this work only sometimes (monthly).	28.1%
No, we don't have any such roles right now, but we anticipate a need for this role in the next 2 - 5 years.	6.3%
No, we don't have any such roles / we don't do this work. (If selected, the survey will end here).	0.0%

RPL / PLAR ACTIVITIES:

Workers: Which of the following skills advising, identification, assessment and/or recognition activities do you perform, even if they aren't explicitly called RPL/PLAR Activities? (Select all that apply and please add other activities not included in this list) (n=68)

Employers / Leaders: Which of the following advising, identification, assessment and/or recognition activities are carried out by any of your employees, even if they aren't explicitly called RPL/PLAR Activities? (Select all that apply and please add other activities not included in this list) (n=31)

Table 11

Activities	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Assessing what individuals have learned through education, training, work, community, or life experiences	64.7%	77.4%
Helping individuals identify transferable skills to facilitate professional growth and recognition	57.4%	71.0%
Advising on career development and/or pathways based on existing skills or experience	50.0%	61.3%
Mapping existing skills to job requirements and/or occupational standards	32.4%	54.8%
Creating or facilitating the creation of records or portfolios that capture skills, experiences, and achievements	52.9%	61.3%
Facilitating access to training or development programs based on skills or experience	35.3%	64.5%
Helping individuals qualify for certifications or credentials based on their previous experiences and competencies (assessment of prior learning)	52.9%	71.0%
Recognizing learning that could count toward credits/ certifications/ qualifications/ credentials, etc.	72.1%	80.6%
There are no job roles in our organization that include any of the above activities.	1.5%	0.0%

Other, please specify:

Employers / Leaders:

- Designing and developing RPL systems and practices
- Research
- Recruiting mature and transfer students
- Gap training for reassessment
- Supporting educational activities based on assessment results
- Updating RPL policies and procedures
- Training RPL assessors

Workers:

- Program development and management (x4)
- Conducting evaluations and research (x2)
- PLAR / RPL consultant (x2)
- Developing PLAR policies and processes and training employees (x2)
- Training RPL Assessors re candidate-centred processes and practices
- Advising training providers on how to comply with RPL legislation
- Facilitate and coordinate community / post-secondary PLAR
- Conduct research

RPL / PLAR ACTIVITIES:

Workers: How many years have you worked in the RPL/PLAR or a related field performing these types of skills assessment and recognition activities? (n=68)

Table 12

Experience	Workers
Less than 1 year	5.9%
1 – 2 years	25.0%
3 - 5 years	11.8%
6 - 10 years	22.1%
10 - 15 years	17.6%
16 years or more	17.6%

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RPL / PLAR ACTIVITIES:

Workers: How important are these advising, skills identification, assessment and/or recognition activities to your organization’s goals and objectives? (n=68)

Employers / Leaders: How important are the advising, skills identification, assessment and/or recognition activities you identified above to your organization’s workforce planning or talent development? (n=31)

Table 13

Importance of RPL/PLAR Activities	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Crucial; these activities are integral to our organization’s objectives and success.	48.5%	54.8%
Important; they play a significant role in our organization’s operations.	29.4%	12.9%
Moderately important; they are useful but not central to our work.	17.6%	22.6%
Somewhat important; we occasionally engage in these activities.	4.4%	9.7%
Not important; these activities are not relevant to our organization’s goals	0.0%	0.0%

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



RPL / PLAR ACTIVITIES:

Employers / Leaders: Do you see value for your organization in creating or formalizing job roles that focus on advising, skills assessment and/or recognition activities, even if these roles currently exist under different titles? (n=31)

Table 14

Value for Organization	Employers / Leaders
Yes, we have already implemented such roles.	54.8%
Yes, we are considering implementing such roles.	12.9%
Yes, but we would need more information or support to proceed.	9.7%
Maybe, it there's a clear benefit or demand for it.	16.1%
No, we don't see this as a priority at the moment.	6.5%

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: How familiar are you with the skills and competencies required by RPL/PLAR Workers?
 (n=67)

Employers / Leaders: How familiar are you with the skills and competencies required by RPL/PLAR Workers? (n=30)

Table 15

Familiarity with RPL/PLAR Skills and Competencies	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Very familiar: I know about RPL/PLAR skills and competencies and their applications.	49.30%	53.30%
Somewhat familiar: I have a basic understanding of RPL/PLAR skills and competencies but not in-depth.	49.30%	33.30%
Not familiar: I have little or no knowledge about RPL/PLAR skills and competencies.	1.50%	13.30%

Employers / Leaders: Does your organization currently need employees better trained in RPL/PLAR Activities? (n=30)

Table 16

Current Need for RPL / PLAR Workers	Employers / Leaders
Yes, we actively need trained RPL/PLAR Workers.	33.3%
We could benefit from trained RPL/PLAR Workers, but it's not an immediate need.	53.3%
No, we don't see a need at this time.	3.3%
Not sure	10.0%

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: To what extent does your organization prioritize structured professional development for you as an RPL/PLAR Worker? (n=67)

Employers / Leaders: To what extent does your organization prioritize structured professional development for RPL/PLAR Workers? (n=30)

Table 17

Priority of SPD for RPL/PLAR Workers	Workers	Employers / Leaders
High priority: We allocate resources and plan for these needs.	36.70%	23.90%
Moderate priority: We support it but it is not a primary focus.	40.00%	40.30%
Low priority: We have limited interest in investing in this area.	20.00%	28.40%
Not a priority at this time.	3.30%	7.50%

Workers: Do you currently participate in structured professional development (such as courses, webinars, training, qualifications, certificates/academic programs of study/diplomas or certification programs/professional credentials, etc.) related to RPL/PLAR? (n=67)

Table 18

Frequency	Workers
Yes, monthly	19.4%
Yes, quarterly	25.4%
Yes, annually	31.3%
No, rarely / never	23.9%

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: How do you currently receive training, if any, for your RPL/PLAR Activities and the underlying tasks? (Select all that apply) (n=67)

Employers / Leaders: How do your employees currently receive training, if any, for your RPL/PLAR Activities and the underlying tasks? (Select all that apply) (n=29)

Table 19

Current SPD	Workers	Employer / Leaders
Self-study or online resources	68.7%	58.6%
Communities of practice, associations, online networking, conferences, etc.	64.2%	69.0%
External professional development courses, workshops, or certificates	53.7%	69.0%
In-house training or internal resources	38.8%	62.1%
Formal academic or industry certification programs	11.9%	24.1%
They don't receive any training.	0.0%	0.0%

Other, please specify:

Employers / Leaders:

- Conferences, research papers, industry and vendor reports
- Partnership with industry association that has RPL /PLAR training program
- Project performance - learning on the job

Workers:

- International training providers, such as the International Labour Organization.
- Reading
- Mentor guidance

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: Would you benefit from (additional) structured professional development opportunities that enhance your ability to do RPL/PLAR Activities? (n=67)

Table 20

Responses	Workers
Yes, I am actively seeking OR would invest in RPL/PLAR structured professional development opportunities.	47.8%
Yes, (additional) structured professional development in RPL/PLAR tasks would be beneficial, but it's not an immediate need.	40.3%
Maybe, if it aligns with current goals or needs.	10.4%
No, I don't see this as a priority at the moment.	1.5%

Employers / Leaders: Would your organization benefit from (additional) structured professional development programs that enhance employees' ability to do RPL/PLAR Activities? (n=30)

Table 21

Responses	Employers / Leaders
Yes, we are actively seeking OR would invest in RPL/PLAR structured professional development programs	30.0%
Yes, but we would need to understand the specific benefits before deciding.	33.3%
Maybe, if it aligns with our current goals or needs.	36.7%
No, we don't see this as a priority at the moment.	0.0%

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: What types of structured professional development resources would be most useful for you as you perform RPL/PLAR Activities? (Select all that apply) (n=68)

Employers / Leaders: What types of structured professional development resources would be most useful for people in your organization performing RPL/PLAR Activities? (Select all that apply) (n=29)

Table 22

Preferred SPD	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Webinars and virtual learning events	80.9%	86.2%
Self-paced online training (available anytime)	76.5%	72.4%
Competency-based assessments and skills evaluation tools	44.1%	72.4%
Peer networks and knowledge-sharing platforms	55.9%	69.0%
Live online training (group-based)	55.9%	62.1%
Professional standards and competency framework	42.6%	62.1%
Professional certification/designation	48.5%	51.7%
Certificate courses	57.4%	48.3%
Mentoring and coaching programs	30.9%	48.3%
In-person conferences and seminars	55.9%	41.4%
Industry-specific guidelines and manuals	44.1%	41.4%
In-person workshops	42.6%	34.5%
Formal credentialing programs	30.9%	31.0%
Job-shadowing and cross-training	13.2%	24.1%

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: What factors most influence your choice of structured professional development? (n=67)

Table 23

Factors	Workers
Relevance to my specific tasks or sector	70.1%
Time and scheduling flexibility	68.7%
Affordability and accessibility	59.7%
Enhancing my ability to better support my clients	55.2%
Networking and knowledge-sharing with peers	49.3%
Opportunities to gain new certifications or credentials	40.3%

Other, please specify:

- Professional development that has breadth and depth

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: As you envision advancing your career in RPL/PLAR, how do you see your demand for specialized skills or certifications evolving? (n=66)

Employers / Leaders: How are the RPL/PLAR-related structured professional development needs evolving in your industry or sector? (n=30)

Table 24

Demand for SPD	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Increasing demand: I anticipate a growing need for advanced RPL/PLAR skills and certifications to support my career progression.	53.0%	63.3%
Stable demand: The need for advanced RPL/PLAR skills and certifications feels steady, with consistent expectations for professional growth.	39.4%	23.3%
Decreasing demand: I perceive a declining need for formal RPL/PLAR skills and certifications to advance my career.	1.5%	0.00%
Not sure: I'm unsure of the current trends in RPL/PLAR skill and certification requirements for my career progression.	6.1%	13.3%



STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: Are there any emerging skills or competencies that RPL/PLAR Workers in your industry or sector now require that were not previously essential (e.g., digital literacy, cross-cultural assessment skills, specialized industry knowledge, data analysis, and reporting on RPL outcomes, policy development and advocacy in RPL/PLAR, etc.)? (Open-ended) (n=45)

- *Not that I know of*
- *A recognized standard of competence for a RPL professional which includes some for of certificate/badge that the professional is recognized as having competence in the skills and knowledge required*
- *Data analysis*
- *Machine learning skills. Data science skills.*
- *AI and automation proficiency, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving skills*
- *Digital literacy and AI with documentation*
- *Nothing specific, but there is always room for growth*
- *Those as mentioned!*
- *Digital Skills for working with AI in a reasonable and responsible way.*
- *Cultural awareness*
- *AI*
- *Digital literacy and cross-cultural assessment skills are important*
- *Cross cultural assessment skills*
- *Digital literacy, cross-cultural assessment skills, LMI and its relevance to the future of work in a rapidly changing environment*
- *Skills related to AI and RPL; policy implementation*
- *Higher levels of assessment literacy; specialized knowledge of genAI*
- *Uncertain*
- *Cross-cultural assessment skills & specialized industry knowledge*
- *Yes*
- *No*
- *Cross-Cultural Assessment, Digital Literacy, policy development and advocacy, especially, to advocate for minority group that carrying and pass on their knowledge (indigenous groups and immigrants)*
- *RPL assessment and reporting skills*
- *Foreign skills and credential assessments*
- *Digital literacy, policy development, advocacy*
- *Exploring inclusive and equitable cross-cultural assessment practices, integrating AI in assessment process, Canadian RPL data analysis.*
- *Digital literacy*

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- *RPL and international education; document authentication/verification; cross-training with regards to RPL and education vs RPL and career advising.*
- *Digital literacy (surveys, AI), cross-cultural assessment skills (indigenous culture), data analysis (Excel, Tableau, extracting data from Outlook), some industry knowledge (understanding certifications, assessing competencies in Autobiographical Resumes for students working in specific field i.e. law enforcement)*
- *Digital literacy, accessibility, instructional design.*
- *All that are noted as examples in the question.*
- *Cross-cultural*
- *More advocacy in RPL is needed*
- *Rubric templates, digital literacy, more data on RPL and reporting features on student mobility.*
- *Developing course-based process for teaching students to identify and express their high-level learning as is applies to program/course outcomes.*
- *Nothing I can think of specifically for the work in assessing private training programs, aside from keeping up with the drastic technological advances of AI etc. (possibly as tools to support?) this could fall under digital literacy.*
- *Cross-cultural assessment skills*
- *Anything to do with AI and scalability of programs are imperative emerging skills and competencies. Cross cultural assessment skills that have to do with conscious and unconscious bias, epistemology, and ontology. As well, skills and competencies related to the intersection of RPL/PLAR with badging, micro-credentials, labour market changes, and career development are emerging. Lastly, there seems to have been a decrease in the understanding of adult learning theory and how we learn at work. I suspect (or hope) these skills become more important.*
- *AI*
- *Fundamentals of RPL, assessment skills, advocacy*
- *Cross-cultural assessment skills*
- *Competency based learning. Assessment practices. Data analysis, policy creation, qualify assurance.*
- *Use of digitalization of PLAR, how to use PLAR to meet low demand in certain demands in programs, using PLAR as a flexible means for alternative assessment when paired with CBE programs.*
- *RPL outcomes and policy development*
- *Specialized industry knowledge/professional standards*
- *Advisement experience (in different capacities)*



STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Employers / Leaders: Are there any emerging skills or competencies that RPL/PLAR Workers in your industry or sector now require that were not previously essential (e.g., digital literacy, cross-cultural assessment skills, specialized industry knowledge, data analysis, and reporting on RPL outcomes, policy development and advocacy in RPL/PLAR, etc.)? (Open-ended) (n=18)

- *Yes, reporting on RPL and credential and transfer equivalencies and policy and data standards development and data collection to assess/identify/support learner pathways*
- *Cross cultural assessment skills*
- *All of the above*
- *Specialized industry knowledge will be the most pressing need downstream.*
- *Data analysis, reporting, policy development, advising skills*
- *I am not sure*
- *Competency development, cross cultural assessment skills*
- *Evaluation for economic development*
- *Don't know.*
- *Use of AI, understanding RPL barriers or challenges, DEI, building an evidence base. NOTE re Q20 - difficult to answer as there is a growing interest/need, but not necessarily for formal programs.*
- *Cross cultural assessment; elevated digital skills (LMS);*
- *AI literacy*
- *Cross-cultural assessment skills, particularly for Indigenous communities. Digital/AI literacy.*
- *No*
- *Development of assessment tools.*
- *AI Literacy, Digital Literacy*
- *Cross-cultural assessment skills specialized industry knowledge*
- *Transferrable experience of formal education, digital literacy and a need for training human resource recruiters and job description writers how to leverage transferable skills from different types of learning.*



STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Workers: Are there any resources or information that are difficult to find that would help you achieve your career progression goals? What types of skills, certificates or certifications might be most important for you to grow in your career? (Open-ended) (n=43)

- *Microcredentials or badges*
- *No*
- *As above*
- *Not that I know of for now*
- *Specialized training and certifications in emerging technologies, data analytics, and leadership to enhance my expertise and stay updated on industry trends, and would enable me to expand my professional network, take on leadership roles, and contribute to policy development and advocacy efforts.*
- *Language proficiency certifications is also a needed skills for me*
- *Certificate in document identification and digital literacy*
- *Information about the assessment of portfolios for admission to post secondary school, based on competencies.*
- *There needs to be a better resource to share with employers, funders, and stakeholders the importance of RPL/PLAR. I am starting to see a shift in the mindset of formal education towards unique skills needed for post-secondary education, transitioning in careers and the hiring of senior level positions. The reality is, the world of IT and digital literacy are moving faster than we are able to adjust to them.*
- *Portfolio assessment*
- *Nothing that I can think of based on my career goals.*
- *One barrier for RPL for students is for those in programs that have accreditation considerations. Often accreditation of a program by an external body means that students are ineligible for PLAR credit toward their program.*
- *Economic development*
- *N/A (I'm at the end of my career)*
- *Benchmarking RPL against other countries*
- *An assessment framework or tools would be helpful.*
- *Perhaps models similar to C-BEN's certification programs?*
- *Technology*
- *Anything related to cross-cultural assessment skills*
- *There should be a formal education for PLAR and professional designation*
- *Some recognition of RPL skills through a professional designation*
- *How to overcome cultural bias in hiring*
- *Policy, ministry guidelines, quality assurance in assessment*

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- *Canadian specific data on the benefits of RPL. This is helpful to gain Institute support.*
- *Difficult as generally RPL workers are a small number within an institution, so little room for growth or team.*
- *Advanced PLAR practitioner type courses; National certification for PLAR practitioners; required PD hours, etc.*
- *Technical skills for digital literacy would be helpful. If I continue in education, it would be useful to take free courses on academic and career counselling.*
- *Uncertain, have not had the opportunity to research.*
- *None that I can think of at this time.*
- *I'm not sure.*
- *The CAPLA website has been of assistance to me.*
- *Course outline assessments tools to take pressure off our subject matter experts.*
- *I really need examples of how specific post-sec institutions teach students to write learning narratives, to dig into their experiences and express the cognitive processed behind their experiences, and align these to program/course outcomes.*
- *None that I can currently think of. The work I administer is best supported by peer-to-peer networking groups, industry related networking groups and platforms that allow sharing amongst the groups*
- *It is hard to find PLAR/RPL resources specific to AI and scalability of programs. It would also be valuable to have cross cultural assessment skills that have to do with conscious and unconscious bias, epistemology, and ontology. As mentioned earlier, skills and competencies related to the intersection of RPL/PLAR with badging, micro-credentials, labour market changes, and career development would be valuable. Lastly, there seems to have been a decrease in the understanding of adult learning theory and how we learn at work. More resources, directly related to PLAR, would be valuable.*
- *No*
- *Research-based evidence. Postgraduate micro programs with the possibility of directed research.*
- *Formal recognition of a standard of practice, courses on best practice for assessment, policies and processes and quality assurance practices*
- *Found some research on CBE and PLAR in the USA. wanted to know more on how that would work. How to use PLAR more flexibly, efficient, feasibly, and what are the countries doing. Especially at different levels of postsecondary (University to College).*
- *Little to no workshops or online courses available*
- *PLAR resources and shared documents of goals around PLAR within our institution*
- *Certificate program for RPL assessment or designing RPL programs*
- *Having a tangible credential to prove my abilities to support RPL/ PLAR and skill identification.*

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada

PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

RPL Workers: What benefits do you think your ORGANIZATION would gain by providing structured professional development programs for employees involved in RPL/PLAR Activities? (Select all that apply) (n=66)

Employers / Leaders: What benefits do you think your ORGANIZATION would gain by providing structured professional development programs for employees involved in RPL/PLAR Activities? (Select all that apply) (n=29)

Table 25

Organizational Benefits of SPD	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Improved assessment accuracy and consistency	83.3%	65.5%
Enhanced communication across teams involved in skill assessments	63.6%	51.7%
Increased operational efficiency in skills assessment and recognition	59.1%	58.6%
Increased effectiveness in training, learning, development, and performance improvement	54.5%	51.7%
Support for overall workforce development strategies	37.9%	65.5%
Enhanced alignment of worker skills with organizational goals	34.8%	51.7%
Compliance with industry or regulatory standards	34.8%	31.0%
Increased effectiveness in training needs assessment	31.8%	51.7%
Better organization performance as a whole	25.8%	41.4%
Improved hiring practices using skills-based/competency-based hiring rather than credentials-based hiring	24.2%	48.3%
Improved organizational reputation for attracting skilled workers	24.2%	41.4%
Improved hiring practices through effective advising and assessment strategies that help individuals uncover their existing knowledge and skills	22.7%	27.6%
Improved talent retention and reduced turnover	22.7%	44.8%
Structured professional development for RPL/PLAR workers might offer some value to the organization, but it's not essential	15.2%	17.2%
Structured professional development will not benefit the organization at this time	3.0%	10.3%



PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Other, please specify:

Employers / Leaders:

- As a unionized workplace, we probably would not see much impact on hiring practices, given the current processes for screening in via credentials
- Equity-based hiring practices
- I would like to see Professional Designation be available, provided obtaining designation is also based on RPL approach

Workers:

- More equitable hiring practices
- Higher attractiveness to prospective students who may not have as much traditional education but may benefit from improved PLAR processes
- Make the organization more inclusive and open more opportunities for minority groups to access post-secondary education
- Reducing mentor burnout as our process is very one-on-one, involving up to 80+ hours of mentor time per student

PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Workers: What benefits do you believe structured professional development offers (could offer) to YOU as an RPL/PLAR Worker? (Select all that apply) (n=68)

Employers / Leaders: What benefits do you believe structured professional development offers (could offer) directly to RPL/PLAR Workers in your organization? (Select all that apply) (n=28)

Table 26

Activities	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Increased confidence and competence in performing RPL/PLAR-related functions	73.5%	71.4%
Opportunities for lifelong learning and skill-building	60.3%	71.4%
Recognition and validation of RPL/PLAR Worker skills	58.8%	78.6%
Expanded professional network and peer support	57.4%	67.9%
Improved service to the clients	55.9%	67.9%
Enhanced career growth and progression opportunities	54.4%	71.4%
Increased understanding of adult learning theory and application of career development tools	52.9%	64.3%
Enhanced communication across teams involved in skill assessments	45.6%	57.1%
Development of specialized skills valued within the industry	41.2%	57.1%
Access to a pathway for formal certification or credentialing	38.2%	57.1%
Improved job satisfaction and engagement	29.4%	67.9%
Structured professional development might offer some value to RPL/PLAR workers, but it's not essential	5.9%	14.3%
Structured professional development will not benefit RPL/PLAR workers at this time	1.5%	3.6%

Other, please specify:

Workers:

- There is a great opportunity for mindset change. It is a missed opportunity to finding the best talent for work and/or demonstrating competency.
- Sense of belonging and recognition for minority groups



PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Employers / Leaders: What value do you think RPL/PLAR structured professional development could bring to your INDUSTRY/SECTOR? (Open-ended) (n=28)

- *Application of PLAR standards and equivalencies to data standards that support credential recognition and credit*
- *The ability to scale up RPL activities with more skilled practitioners embedded in various roles.*
- *Recognition for all types of life-long learning, formal, informal, experiential, transformational*
- *Confidence that PLAR process and practices are consistent*
- *Tap into unrealized talent*
- *Consistency, trust, and overall confidence in the RPL process and outcomes.*
- *Networking*
- *Streamlined training and development for staff would help benefits the learners who are looking to upskills and reskills more seamlessly*
- *Provide much needed people with required skills a way to recognize same*
- *Not sure*
- *Raising awareness of RPL and entrenching it in institutional policy. Educational pathways to achieving RPL/PLAR skills are valued in the academic setting.*
- *Students could have a more reliably good experience of the PLAR process.*
- *Increased awareness and confidence for those who perform these duties.*
- *Better supports and awareness to support learners.*
- *Professionalizing the RPL industry to enhance standards*
- *It would increase our awareness of how to recognize prior learning and to steer either students/learners and potential new hires (for those exiting the education system and entering the workforce).*
- *RPL/PLAR professional development, whether structured or semi-structured, could bring great value to the career development field, as career/workforce dev't and RPL are deeply connected.*
- *Enhanced career growth; Recognition and validation; Job satisfaction and engagement; expanded network*
- *More authentic and useful ways to develop, assess and recognize skills*
- *Consistency, thereby enhancing credibility*
- *Ultimately, stronger service for our students, but also enhanced professional development and team cohesion.*
- *Reconnaissance*
- *Something is always better than nothing.*
- *Parity between informal/non-formal and formal learning as a RPL professional*
- *Greater clarity around what PLAR is and how it is undertaken. Some of my colleagues understand this but many do not.*

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



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- Greater awareness of validity of RPL in higher education & greater acceptance of the practice
- Better recognition and respect for the skills that employees have developed
- The individual recognizing the wealth of skills they have gained over the course of their life and leverage that in their current workplace or when seeking other employment.

PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Workers: If you were to pursue structured professional development programs for yourself, which type of provider would you prefer? (Select all that apply) (n=63)

Employers / Leaders: If your organization were to pursue structured professional development programs for RPL/PLAR Workers, which type of provider would be preferred? (Select all that apply) (n=28)

Table 27

Preferred SPD Providers	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Educational Institution	79.4%	64.3%
Professional Membership Organization	76.2%	64.3%
Industry Association	47.6%	46.4%
Sector accredited source	46.0%	39.3%
Government Agency	27.0%	28.6%
Private training provider	22.2%	21.4%
Internal training function of organization	15.9%	28.6%

PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Workers: How important is it to you that structured professional development be provided by a recognized third party (e.g., government, professional body)? (n=65)

Employers / Leaders: How important is it that structured RPL/PLAR professional development be provided by a recognized third party (e.g., government, professional body)? (n=28)

Table 28

Importance of SPD	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Very important	46.2%	50.0%
Somewhat important	36.9%	35.7%
Doesn't matter, as long as the professional development is effective	12.3%	10.7%
Not important	4.6%	3.6%

PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Workers: What barriers, if any, would prevent you from participating in structured professional development? (Select all that apply) (n=64)

Employers / Leaders: What barriers, if any, would prevent your organization from adopting structured professional development for your RPL/PLAR Workers? (Select all that apply) (n=28)

Table 29

Barriers to SPD Participation	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Cost of professional development or training programs	68.8%	71.4%
Geographical/location constraints	54.7%	39.3%
Difficulty finding qualified providers of training or certification	34.4%	42.9%
Lack of awareness or understanding of RPL/PLAR and related activities	15.6%	32.1%
Uncertainty about the value or return on investment	14.1%	39.3%
Technological/digital literacy constraints	4.7%	7.1%
No organizational need for RPL/PLAR professional development	0.0%	14.3%
Limited time or high workload of employees	0.0%	57.1%

Other, please specify:

Employers / Leaders:

- Ability to train internally and with the support of external consultants

Workers:

- Specific relevance to Secondary Adult Education, as opposed to Workplace or Post-Secondary application
- Subject matter (for example, the upcoming CAPLA conference is about Rural RPL practices and because we are urban, we would not be approved for this topic).

PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Workers: Would you support the establishment of structured professional development, such as competency standards, training, and/or certification for RPL/PLAR Workers? (n=59)

Employers / Leaders: Would your organization support the establishment of structured professional development, such as competency standards, training, and/or certification for RPL/PLAR Workers? (n=29)

Table 30

Support for SPD	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Yes, it would be beneficial	72.9%	53.6%
Yes, but only if it aligns with our industry needs	22.0%	35.7%
Not sure	5.1%	10.7%
No, we prefer internal or informal processes	0.0%	0.0%

Workers: How willing are you to invest in paid structured professional development programs for yourself? (n=65)

Employers / Leaders: How willing is your organization to financially support structured professional development programs for employees involved in RPL/PLAR tasks and activities? (n=28)

Table 31

Willingness to Pay for SPD	Workers	Employers / Leaders
Very willing to pay	26.2%	10.7%
Somewhat willing to pay	56.9%	35.7%
Not willing to pay	7.7%	7.1%
Not sure	9.2%	46.4%



PERCEIVED VALUE AND BENEFITS:

Workers: If you could design your ideal structured professional development experience to support your role as an RPL/PLAR Worker, what would it look like? (Open-Ended) (n=64)

- *Online, synchronous group learning*
- *On line on my own time*
- *Simulation exercises for practicing assessment techniques.*
- *Self paced but supported by a mentor and a community of practice/ learning*
- *Conferences, professional meetups, and discussion forums to exchange best practices with industry experts.*
- *My ideal structured professional development exercise would be an advanced 5-day masterclass titled "Strategic RPL/PLAR Leadership: Innovations and Futures." This expert-led program would focus on cutting-edge trends, policy development, and strategic planning, enabling me to enhance my leadership skills, expand my professional network, and contribute to the evolution of RPL/PLAR practices. Upon completion, I would receive a recognized credential, such as a Certified RPL/PLAR Leader designation.*
- *It would contain Easy access to online resources, mentorship provision and regular seminars about up to date facts and information in the field.*
- *Combine program of virtual and elearning format.*
- *Not sure at this time*
- *Online, at your own pace, affordable, networking opportunity*
- *We would review PLAR assessment practices in post-secondary from admission, course/ program perspectives. We would look at example portfolios, we would discuss institutional training and buy-in. We would learn about different ways to do assessment; we would discuss how to teach others about new assessment practices (moving beyond exams).*
- *A structure that allows me to both learn and share my experiences. Therefore, it promotes growth and change within that structure in real time. It is time for people to be nimble. We need to stop dwelling on the way we have always done things and support change.*
- *Short, specific and interactive*
- *Experts in all aspects of RPL/PLAR sharing their knowledge, skills and experience*
- *A certification body or process so that people get the training they need to understand the RPL/PLAR process and who/where to connect to for more support*
- *Unsure*
- *Specific to Manitoba and to Educators in Adult Learning Centres*
- *Understanding assessment as it pertains to specific industry experience*
- *Case studies, group work combined with lectures*
- *Theory combined with practice*
- *Workshop/COL on specific topics of interest*

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



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- *Self-learning online, with peer group sessions to discuss content or monthly sessions followed by discussions and self-reflection.*
- *In-person or virtual training*
- *Online, collaborative,*
- *Must focus on what a competency is/could be*
- *Unsure*
- *Not sure yet! Would need to discuss with other professionals to wrap my head around it and have a better idea.*
- *In person on-campus training.*
- *Something that includes hands-on, experiential learning opportunities to work with experienced RPL/PLAR professionals in real-world assessment scenarios, to give a better understanding of the more specific aspects of PLAR. It would also involve cross-cultural literacy, and give a better understanding of the benefits of PLAR to be able to better convey the value to the organization.*
- *Customized knowledge sharing sessions such Indigenization and decolonization PLAR*
- *High quality provision that is recognized by RPL professionals. Accessibly and flexibly provided.*
- *One day workshops with peer to peer discussion - in person or Zoom self-led online class*
- *Identifying ways to advocate for students to receive credit in degree programs for non-credit coursework they've successfully completed.*
- *Foundational knowledge of PLAR/RPL, assessment techniques, technology integration, curriculum planning and design, making it equitable, inclusive and diverse, quality assurance*
- *Online, structured, and cohort-based for engagement and networking. I prefer being immersed in learning for half-day or full-day rather than go back and forth from work. Otherwise, priorities and focus shifts.*
- *Professional designation*
- *Not sure to be honest*
- *Would look for something that leads to a professional designation or credential resulting in a certificate or diploma.*
- *For onboarding training, I think I'd prefer a self-paced online course consisting of readings, tutorial videos, and quizzes for common tasks and student cases I encounter. For professional development after that, I would prefer online courses and seminars, job shadowing or mentorship programs, and team workshops.*
- *How to support the learner as they uncover their related learning, no matter their academic area of study.*
- *Develop it as a micro-credential with 4 - 5 courses.*
- *I'm not sure.*
- *Continuing education and increased participation in various types of forums on recognition of prior learning*
- *I would prefer to have short informational sessions.*
- *There would be specific online stand-alone modules that may be worked on at your own pace.*

Environmental Scan of RPL/PLAR Training and Structured Professional Development Needs in Canada



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- *Core Knowledge & Practical Application: Provide in-depth training on adult learning theory, assessment frameworks, and real-world scenarios to build practical skills in evaluating prior learning and applying assessment tools effectively.*
- *Self-paced, online, self-assessments (self-marking quizzes after each unit), chunked content in a user-friendly platform, lots of open-source templates to begin using immediately, a system that tracks your progress so it's easy to jump back in as time permits, option to take a formal exam for recognition or just take the content without being examined.*
- *It would include some guidance on how to structure student resources or teach the principles of PLAR to students (i.e.: how to develop learning narratives and other materials that meet university-level program outcomes)*
- *It would relate to the work I currently undertake, as well as delivery methods as selected above and finally through peer-to-peer network and shared information be able to better streamline the work I do to provide better consistency across our industry.*
- *Distance-learning program*
- *Have already answered this question throughout the survey and unfortunately I have nothing additional to add to this question.*
- *Financial support-when I advance my career*
- *It would focus on more advanced skills, knowledge.*
- *Learning communities within the PSE environment*
- *Practicing with real-world scenarios*
- *A certificate , that included mandatory courses for basic/standard RPL knowledge and then elective courses you could choose based on your role or position or desire to learn i.e. QA, policy and process, advising, assessment etc.*
- *A microcredential with transparent and authentic demonstrable skills required for competence in the role. Submissions to be assessed by experts in the field.*
- *Ideally my experience working in the position would be recognized along with the seminar, conferences, policies, procedures, and documents I had collaborated and worked on. Ideally a review of a portfolio.*
- *PD that could be completed at own pace.*
- *Online, at your own pace, free or minimal cost*
- *In house support, top down encouragement and support of PLAR, student centered approach and employee and faculty friendly model*
- *One that doesn't only focus on RPL for academic credits for a post-secondary course*
- *Blended learning program*
- *Training to receive a formal credential to help with eventually creating and supporting portfolios and candidate support institutionally (and possibly more mobility in my role).*

Appendix B – About North Pacific

North Pacific Metrics Inc. (North Pacific) is firmly grounded in the competency-based approach to occupational certification and assessment, having applied the principles of observable/measurable human performance to a wide variety of trades, occupations, and professions over the past 25 years. We've developed competency standards and assessment tools for more than forty trades, occupations, and professions - specializing in competency-based initiatives to identify and recognize prior learning.

North Pacific works with sector councils, regulators, and industry associations to develop and validate tools and resources for PLAR/RPL certification programs for a variety of occupations across Canada. Our work is focused on assessing and recognizing prior learning and work/life experiences of workers within (or those entering) various industry sectors to assist and support them in becoming qualified/certified / licensed in their profession of choice. This work has largely been driven by the need to support harmonization and cross-jurisdictional labour mobility, address skills shortages, and sustain the diversity and growth of a specific industry or occupation.

With a proven track record in managing complex competency development and research projects and a deep commitment to advancing the field of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR/RPL), North Pacific is eager to contribute to CAPLA's mission of enhancing awareness, acceptance, and quality practices - nationally and internationally.

Relevant Projects:

Environmental Scan Report: RPL Program Models for Competency Assessment and Recognition

In 2021, in partnership with the Atlantic Home Building and Renovation Sector Council (AHBRSC) and the Automotive Sector Council of Nova Scotia (ASCNS), and with support and funding from the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education (DLAE), North Pacific was engaged in an extensive environmental scan of exemplary RPL programs, both within Canada and internationally, that were successfully implementing a competency-based assessment approach to recognizing existing competencies for occupational certification and/or licensing. The report was enabled by partnerships including those with the AHBRSC and (ASCNS) and also with many other RPL practitioners in Canada, India, Australia and South Africa. The environmental scan and report employed a variety of perspectives to explore the nature and type of RPL models currently in place in Canada and Internationally and offered an analysis of the key success factors and smart practices that can best influence the design of competency-based RPL program governance, administration, and funding models.

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Level 2 Certification

Since 2018, North Pacific has worked with the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to develop, pilot and implement a PLAR process to provide an alternative pathway to an **Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Level 2 Classification**. This project was funded through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. As a result of this project, a valid and reliable PLAR program now provides a mechanism to assess candidates' knowledge and practical skills in order to

determine their eligibility for Nova Scotia ECE Level 2 Certification. Candidates with deficiencies identified via the assessment process are assisted to access appropriate learning resources to bridge their competency gaps. This alternate PLAR pathway facilitates the recognition of education and training obtained by international applicants seeking ECE licensure in Nova Scotia. North Pacific continues to provide psychometric / assessment support services to DEECD.

Environmental Scan Report: Certification for Early Childhood Educators in Nova Scotia

North Pacific worked with the **Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)** in 2022 to complete an environmental scan report for the certification of Early Childhood Educators in Nova Scotia. In 2022, DEECD initiated a plan to develop and implement a comprehensive framework for a new Early Childhood Educator Certification System that would explicitly recognize the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to perform specified roles in early learning and child care programs in Nova Scotia. This system would eventually replace the current requirements for ECE Classification that are embedded in the Early Learning and Child Care Regulations. North Pacific was selected to complete an environmental scan that included conducting a review and cross-jurisdictional comparison (Canada and international) to inform and support the planning and development of a certification system for ECEs in NS and the introduction of an ECE Assistant role.

This Environmental Scan Report:

- provided a cross-comparison of systems, models and scopes of practice for each jurisdictional, including a comparison with the current Nova Scotia model,
- identified how other jurisdictions support internationally trained ECEs,
- identified applicable legislation and regulations for each jurisdiction, and
- identified opportunities and risks associated with the Nova Scotia status quo, including the current Recognized Prior Learning Program.

Other PLAR Projects

- North Pacific has worked with **Digital Nova Scotia** since 2021 on a series of PLAR projects including:
 - **Digital Essential Skills Project (2021-22)** – Design and develop a competency framework and self-assessment tool to identify existing digital competencies mapped to high-demand roles across 12 different industrial sectors. The deliverables included role-specific proficiency ratings and identification of available resources for further competency development.
 - **Changing Perspectives Project (2022-23)** – Design and develop a framework and specifications for assessing 'in-demand' technical competencies for the top 5 information technology occupations in Nova Scotia. The deliverables included a competency-based assessment tool to help employers, employees, and prospective job applicants identify their existing technical competencies.
 - **Beyond Digital Recognition Project (2023-24)** – Competency Framework to assess and recognize key non-technical competencies that are deemed relevant and in demand in the IT sector. The deliverables include the development of competency specifications and a suite of assessment tools and processes that will enable IT employers and community/employment support agencies to assess and recognize the non-technical competencies of skilled and entry-level IT workers.

- North Pacific has been working with the Automotive Sector Council (ASC) since 2020 on a series of PLAR projects including:
 - **Tire & Maintenance Technician (2020-23)** – Competency specifications plus assessment tools and resources (written examination and practical assessment) to enable recognition as a Certified Tire & Maintenance Technician based on existing competencies for uncredentialed workers within or those entering the automotive service industry.
 - **Collision Repair Preparation Technician (2022 - Ongoing)** – Competency specifications plus assessment tools and resources (written examination and practical assessment) to enable recognition as a Certified Collision Repair Preparation Technician based on existing competencies for uncredentialed workers within or those entering the automotive service industry.
- North Pacific worked with the Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA) on a PLAR-based project to design and develop assessment tools to recognize and certify **Career Development Practitioners (CDPs)** nationally. The deliverables included assessment tools and resources (eligibility requirements, written examination, and situational interview), pilot validation (40 participants) of all assessment tools, and development of national program policies and procedures to award certification to professionals working in the field of career development in Canada.

Appendix C – Summary Report: Focus Group by C&C, CAPLA (May 2024)

An Environmental Scan of PLAR/RPL Training

A pan-Canadian, multi-sectoral research project funded by the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT)

Focus Group Summary Report
May 22, 2024
Loyalist College
Belleville, ON

Increasing our understanding of who uses RPL/PLAR in their work and who has taken training, by listening to peoples' stories

1. Introduction

On March 28, 2024 the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) signed an agreement with ONCAT to undertake a pan-Canadian, multi-sectoral Environmental Scan of PLAR/RPL training in Canada. Work on the research project began in early April and involved the existing members of CAPLA's Certificates and Certification (C&C) Working group, as an advisory body. At the April 23 meeting of the C&C, the project Deliverables and Activities were posted for review and clarification. Since one of the first project activities was undertaking a Focus Group among RPL practitioners in Belleville ON at the Loyalist RPL conference in May, significant time was spent in the April meeting discussing characteristics of different kinds of focus groups, possible questions for participants, incentives for participation, refreshments etc..

The Loyalist College event was identified by CAPLA as an important strategic preparatory opportunity to 'set the table' for subsequent research activities into RPL/PLAR training in Canada, by taking advantage of the only in-person, pan-Canadian RPL conference planned for the duration of the ONCAT contract. Conversations began early with conference planners and there was agreement to open the Focus Group to all conference attendees. There was an understanding the focus group would have to take place on Wednesday, May 22 following Loyalist's Opening Plenary session, since the second night of the three day conference involved a banquet. A conference planning committee member from Loyalist sent out the Focus Group invitation to all conference registrants.

This report will describe the focus group activity undertaken by CAPLA and attended by a small number of individuals (n=13) with varied backgrounds from across Canada, who registered for the face-to-face, RPL/PLAR professional development conference. Participation in the Focus Group was voluntary and interested participants were asked to sign up at the Registration Desk, to include their email address, and to indicate their willingness for CAPLA to contact them in the future, if necessary. They were invited to share their past and present experiences with PLAR/RPL, whatever they may be.

It was anticipated that the Focus Group findings would help inform subsequent activities related to the Environmental Scan of RPL Training, by identifying some personal and professional factors which have influenced participants' career trajectories into RPL/PLAR. Likewise, the information may be useful in the development and distribution of other research tools such as surveys, so they will reach their intended audiences, many of which are 'hidden' within other occupations.

The Understories Past and Present

For many years, workers, researchers and advocates in Canada's PLAR/RPL sector have drawn upon the 'iceberg' metaphor to illustrate the magnitude of non-formal and informal learning that is often invisible to those who possess it and to those who evaluate it. A similar challenge presents itself in this study, since RPL workers are often 'hidden' within a vast number of paid and unpaid occupations. They work in fields where helping individuals reach their full personal and professional potential is an integral part of their everyday working lives. However, the tools of their trade may not necessarily be regarded as being RPL/PLAR tools/processes and vice versa. Sharing workers' stories and synergies within the actual occupational group will be an important part of increasing awareness and adding to the body of knowledge in subsequent research.

Another factor to take into account is the receptivity of the environment in which people work. As always, the politics associated with implementing an innovative strategy like RPL/PLAR can have implications related to changing systems from within, even when there are obvious barriers to learner/candidate success. This can be challenging for those working in the field. Care must be taken to ensure confidentiality for survey respondents, given the risks and benefits of being an agent for change.

By uncovering occupations where RPL-related activities take place either purposely or unknowingly, we will be able to move forward with greater confidence in the development and distribution of surveys and other research tools, to discover the training needs among workers and employers in these diverse populations.

Background of CAPLA's Certificates and Certification Working Group (C&C)

The pan-Canadian C&C Working Group has been meeting since 2022, has established Terms of Reference and has been open to those interested in exploring the RPL/PLAR training needs and opportunities offered in Canada. They have discussed RPL training courses, PD opportunities and certificate programs and will act as advisors for the ONCAT Environmental Scan of PLAR/RPL training project. The training needs of sector workers and the competencies required in the labour force will continue being a focus of discussion, along with past and current PLAR/RPL courses and certificate programs. All relevant resources will be posted on the CAPLA website, including findings involving the competencies of those working in a range of RPL jobs (advising, assessing, facilitating) in different sectors. Existing RPL competency frameworks and role descriptions will be used and updates recommended, based on the results of subsequent surveys/focus groups among RPL workers and employers.

Based on the results of and recommendations from the Environmental Scan of training, this study could lead to subsequent project phases, in which a pan-Canadian RPL Certificate and/or a voluntary Certification program could be developed.

2. The May Focus Group

Purpose of the Focus Group

The purpose of this qualitative study was to bring together a small number of people who had sufficient awareness and interest in RPL/PLAR to attend a conference on the same topic. To help increase our understanding about the varied occupations where workers using RPL/PLAR practices and processes are employed, we began asking Focus Group participants how they got into the RPL field. Personal stories were shared from those new to the sector and participants who had been involved for many years.

(Note: While those who evaluate formal credentials by reviewing/evaluating/authenticating transcripts, diplomas, degrees, certificates, and licences were not excluded from the Focus Group, the discussion related primarily to activities related to non-formal and informal learning.)

Description of the Focus Group

The design of the Focus Group was based on several factors. It was a small, participant-led, homogeneous group of interested PLAR/RPL stakeholders who registered for a pre-existing RPL professional development event. A sign-up sheet was located at the Registration Desk and an announcement was also made about the Focus Group opportunity at the opening plenary session, to remind people that it was taking place immediately following it, at 4:30 p.m. Refreshments were offered, along with a small incentive gift. Thirteen people participated and the meeting was 75 minutes in length. Eleven out of 13 people agreed to stay in touch with CAPLA should the need arise.

After thanking ONCAT for their funding support, session facilitator Bonnie Kennedy introduced three members of the CAPLA Board of Directors who were present, along with members of the Certificates and Certification Working Group (C&C). CAPLA Board member Melissa Josey (Holland College) took notes and arrangements were made for the session to be recorded by Loyalist College. (Note: Neither an audio recording nor a written transcript of the meeting was useable.)

Each participant received an Infographic (May 22, 2024) which outlined the origin of the ONCAT-funded project. Highlights were pointed out, including the distinction between certificates and certification (the former being training/courses leading to a credential following assessment of acquired learning; the latter being a certification system involving ongoing compliance to a specified process). CAPLA also indicated an interest in collecting some verbatim participant comments for future use, and further explained other items in the Infographic such as the function of the four regions in Canada and their local networks, as sources of information for RPL/PLAR resources, survey development ideas and dissemination.

Draft Focus Group questions included:



1. Tell us about yourself (current/past employment that got you started doing PLAR/RPL)
2. In what fields do RPL advisors and assessors work? How do we reach people who work in the field but don't refer to themselves as RPL practitioners?
3. What kind of training (courses, workshops, webinars) have you taken to enhance your knowledge, skills, abilities (KSA)? Have you received any documentation for having completed the program?
4. Are there any professional development gaps which you have experienced in your P/T?
5. What questions should we be asking RPL workers and RPL employers?
6. Do you think a PLAR/RPL certificate would be beneficial to you?

Due to time restriction, combined with the trajectory of this learner-centre gathering, not all group members expressed their views on all questions. Several participants mentioned having PLAR/RPL certification but others chose not to talk about their qualifications.

Limitations

- Personal and professional comments from Focus Group participants are not available due to technology problems as described earlier. This has necessitated a secondary process in an attempt to re-create some 'what was said' comments from several participants. Once they become available, the results of the post-Focus Group comments recorded in ZOOM interviews may be used in worker profiles at a later date.
- Finding RPL employers to participate in the Focus Group proved to be problematic so comments contained in this report are primarily those who use RPL processes and practices in their work.
- The vast majority of Loyalist conference attendees worked in the academic sector, which was reflected in the Focus Group participant demographics.

3. Impressions and Observations

With few exceptions, there appeared to be several characteristics in common among Focus Group members' recollections of how/where/why they got involved with RPL/PLAR. These themes included:

- Personal experiences with RPL as an adult learner themselves, seeking academic credit (or other types of recognition)
- Familiarity with/use of portfolios as a tool for personal and professional growth for themselves, as well as for their clients (if applicable), and with portfolio development (advising and assessing) as a PLAR/RPL process
- A desire to find 'a better way' to make academic systems, HR processes and the labour force overall, more receptive to all kinds of learning (informal, non-formal, formal) for the social justice and economic benefits. Several focus group participants had first-hand knowledge working with the following groups: immigrants, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members and their families, adult learners returning to school, Indigenous peoples, individuals in transition, those changing careers, and community organizations.

Training in RPL

When asked if they had attended any RPL training in the past, most Focus Group participants responded in the affirmative. Given how many people in the group appeared to have first-hand portfolio training and experiences, it is not surprising that 'portfolio- assisted RPL' loomed large as proof of RPL training in this Focus Group. The nature of the training ranged from individual courses and workshops to certificate programs. One participant said she was self-taught. It was interesting to note that for the most part, informal opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange were not mentioned as learning sites (e.g. communities of practice, mentoring, webinars and conferences).

Further clarification of training and appropriate descriptors will be needed when surveys are being developed, to identify the many places where formal, non-formal and informal learning occurs for RPL/PLAR workers, considering how many occupational groups encounter RPL training inadvertently through, for example, their primary sector employer (e.g. career development practitioners' existing knowledge of goal-setting theory and practice, immigrant counsellors' awareness of labour market opportunities fitting with newcomers' skills/interest inventories, human resources practices in recruitment and selection).

Support for RPL courses leading to a formal credential in RPL was voiced by several people. However interest in an ongoing certification process for practitioners was low, and viewed by some as another barrier and perhaps antithetical to the tenets of RPL theory and practice.

Interestingly, there appeared to be some reluctance for participants to use the term 'RPL practitioner' as a label for themselves.



Notional titles emerging from Focus Group participant backgrounds

The following five categories are offered to reflect similarities and differences in participants' lived experience with RPL:

1. The Advocate

- The stakeholder who supports the overall concept of RPL
- Sees the benefit to themselves and others
- Situational involvement in/commitment to RPL

2. The Avenger

- People for whom a personal encounter with RPL as a candidate was frustrating
- Empathy for others attempting to get recognition which can impact motivation (+ or -) to work in/improve the field of practice

3. The Activist

- Community-based activities for those in need, those left behind, those at risk and those for whom the system is not working
- Both paid and unpaid RPL workers in this category
- Passion for change (RPL as a movement)

4. The Adult Educator

- Scholar and researcher
- Recognition of differences between services for adults and those for younger people (pedagogy/andragogy)
- RPL is connected to adult education theory and practice

5. The Reluctant Recruit

- The person given RPL as a new area of responsibility (off the side of the desk)
- Little or no training, no funding, limited authority/institutional support

Common threads running through many participants' responses included a desire to help others, resilience in the face of indifference/resistance, optimism that change is possible, finding a 'home' in RPL with like-minded workers, acceptance of small gains rather than major shifts in policy and funding, an appetite for innovation, flexibility and passion for the work.

Other comments included:

- decolonize RPL
- build awareness and define RPL in different sectors using words relevant to the sector, based on roles such as advisor and assessor
- find organizations who do their own RPL/PLAR training and award certificates
- continue to clarify the difference between certificates and certification
- use all available means of assessing knowledge, skills and abilities – don't let the presence or absence of a particular formal credential compromise someone's employment potential



- encourage HR professionals to think holistically and flexibly about hiring rather than using arbitrary screening mechanisms
- standards and principles are important and don't have to be a barrier

Occupational fields where RPL activities may take place and/or for targeted survey distribution

1. Indigenous programs and organizations
2. Community and workforce development groups
3. Research/Granting bodies
4. Immigrant-serving agencies/settlement services
5. Career development services
6. Women's programs
7. Social service agencies (at risk youth, unemployed, John Howard)
8. Canadian Armed Forces services
9. Human resources departments
10. Criminal Justice system
11. Professional bodies
12. Academic institutions

4. Closing

The outcomes of CAPLA's first Focus Group 'snapshot' associated with the Environmental Scan of PLAR/RPL training in Canada has been useful in examining the education and training needs of a small sample of 'visible' workers in the sector by recognizing their personal and professional RPL/PLAR reflections. However the training needs of their 'hidden' counterparts, along with the needs of employers who hire them, will require additional research.

Attention to the needs of workers who use PLAR/RPL in the non-academic areas listed above might be a useful start, by providing examples of real people, doing real RPL work, described in real sector-specific language.

In conclusion, it is my belief that people with passion drive change in every sector, in terms of envisioning a better tomorrow, as well as initiating innovative practices and processes. RPL is no exception....its future depends on both the dreamers and the doers.

Respectfully submitted by
Bonnie Kennedy, Focus Group facilitator
Past Executive Director, CAPLA



Rose-Marie Reid post focus group interview July, 2024

'I came upon RPL as a Social Services college graduate. I was invited to attend a PLA conference in the 1990's in Belleville and was hooked! The philosophy, theories and practices were consistent with my academic program and personal beliefs about equity and social inclusion, so using them in my work with community groups and as a mental health professional seemed natural. Helping people achieve their potential and get recognition for their learning is important work, as is seeking out opportunities to learn from others informally, through communities of practitioners. Communities of practitioners build capacity for PLAR practice both for the practitioner and the community as a whole. Even though I deliver RPL practitioner training which can lead to a certificate, we must be cautious about putting up barriers for people who already have the RPL knowledge, skills and abilities but lack the piece of paper. After all, RPL is about reducing barriers not creating them. I believe we should be focusing on growing the practice.'

Neil Kerby post focus group interview July, 2024

"I was introduced to PLAR many years ago when I was working in a social services agency. There wasn't a lot of job security and as a father of 6 children, I wanted to increase my educational credentials and was referred to Mark Gallupe at Loyalist College who explained how PLAR/RPL could help reduce the time it would take to get a diploma. Because I had worked in the field, there were documents I could use in a portfolio which would later support my efforts to achieve credits in several programs, including Athabasca University. Based on my experience, many people who work in human service occupations are already using RPL.

Since those early days, there is growing awareness about where diverse learners come from and what services they require. Progressive organizations have left behind 'one size fits all' approaches and are changing with the times.

My experience with Mark illustrated how important it is for adult learners like me, to have an advocate and advisor in their corner because there are still barriers to overcome. It is logical to build positive RPL attitudes and practices into everything we do, from assessor training and HR practices to community partnerships. As a Loyalist faculty member in Justice Studies and an Associate Dean, I believe RPL is an underutilized bridging strategy that can support diversity, reduce declining enrolment and improve student outcomes."



Ann Sylliboy post focus group interview October, 2024

“I first experienced PLAR as a student myself and understood what it offered. Later, we responded to a Call for Proposals from the government of Nova Scotia and received funding to look at PLAR in our Mi’kmaq community and with the help of experienced PLAR leaders at Loyalist and Tyendenaga in Belleville, seeds were planted in our hearts and minds. We began thinking about what PLAR looks like in our community, called L’nu in our language. We weren’t really focusing on it beyond our community and wanted to take time to recognize, honour, respect and value the gifts acquired through our traditional knowledge and culture.

We also understand the importance of getting recognition in academic institutions and in the labour force, as well as the value of portability and transferability, but it’s always a tension when straddling the Western and Indigenous worlds. I think the reasons why some people fall in love with RPL/PLAR is because it’s organic, is rooted in andragogy and adult learning theory and practice and helps people uncover their own knowledge, skills, and abilities for personal and professional reasons. Trained RPL/PLAR practitioners can help by walking with adults on their career paths. It is early days for us, since we are still babies on our PLAR/RPL journey.”