

# Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance

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Pre-budget Consultation Hearings 2011

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**Presented by**  
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**Literacy and Learning for Life**



## Introduction

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) is a community based non-profit organization that has promoted and supported literacy within Saskatchewan since 1989. We believe that literacy is a basic human right, and improving literacy and essential skills is a social responsibility in order to ensure that our society is well equipped for the challenges of life and the changing needs of the Canadian workplace. Working together through partnerships and collaborations with government, community, business and learners from all walks of life, we are committed to raising awareness that literacy and essential skills are recognized as a determinant for economic, social and individual health.

The SLN has prepared this brief to assist the Standing Committee on Finance in its deliberations through pre-budget consultations. We are pleased that the current government has continued its commitment to improving all forms of literacy and essential skills for Canadians. We are confident that the policy decisions resulting from these consultations will allow Canada to improve our economic status by building a robust workforce through continued, quality essential skills training.

Following are the SLN's recommendations to ensure that all Canadians are equipped with the fundamental essential skills necessary for a thriving Canadian labour force.

## Recommendations

- 1. Collaborate with the literacy and essential skills sector to strengthen relationships between industry, labour, and government that will ensure Canada's labour force has the essential skills necessary to continue to participate fully in a thriving and evolutionary knowledge economy.**

Ensuring that today's employees and job seekers have the necessary skills to gain entry and perform well on the job are priority issues that will, if properly addressed, continue to contribute to the growth and health of the Canadian economy. *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*, (Human Resources Development Canada, June 2003) suggests that increased public and private sector support for improving the skills and literacy of Canadians represents a major opportunity to improve the economic and social welfare of many thousands of willing workforce participants who lack the necessary basic skills to fully participate in the labour force. We should build on the current momentum in this area in order to ensure that our workforce continues to strengthen, and that unemployed and underemployed Canadians are fully equipped with the necessary skills to access and succeed within today's labour

market. A coordinated national approach to workforce development would address these concerns, further enabling a healthy workforce that can continue to provide the foundation for a successful Canadian economy.

## **2. Implement an awareness and engagement strategy focused on underemployed population sectors.**

In 2006, the unemployment rate among Aboriginal people was 14.8% - significantly higher than the national average, which at the time was 6.3% ([www.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca)). This population group represents a vast source of potential that could meet skilled labour shortages – now and in the future. Investing in an engagement strategy focused on bringing industry together with underemployed population sectors for essential skills development could bridge the gap between labour shortages and unemployment rates. This should include a coordinated effort to increase essential skills awareness with target groups and industry, and to implement community based, strength based essential skills development programs that match the strengths of target groups with the needs of regional sectoral shortages.

## **3. Increase Canadian skills in the areas of digital technology and online security.**

As part of an effective and integrated workforce retention strategy, we must ensure that all Canadians can incorporate technology into life and work, as well as protect their identities. Implementing a training program that complements the anticipated national digital economy strategy will allow for Canadians to use digital technology effectively while protecting their identity and security online. This would not only provide our workforce with access to labour market opportunities, but also provide employers direct access to a digitally experienced workforce ready to bring these skills to work.

Many regional populations within Canada, such as Northern Saskatchewan communities, have not had adequate access to, or training in, digital technology. A national strategy addressing these challenges would provide all Canadians with the necessary skills to not only enter the workforce, but increase success within it.

## **Conclusion**

Employers require access to skilled workers who bring an increasingly specialized level of skill into the workplace. Employees require access to training in order to develop and maintain these necessary skills. These successes form the foundation of a thriving and

sustainable Canadian economy. Targeted awareness and essential skills development campaigns will allow Canada to poise itself as a leader among nations during challenging international economic times. A collaborative approach linking national investment with provincial and territorial action will allow solid policy to direct positive action for workers and business alike.