

ALFI: Overview

What is ALFI?

The Adult Learner Friendly Institution (ALFI) concept began in 1999 with CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning), an American non-profit association which was founded in 1974. As part of its original study, CAEL conducted site visits at eight institutions, including Athabasca University in Alberta. CAEL then benchmarked the best practices in adult learning and shared them in two publications: *Findings of Original Benchmarking Study* (1999) and *Self-Evaluation Work Book for Colleges/Universities* (2003).

Who is the adult learner?

The definition of an adult learner varies depending on who is doing the defining. For the sake of the ALFICan pilot (described below), the project team decided not to use age as a definer, but rather to identify traits shared by adult learners, including:

- Delayed enrolment into postsecondary education or return after many years of absence
- Attending part-time (not necessarily aiming for a certificate or diploma)
- Financially independent (but not necessarily having required financial resources)
- Working full-time while enrolled
- Having independents other than a spouse (e.g., children, aging parents)
- Not having a standard high school diploma
- Frequently motivated to study for career reasons (e.g., career change, promotion, layoff, job loss)

ALFICan

ALFICan, which came out of CAEL's benchmarking efforts, is a national pilot project conducted in 2005-06. Led by the First Nations Technical Institute (Belleville) and funded by HRSDC, the project partnered 15 project participants from across Canada, including Cambrian (only Ontario college). The overall goal of the project was to test the CAEL benchmarks in a Canadian context. Each participant conducted a detailed self-assessment comparing their institution against a set of 8 guiding principles and a number of performance indicators under each principle.

The guiding principles relate to Outreach, Life & Career Planning, Financing, Assessment Of Learning Outcomes, Teaching-learning Process, Student Support Systems, Technology, and Strategic Partnerships. These are outlined in the attached document.

Each principle identified a number of performance indicators and required partners to provide evidence supporting that how they meet each performance indicator. Evidence examples included learner feedback, publications, written policies/procedures, staff training programs, learning outcomes, attestations, annual reports, etc.

Pilot Project Conclusions

- For most part, ALFI principles are applicable in Canadian context.
- ALFI principles are useful way to identify strengths, gaps, and inconsistencies in services to adults.
- Finance principle was problematic – wide variations in funding approaches across provinces.
- General consensus that the self-assessment *process* held the most value.
- Study confirmed ALFI Self-evaluation scale is reliable method of assessing organizations' performance against benchmarks.
- Some language may require tweaking to suit each institution's culture/environment.

For additional information, see www.alfican.ca.