CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET AND SKILLS RESEARCHER NETWORK

CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON

Adult Learning and Training: How do We Measure the Returns and What are They?

This is a Request for Proposals (RFP) for research on the returns to adult learning and training, and participation in developing an analytical framework for the measurement of the financial and nonfinancial returns to adult education and training. The Canadian Labour Market Skills and Researcher Network (CLSRN) is organizing a research team in response to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC) RFP, "Adult Learning and Training: How do We Measure the Returns and What are They?" CLSRN is seeking researchers who wish to become members of this team in order to submit a proposal to HRSDC. The co-ordinator of this research team is Arthur Sweetman (Queen's University).

HRSDC envisions this program of research as having three substantive tasks after the research program is established. The first two address "how to measure" the returns, and the third measures "what they are". First, an individual or small set of individuals will prepare a background document outlining the vocabulary of adult education (a dictionary of terms). Second, centred around a workshop the entire research team will develop a methodology/ analytical framework for measuring the returns to adult education and learning. We are seeking an individual or small set of individuals from the team to undertake leadership in these two areas and to write the synthesis reports on these topics. Third, CLSRN expects to support several research papers. The specific topics of interest are detailed at the back of this document. In addition, complementary topics measuring and identifying the returns to adult learning and training are welcome.

Our goal is to construct a coherent research program in which the team members will interact through three workshops spread over the term of the funding. Thus, while the list of potential topics is long, we intend to select papers that can be grouped into a coherent program. The specific focus of the program will be determined by the areas of commonality among submitted proposals. To allow us to construct the program, the application process will proceed in **two stages:**

1) An initial one page statement of intent in which the researcher proposes the main outlines of a substantive research paper. This is due by **October 23, 2009**
2) Based on these initial proposals, we will identify a main theme for the program and will invite researchers whose proposals fit closely with that theme to submit a more expanded 3 to 4 page proposal due **November 13, 2009.** We will notify researchers about their inclusion in CLSRN's proposed research program by approximately November 20.

Papers are to be of the quality submitted to peer-reviewed, refereed journals and authors are encouraged to ultimately submit to such forums (with appropriate acknowledgement of the funding source). Research studies will generally provide new empirical evidence that supports evidence-based policy decision making. Methodological studies and critical reviews of existing

literature, normally part of the first two phases of the program, are also of interest. CLSRN is particularly interested in supporting the research of new researchers in this area. For established researchers, proposals that involve graduate students or recent graduates in a significant role are also encouraged. CLSRN is interested in organizing a multi-disciplinary research team.

For the purposes of research support, the final product of the research will be a peer-reviewed working paper, and an associated PowerPoint presentation and executive summary. CLSRN will be organizing workshops at which researchers will present their research. Copyright of the research paper remains with the author(s). The working paper will appear in the CLSRN Working Paper Series, may be posted on a HRSDC web site, and may be reported in the CLSRN Newsletter. Working papers are expected to be 20-40 pages in length, although they could be somewhat longer than this standard in order to provide sufficient detail on methods used, results obtained, and discussion of policy implications.

Proposal requirements

Proposals and final working papers may be written in English or French.

1) Proposal Regarding Vocabulary/Dictionary of terms (Task 1), and Analytical Framework (Task 2)

Researchers are invited to apply to take the lead in (co-)authoring the report for task 1 (vocabulary/dictionary) and/or the team's report for task 2 (analytical framework) of the research program. A brief one page (or less) indication of areas of interest and CV is all that is required to apply to take a general role in co-ordinating and (co-)authoring either report. Remuneration for these tasks will be negotiated, but will be broadly similar to that outlined in (3) below.

Researchers wishing to undertake the extended development of a specific methodological/ analytical approach should submit an initial research proposal as in (2), and may be invited to subsequently submit an expanded proposal as in (3).

2) Initial Research Proposal for a Specific

Researchers are invited to submit proposals for specific projects. The initial proposal should be 1 page in length. The proposal should include the following:

    a. A brief description of the proposed research project with reference to related literatures and a description of the conceptual/theoretical framework to be used in the research;

    b. A list of the proposed data sources (where relevant) and a brief discussion of the main research challenges and research methods;

    c. The anticipated total duration of the project;

d. A list of the primary researchers involved in the project and their affiliations;
e. A total budget request and a brief breakdown of the allocation of that budget (e.g., to areas such as teaching release, travel, research assistant time, etc. – see the description under the Expanded Proposal, below)

Researchers must also submit a current copy of their CV with their proposal.

3) Expanded Proposal

Researchers whose initial proposal is accepted will be asked to submit an extended proposal. The expanded proposal should still be brief (e.g. 3-4 pages in length) and can take the form of the proposed outline of the research paper. The proposal should include the following:

a. A brief description of the proposed research project contextualized within the existing literature and including the conceptual/theoretical framework to be used in the research;
b. A description of, and rationale for, the data sources and research methods to be utilized as well as a discussion of potential challenges or research limitations;
c. A discussion of how the data (where relevant), methods and analysis proposed will address gender-based analysis;
d. The anticipated total duration of the project;
e. The names of the researcher(s), research assistants, etc. involved in the project with the activities to be carried out; proposals should demonstrate how the researcher(s) is/are qualified to carry out the various components of the proposed research;
f. A breakdown of the level of effort by each research project member.

Researchers must also provide a budget with a brief justification of the budget (including a breakdown of all costs). The budget can be used by researchers to meet any legitimate expenses associated with carrying out the research. Such expenses can include: teaching or administrative release (at the relevant local university rates for such release); research assistance; data collection; honorarium for author(s); and travel associated with conducting the research. The maximum budget for a project involving a literature review would be $15,000. The maximum budget for a project involving the analysis of secondary data would be $25,000. For projects requiring primary data collection, additional costs may be allowed if justified. Travel associated with presenting the paper at workshops and conferences organized by CLSRN will be covered separately. Additional amounts are available to cover the costs of accessing data at a Statistics Canada Research Data Centre (RDC).

Researchers must also submit a current copy of their CV with their proposal.

General Information

- If researchers plan to use data housed in an RDC, their proposal should (i) demonstrate need for access to confidential micro-data and (ii) the viability of the methods to be applied given the data to be analyzed.

- Government researchers are invited to submit proposals, either as principal investigators or as co-investigators. However, government researchers are not eligible for financial support.

- Proposals must involve new research that is not supported by other organizations. However, the proposed research may be related to, or an extension of, research supported elsewhere.

Timelines – Proposals, deliverables, and payments

The Initial One-page Proposal is due by Friday, October 23, 2009. Researchers will be contacted shortly thereafter to let them know if they are invited to submit an expanded proposal. If they are, the Expanded Proposal is due by Friday, November 13, 2009. If CLSRN's application is successful, it is anticipated that payments will be made upon submission of each deliverable as outlined below subject to the receipt of funds from, and the terms of the final contract signed with, HRSDC. The schedule is tentative and specific dates are to be determined.

October 23, 2009	Initial Proposals due
November 13, 2009	Expanded Proposals due (by invitation)
December 2009-January 2010	Notification of RFP results
January-February 2010	Workshop for Research Team to refine the research proposal in conjunction with HRSDC
Spring 2010	1) Prepare a "concepts and vocabulary" report (An individual or small set of authors) 2) Workshop for the research team to prepare a methodology / analytical framework report addressing the measurement of returns to adult education and learning in general (not exclusively financial/labour market returns) (20% of budget)

Note that approval to proceed with the individual research projects is conditional on completing the analytical framework to HRSDC's satisfaction. Members of the team need all participate in the development of the conceptual foundation of the analytical framework document, and an individual or small set of coauthors will draft the final report.

Mid-2010 to fall-2011	Conduct research on individual projects & prepare papers
Late spring/early summer 2011	Draft research report (10% of budget)
Early fall 2011	Final research report (30% of budget)
Late fall 2011	Present research report at workshop and prepare including PowerPoint summary slides and material for a synthesis report (40% of budget)

Proposals should be sent to: Katherine Meredith
Canadian Labour Market and Skills Researcher Network
Department of Economics
University of British Columbia
#997 – 1873 East Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

Proposals can also be submitted by email to: clsrn@interchange.ubc.ca

Enquiries about this research project can be directed to: Arthur Sweetman
School of Policy Studies
Queen's University
sweetman@queensu.ca

To learn more about CLSRN, please visit www.clsrn.econ.ubc.ca.

Research Program – Topics and Requirements

HRSDC is proposing to undertake a coherent research program that will help close the significant knowledge gaps in our understanding of the link not only between adult education/ training/ learning and economic outcomes, but also social outcomes through: the development of a consistent vocabulary for adult learning; the development of a coherent analytical framework for understanding and measuring the range of returns to learning that includes both economic and non-economic returns to learning; and the empirical testing of the new framework through measurements of the economic and non-economic returns to adult learning, and to learning by adults with low initial education and skill levels. HRSDC has identified a large number of key knowledge gaps and issues regarding adult learning outcomes that may be used as the basis for research, or other ideas may be put forward. The HRSDC list of knowledge gaps includes the following issues. (Some may be moved from one list to the other by authors.)

For Methodological Papers and for the Team Analytical Framework Report

a. What is the definition of adult learning? What activities comprise adult learning?
b. What is the distinction between informal and non-formal learning activities, and formal learning activities?
c. What are appropriate theoretical, analytical and methodological frameworks for understanding and measuring economic and non-economic returns to learning? Which is the best among these and why?
d. What elements of learning / skills development should be captured?
e. What learning outcomes – social, economic, private, public, employer, individual – can and should be considered?
f. What are the individual and societal returns to learning, including informal adult learning, and learning by adults with low skills and education levels?

g. How can the incidence and intensity of various dimensions of adult learning activities be captured and measured?

h. As the OECD acknowledges, human capital theory links education to economic outcomes, but there is not yet a widely accepted theory linking education to social outcomes (http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/2/37425660.pdf) and there is a need for more theory in this area.

i. Is it possible to do a broad cost-benefit analysis to determine where investments in learning are best placed?

For Papers Providing Empirical Estimates of the Returns to Adult Learning

a. Who should invest in adult learning activities?

b. What is the relative payoff of investing in formal, sustained training geared towards attaining credentials, versus episodic training?

c. Where and under what circumstances should adult learning activities be delivered to those in need?

d. What is the relative role of government, firms and individuals, in fostering investments in adult learning?

e. Is there a market failure in the provision of adult learning and training?

f. What are the best practices for adults with low education and/or low skills?

g. Social and economic inclusion issues with regards to people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and recent immigrants.

h. The aging baby boom generation has various needs for ongoing learning in order to remain in the labour market longer, while younger cohorts who will be replacing them require ongoing learning to be able to make up for the loss of experience and knowledge.

i. Given that much adult learning is job focused, is it also important that employers better understand the outcomes of employee skills development, and best practices?

j. Data on earnings show considerably more divergence in earnings within given levels and subject of formal educational attainment than between levels and subjects. Earnings data also show that those with higher levels of initial educational attainment earn more and see their earnings rise more with work experience. What's happening here? Do measurements of earnings truly reflect increased human capital as a result of learning? Or do they more accurately reflect a return to acquired credentials? Are there more accurate measures of learning than earning?

k. Specific sub-groups of the adult population including the self-employed, employees in small firms, blue-collar workers, older workers, and workers with low initial education, tend to participate less in formal education than other groups, and to engage primarily in informal training for the acquisition of job-related skills. Is this because these groups face particular barriers to formal education? What other reasons might account for this pattern?

l. Those who are arguably most in need of on-going learning – older workers, Aboriginal workers, immigrant workers, workers in rural areas, and people with disabilities – are less likely to receive employer-sponsored training. Is the perceived or real lack of returns

to learning by the low-skilled and lowly educated itself a barrier to participation and/or employer investment in their on-going learning? Is informal training the most effective means of learning job-related skills?

m. There is some evidence that a concern about "poaching" prevents some employers from investing in employee training. Are there other reasons why some employers hesitate to invest in employee-training? Are employers educated about the returns to their company productivity as a result of employee-training?

n. How valuable is informal education?

o. Our understanding of the non-economic returns to learning is vastly underdeveloped. It is increasingly acknowledged that learning produces social as well as economic returns to individuals, firms and society at large. For instance, growing evidence indicates that the connections between increased education and health are causal (OECD, 2007). According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2008), continuous learning over the life course has been clearly linked to everything from economic prosperity to greater political participation. It is also theorized that education results in greater civic and social participation, decreased poverty and crime, and greater social cohesion. However, the nature and extent of these connections remain to be determined. How does learning affect these other indicators? What is the size of the effect?

p. Does adult learning yield non-financial and social returns to the same extent as children's learning appears to? To what extent does the age of the learner, the learner's skill and education level, and the type of learning engaged in produce social returns?

q. Is the positive effect of education and learning reduced by other factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, or mental/physical disability? If so, how?

Researchers are encouraged to propose research projects which fill these research gaps or address complementary research gaps not specifically identified above.

Gender- based analysis (GBA) – GBA means looking at the differences between women and men in both outcomes and determinants. Researchers shall identify, where possible, how the data, methods and analysis proposed will address GBA. Where the researcher does not believe GBA is possible, for example due to data limitations, an explanation should be provided.

Statistics Canada Datasets that may be useful (not an exhaustive list)

National Graduates Survey
Follow-up Graduate Survey
Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada
Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics
Adult Education and Training Survey
Census
General Social Survey Cycles 9, 14 and others

International Adult Literacy Survey
International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey
Survey of Approaches to Educational Planning
Workplace Employment Survey
Adult Literacy and Lifestyles Survey
Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities
Ontario Adult Literacy Survey
Post-Secondary Education Participation Survey
Survey of Displaced Workers
Survey of Earned Doctorates
School Leavers Survey
Self Sufficiency Survey
Access and Support to Education and Training Survey