

# Alberta-North

## 2009-2010 Annual Report

### Section 3 - Project Updates and New Initiatives

Alberta-North continuously assesses its successes while identifying areas that need improvement. Having invested in the development of a strategic four-year business plan in 2009 the Board of Directors, staff, and stakeholders of Alberta-North refer to this plan for guidance and direction, and modify it while working toward its collective vision. As a grassroots initiative, Alberta-North is open to change, new ideas, and practical solutions that meet the needs of learners and communities.

Since its inception Alberta-North has created a distributed learning and support model that has received accolades from numerous northern and remote and rural service providers. Though the diversity of our learners and communities' present challenges, Alberta-North's first approach is always to find a way to make it work while considering the political, departmental, and regional factors that impact success. The following project updates and new initiatives reflect Alberta-North's commitment to the model while responding to this collection of factors.

#### Section 3.1 - Access Symposium – Update

The Access Symposium is an annual two-day event held onsite within the Alberta-North service region. The purpose of the annual symposium is to provide an opportunity for members and stakeholders to discuss current topics in distance education, to network, and to attend training sessions relevant to Alberta-North, including technology updates and reporting requirements. In 2009-2010 the event was hosted in May by Northern Lakes College at the Peace River Campus.<sup>11</sup> Of the 78 delegates that attended the Symposium, 39 were CAP Coordinators (50%). Feedback from the delegates indicated that 98% felt they had a better understanding of Alberta-North while 94% said they learned something new that would help them in their role supporting Alberta-North services.

The coordination of Alberta-North's Access Symposium could not happen without the commitment of the host member organization and cooperation from the other post-secondary members who facilitate attendance at the symposium. Considering the large size of Alberta-North's service region, the majority of the delegates must travel a great distance to attend the symposium. Also, many of the delegates are the only staff person at a Community Access Point and diligently attempt to arrange alternate access services for their learners and their community. Needless to say, Alberta-North, its members, and stakeholders eagerly look forward to the annual Access Symposium.

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For many of the delegates, the Access Symposium is their only opportunity to discuss with, and learn from, their counterparts while simultaneously being reinforced and motivated that they are an important part of a much larger collective.

Realizing the importance of contact and connection, Alberta-North will be linking opportunities for CAP Coordinators to other online professional learning events, including a continuing partnership with eCampusAlberta and BCcampus for a monthly online live event. Professional development will be shifted from a one-time learning experience to a series of continuing online sessions provided throughout the academic year.

### **Section 3.2 - Alberta-North Certification Program – Update**

Recognizing the unique learning requirements for staff to competently and confidently provide front-line services for distance education learners across northern remote communities, Alberta-North set a strategic goal in its 2009-2013 Business Plan to create and implement a Certification Program targeted to the training and development of CAP Coordinators located across its 87 Community Access Points. In 2009-2010 the foundation for this Certification Program was created and reviewed by members and stakeholders. The Certification Program is integrated with the investments to which Alberta-North had previously committed under its recently launched *Staff Enhancement Program*<sup>12</sup>. The *Staff Enhancement Program* includes a preparatory step to enhance the technology abilities of CAP Coordinators which is intended to assist them in taking advantage of the distance technology available to them for professional development and social networking through Alberta-North.

The Certification Program focuses on helping CAP Coordinators make an impact in their community while supporting Alberta-North's Community Access Point initiative. The program is comprised of two core elements, a required peer coaching activity and community-based project, and a series of chosen professional learning options from supporting the use of technology for learning, to supporting adult learners, and project management. A letter of competency from each CAP Coordinator's employing institution will be forwarded to Alberta-North. This, combined with a record of completion of the peer coaching and community project, will complete the requirements for issuing a Certificate of Completion.

12 Alberta-North's *Staff Enhancement Program* had 92 on-line participants in 2009-2010

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### *Coordination with Athabasca University's Learning Communities Initiative*

Athabasca University has secured funding for a “Learning Communities” project that launched in select communities in September 2010. The vision of the Learning Communities project is to assist northern Aboriginal communities to create a viable future for themselves through developing the capacity to initiate, foster and support learning opportunities. Alberta-North is working closely with the Learning Communities project to build support in other communities not already supported through Alberta-North. In addition, Alberta-North has created a “Professional Learning” site to be shared by the Alberta-North Certification Program and the Learning Communities Project.

### *Certification Program Evaluation*

The Alberta-North Certification Program is designed to focus service providers on making an impact in their own community through a required community project, and to enhance the Alberta-North network across Community Access Points through a peer coaching component. It is critical to understand its impact on service providers and ultimately rural communities. A program evaluation research proposal was developed to measure the impact of the Certification Program, and to provide feedback and information to support the Program's refinement and improvement, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the capacity of each of the 87 communities connected with Alberta-North's Community Access Point initiative. A grant application to the Alberta Rural Development Network fund was approved.

### **Section 3.3 - Increased Community Access Point Site Hours - Update**

Access of Alberta-North's Community Access Point resources and services reflects the needs of the learners and the communities being supported. With 87 Community Access Points across more than 1.4 million square kilometers, the need to be flexible is paramount to Alberta-North's success. Alberta-North has learned that the business hours dedicated to allow access to the resources and services of the Community Access Point in one community may not be the best fit for the community next door. Also, access may be cyclical in any given community depending upon the changing needs of the labor market and/or demographic fluctuations. In 2006-2007 Alberta-North identified a growing demand for increased access to Alberta-North's resources and services in a number of Community Access Points. In response to this demand, Alberta-North launched a pilot project in 2007-2008 to increase the hours of operation at select Community Access Points. Feedback from these Community Access Points on the reason for the requested increase in hours is provided in [Table 3.3.A](#). Alberta-North provided funding for more than 73 hours per week at CAP sites allowing flexibility for learners to complete or participate in courses they

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wouldn't have had. As of 2010 the continuation of increased hours will be sponsored under Athabasca University's *Learning Communities Project*.

<b>Table 3.3.A - Reasons for Increased Hours at Community Access Point Sites</b>		
<b>Community Access Point Site</b>	<b>Increased Hours Per Week</b>	<b>Primary Reason for Increase</b>
Conklin - Keyano College	6 hours in the evening during the academic year and extension into May and June	Increased access to community members who had previously not been able to attend due to daytime jobs. The extension into May and June was intended to provide access to high school students completing career searches and to allow them to explore the number of programs available to them through online delivery.
Fort McKay - Keyano College	3 hours in the evening during academic year plus extension into May and June	Increased access to services and programming available through the internet. Most community members do not have high speed internet and many do not even have computers.
Gregoire - Keyano College	3 hours in the evening during academic year plus extension into May and June	Provide a needed, positive, education related environment for community members.
Janvier - Keyano College	3 hours in the evening during academic year plus extension into May and June	Provide professional development courses for teachers and community connection point for youth. Increased access to cover May and June to allow for current on-line students to complete courses.
John D'Or Prairie - Northern Lakes College	Extended hours into May and June	Increased access to cover May and June to allow for current on-line students to complete courses.
East Prairie - Northern Lakes College	5 hours in the evening during academic year	Increased evening access to resources for working residents and community groups.
Peace River - Northern Lakes College	9 hours in the evening during academic year	
Lac La Biche - Portage College	14 hours in the evening (M-T) during academic year	Increased evening access to videoconferencing resources to accommodate 74 registered students.
Cold Lake - Portage College	16 hours in the evening (M-T) during academic year	
St. Paul - Portage College	14 hours in the evening (M-T) during academic year	

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### CAP Coordinator Comments on Increased Hours

*“Due to the traffic created, the public image of the CAP site grew. The First Nation has requested that we continue to provide twice weekly evening coverage and they are promoting, through their employment and training offices, the idea of daytime employees coming to the CAP site in the evenings for online courses”.*

Conklin CAP Site Coordinator

*“During the evening hours, the CAP Coordinator hosted a number of high school students who were taking online courses but could not access their high school computers in the evening. These students are the future distance learners of Janvier.”*

Janvier CAP Site Coordinator

*“If the CAP service was not available in John D’Or Prairie, students would be required to drive approximately 90 minutes each way on an all-weather gravel road and paved highway to High Level or Fort Vermilion to access services.”*

John D’Or CAP Site Coordinator

*“Allowing access to the CAP site from October to June provided potentially new students with access to technology and student support services required to complete the necessary paperwork for post-secondary training in the fall. Without this access, the students would have been expected to travel to High Prairie for TABE testing and completing financial applications.”*

East Prairie CAP Site Coordinator

*Student feedback on the value of this service was extremely positive. There was a reduction in the number of concerns logged with the technology, less students attending without the appropriate handouts and less issues with classrooms being locked. The students felt that the level of quality of their experience had improved. It was such a success that the College chose to self fund these positions in 2010-11.*

Portage College

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### Section 3.4 – New Community Access Points - Updates

In April 2010, NorQuest College successfully opened a new Community Access Point site in the City of Wetaskiwin to serve disadvantaged learners who are unable to travel to Edmonton because of a lack of transportation or other socio-economic barriers. These barriered residents include the under or unemployed, single parents, women, Aboriginal and Métis.

In addition to the new Community Access Point opened by NorQuest College in the City of Wetaskiwin, Portage College opened a new Community Access Point in the Village of Boyle in December, 2009. This new site was launched in partnership with the Village of Boyle, Alberta Energy Corridor, Aspen View School Division and the Boyle school. Prior to the installation of the Alberta-North Community Access Point site, The Village of Boyle had limited access to training offered into individual homes by distance institutions. At that time, Portage College delivered customized training in collaboration with funding partners. The new Community Access Point in Boyle will support individualized and customized training and will provide residents with direct communication to Portage College staff to ensure new opportunities are explored.

### Section 3.5 Technology Investments – Update

Each year Alberta-North works in partnership with the member organizations to ensure the resources needed for distance education services are working properly and upgraded as required. Investment in technology is one of Alberta-North's largest expenditures. Hence, maintenance and upgrading of the resources across the Community Access Points and setting up new Community Access Points is a fiscal priority for Alberta-North. In 2009-2010 Alberta-North invested more than \$54,000 in technology resources.<sup>13</sup> This investment, when combined with the resources incrementally added over the last five years places a value of over \$500,000 in technology equipment and software assets that are maintained and regularly upgraded by Alberta-North. [Table 3.5.A](#) shows the technology expenditures for 2009-2010.

<b>Table 3.5.A Alberta-North 2009-2010 Technology Investments</b>			
<b>Steward</b>	<b>CAP Site</b>	<b>Technology Invested</b>	<b>Overall Cost</b>
Keyano College	Fort Chipewyan	Video Conference System	\$16,000.00
NorQuest College	Main Campus	Video Conference System	\$16,000.00
NorQuest College	Main Campus	Computer System with Projector	\$2,250.00
NorQuest College	Westlock	Multi-function Printer	\$840.00
NorQuest College	Wetaskiwin	New CAP Site Set-Up	\$19,032.00

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### Section 3.6 – Advertising Campaign – Update

Alberta-North continued to promote awareness of its programs and Community Access Points in 2009-2010. Advertising in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories took place throughout the fall of 2009 and winter of 2010. Utilizing radio advertising, the campaign built upon its previous campaign, ‘The perfect blend to kickstart your education’, and continued to promote the advantages of studying in your community at one of 87 Community Access Points. Signs and posters were supplied to Community Access Point Coordinators to complement radio ads and build additional excitement and curiosity in their communities. Radio ads encouraged listeners to visit Alberta-North’s web site, and as such, [www.alberta-north.ca](http://www.alberta-north.ca) reported an increase in traffic when radio ads were running. There was also a lowered bounce rate<sup>14</sup> indicating that those who visited the web site found the information as communicated in the ad. Listeners browsed not only the home page, but other pages such as the course calendar and online learning resources. Community Access Point Coordinators also noted an increase in inquiries and visits to Community Access Points during this time, which reflects success at even the grassroots level.

### Section 3.7 – Research Project – Update

The Access to the Future’s Innovation Fund project, “Attracting, Preparing, and Retaining Aboriginal and Low Literacy Learners in Northern Communities” completed the research phase in June 2010, and now has moved into activities that are based on the research findings.

Both survey and literature review results underlined students’ need for on-going, substantive supports, and for role-modeling. With these findings in mind, the project will undertake a five month, January – May 2011, mentorship pilot project, to provide mentorship training and will match five Community Access Point Coordinators with 1-3 interested students each. This pilot project is called the Alberta-North Personal Learning Project. As well, a mentorship resources library is being developed in conjunction with Athabasca University’s Learning Communities: Indigenous Communities project and will be located in the Alberta-North Professional Development website.

Over the next several months, the Innovation Fund project will also develop and support the Alberta-North Certification program, and will create a handbook that describes strategies and approaches to attract, prepare, and retain under-represented learners in northern communities.

14 The bounce rate represents the percentage of initial visitors to a site who “bounce” away to a different site, rather than continue on to other pages within the same site.

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### **Section 3.8 - Welcome NorQuest College - New**

Effective October 6, 2009, NorQuest College officially joined forces with Alberta-North. Representing an extension of Alberta-North's resources and services into areas surrounding Edmonton, NorQuest College and the other Alberta-North members realigned the stewardship designation of four Community Access Point sites along the Edmonton corridor – Westlock, Barrhead, Whitecourt, Hinton – to be included under NorQuest College's stewarding responsibilities. NorQuest College has already identified a number of other potential Community Access Point sites that could be incorporated under the Alberta-North stewardship model – Jasper, Edson, Stony Plain, Drayton Valley, and Camrose. Alberta-North members and stakeholders will be working collectively to facilitate this growth over the next few years.

### **Section 3.9 - Electronic Data Collection - New**

As noted in Section 2.1, the collection of Community Access Point activity data has historically been conducted through a paper-based checklist. In 2009-2010, Alberta-North member Northern Lakes College proposed the implementation by Alberta-North of an electronic data collection process to decrease the amount of time required to collect the data in the future, while simultaneously increasing the consistency of the data collected from the 87 Community Access Points. In consultation with Northern Lakes College's Department of Institutional Research, Alberta-North's Community Access Point Activity Report will be moved to a web-based reporting platform to be launched in the 2010-2011 academic year. Preliminary training for Alberta-North staff along with technical supports will be ongoing from Northern Lakes College's Department of Institutional Research throughout this launching period.