

LITERACY QUEBEC

COVID-19 SURVEY REPORT

June 2020
11 Respondents
100% Response Rate

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SURVEY OVERVIEW

On June 16, 2020, Literacy Quebec sent out an online survey to 11 member organizations.

We asked about the needs and challenges of students, volunteers, and the organization, as well as the experience of working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey closed on June 30, 2020 with a 100% response rate. We are pleased to share the summarized responses.

TOP 3 RESOURCES for Student Success:

1. Access to a broadband or WiFi connection (9/11 respondents ranked this as the most important resource)
2. Training on getting online and/or accessing digital learning tools (7/11 respondents ranked this as the 2nd most important resource)
3. Print learning materials was ranked the 3rd most important resource

SECTION 1: Impact on Students

Access to hardware

One of the biggest challenges adult-learners faced was access to hardware. Only 1 organization was able to say that upwards of 81%-100% of their students had access to a laptop or tablet, *as well as* obtain easy access to internet/Wi-Fi.

The majority of respondents (7 out of 11) noted that less than 60% of their student-bodies had access to hardware (computer, tablet, or laptop) for online learning.

Note: "Easy access to internet/Wi-Fi" includes: access to affordable internet in the region, or being able to easily access a space with free Wi-Fi

ACCESS TO WI-FI & INTERNET

Impact on Students

Note: Access to internet and Wi-Fi varies greatly between councils and regions.



"Over 80% of our students have easy-access to internet or Wi-Fi"

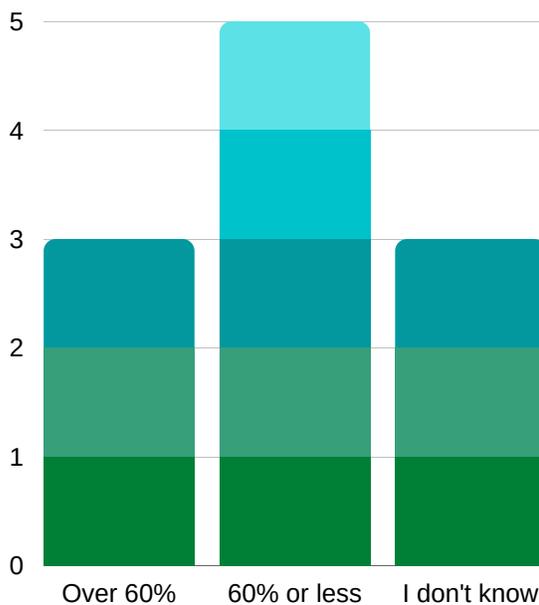
"Less than 60% of our students have access to internet or Wi-Fi"



5 respondents claimed that over 80% of their student-body could easily access the internet or Wi-Fi; however, 5 respondents claimed that fewer than 60% of their students had easy-access to the internet or Wi-Fi.

Only 3 organizations that selected "fewer than 60%" are located in rural areas. While geographic location may be a variable in determining the level of access adult-learners have to internet/ Wi-Fi, it is not the root-cause of the issue.

Please note: 1 respondent did not know about their students' internet/Wi-Fi status.



When asked about smartphone-access:

- 3 respondents claimed that 61%-80% of their students had access to a smartphone with data.
- 5 respondents said that fewer than 60% of their students had access to a smartphone with data.
- 3 respondents did not know the status of their students' smartphone access.

One of the challenges we've identified is the lack of available hardware to lend to students in need.

ACCESS TO HARDWARE

Organizations in rural areas, and cities alike are struggling with lack of hardware and resources.

Out of the 11 organizations, only 2 claimed to have enough hardware to lend to students in need.

5 respondents had limited resources, and 4 respondents did not have the capacity to lend hardware at all.

The Good News:

While most member-organizations have had students ask to borrow hardware, 5 organizations noted that fewer than 20% of their students have made this request.

- 3 organizations who have had students ask to borrow hardware, did not have any available resources to lend.
- 2 out of the 11 organizations did have the resources to accommodate students in need of hardware.



On a scale from “Not important” (value = 0) to “Fundamental” (value = 100), our respondents gave an average answer of **87.5 in regards to the importance of consistent, ongoing contact with learners as a contributor to student success.**

SECTION 2: Impact on Volunteers

Top 3 Resources

The top 3 resources for volunteer-success include:

- Access to a broadband or WiFi connection (8 respondents ranked this #1)
- Training on getting online and/or accessing digital learning tools (8 of respondents ranked this #2)
- Print learning materials was ranked the 3rd most important resource



Unlike adult-learners, volunteers (generally) have easier access to hardware (e.g. computer tablet laptop) and Internet/Wi-Fi).

7 respondents claimed that 81%-100% of their volunteers have access to hardware, as well as the internet/Wi-Fi.

Like adult-learners, volunteers had reduced access to a smartphone with data than to hardware and internet/Wi-Fi

-  • 3 respondents answered that 81%-100% of their volunteers had access to a smartphone with data.
-  • 3 respondents answered that 61%-80% of their volunteers had access to a smartphone with data.
-  • 3 respondents answered that 41%-60% of their volunteers had access to a smartphone with data.
-  • 2 respondents did not know



SECTION 3

Remote Learning

Note: the following section will **only include answers from the 5 member-organizations** who were tutoring students at the time this survey was conducted.

Key Findings

- 3 respondents identified a decline in volunteer morale during COVID-19
 - 1 respondent identified no decline in volunteer morale
 - 1 did not know
- All respondents identified **“volunteers expressing difficulty keeping students engaged”** as a challenge their organization was facing.

In order to practice social distancing, volunteers have had to use remote forms of communication (i.e. Zoom, email, IM, phone) to tutor adult-learners.

When asked about the efficacy of remote learning:

4 out of 5 respondents believed that communicating remotely did not have the same impact as in-person communication.

1 respondent did consider communicating with students remotely to be as effective as interacting with them in-person.

Online meetings (Zoom, GoToMeetings, Skype, etc.) as well as telephone and text, have been the preferred method of student-communication for organizations during COVID-19. However, a few organizations have also used:



Email
(2 respondents)



Social media/
instant-messaging
(2 respondents)



Online learning
platforms
(1 respondent)

Top 3 Resources

When asked what resources were needed by organizations in order to better connect with students remotely, our respondents answered the following (in order of priority):

1. "Training for volunteers on digital learning tools"
2. "Training for staff on digital learning tools"
3. "Additional funding"



In your own words please describe the barriers your students face to access remote-learning during COVID-19.

"Our students are typically living in rural regions where even wifi is not set up. They need to use satellite to get internet. The cost for satellite is around \$60 a month so since they are typically on social assistance, they can not afford the cost [of] internet. They also do not have the technology."

"Before COVID we already had issues with finding suitable public places to host lessons, now it is even more of a problem. Many of our communities are STILL without internet so even if learners and volunteers wanted to connect, they couldn't. People are more concerned with surviving than learning right now. Even in communities where the internet is available it is often very slow, cuts in and out and many of our volunteers who would be willing to tutor online cannot because of bad internet connections."

"Access to free WiFi has impacted many of our learners. Many are not used to using 'cloud' storage to save and file their documents so this has to be taught. Learning styles are different and learners may experience a learning curve transitioning to a virtual platform. Volunteers, depending on their age, face similar challenges, some have technical know-how and some have little. Face-to-face learning was much better for a lot of our learners and this posed challenges to ensure that [Organization] kept its learners engaged. We had to support our programme delivery people too if they needed extra help with the platforms [Organization] was using. For example, hardly anyone used Zoom 3 months ago so that had to be taught to everyone we engaged with."

cont'd

"Preoccupied with other concerns to even consider tutoring again (caring for children or family, facing unemployment, etc). Lack of technology at home."

"Most are low-income [and] cannot afford internet in the home."

Please tell us about any solutions you've found to reduce barriers for students to access remote-learning during COVID-19?

"We connect with them over the phone. We send them literacy oriented activities by post. We created open call-in hours so people can reach us, and we have specific hours liked to helping people understand the ever changing covid protocol. However the quality of 1-1 support is limited and it is mostly staff doing it now."

"We are surveying to try to get a better picture of barriers and what learners need at this time. Looking into funding to create remote tutoring opportunities and toll for potential purchase of technology."

"Still trying to get the government and internet providers to understand the barriers the cost has."

"One-on-one tutoring: moved to a reduced capacity and individual appointments were offered. Project delivery: Moved to an online platform, there was an impact on the project finally, the objectives were achieved. Lifelong Learning for seniors: Got off to a rocky start but tutoring the seniors how to use digital platforms paid dividends. The programme was able to fulfill its scheduled sessions until the end of June."

"We're setting up a laptop lending program. And we're waiting with anticipation for internet to be finally made available throughout our region (apparently in the works)."



Are there best practices that you have identified in working remotely with students during COVID-19?

"Best practices would include [providing] access to [the] internet and tablets for our learners"

"Shorter lessons, more concise plans."

"We're just getting started here and still trying to recruit new tutors that are willing to tutor online (most of our current tutors do not feel comfortable enough with technology to do it) So, our primary focus is recruitment and training and we only have a few students set up with online lessons at the moment."



"Look to their needs first and take cue from their pace as they can be facing unprecedented difficulties: unemployment, care of young children, fear of working if in essential service, isolation."

"Keep it short, keep it simple. Don't overload learners with information that is being provided by other organizations including government sources. Don't offer advice based on personal experience, refer learners to experts or find the information for them and go over it together to ensure comprehension. Reiteration that [Organization]'s role is literacy services."



Top five learning resources to support students remotely

Note: Only 4/5 organizations offered responses

	Resource 1	Resource 2	Resource 3	Resource 4	Resource 5
Respondent 1	Zoom	Pro Literacy	Our own resources/ library	Google classroom	ESL library
Respondent 2	Various online materials widely available	ABC Life Literacy Canada	N/A	N/A	N/A
Respondent 3	News4you	Active reader	Websites	Tablets	Quick reads
Respondent 4	Pro Literacy	Grassroots press material	Actively Learn	ESL Library	New Readers Press



How are you tracking student-progress during COVID-19?

"Regular check ins. We haven't developed a good system yet."

"Reports from tutors."

"We are not prepared to track anything. [We are] just trying to supply teams with resources if they have resumed some tutoring."

"Phone calls."

Have the needs of your students changed in any other ways (not addressed above) since switching to a fully-remote setup? Please explain:

- *"Increased need for digital literacy."*
- *"Not possible to answer. We've not reached the point of evaluation and we've very limited human resources to do any research until the next funding year."*
- *"Too few working to have noted any needs."*

SECTION 4: Your Organization

Note: the following section will include answers from all 11 respondents



Key Findings

- Only 3 respondents were registering new students at the time of this survey
- Registration (for August & the Fall) were being conducted via Zoom-calls, as well as telephone
- All 11 respondents identified limited (or reduced) access to the office as one of the most significant changes or challenges they were facing
- While 6 out of 11 organizations had to temporarily layoff staff, only 1 had to permanently layoff staff
- Almost half of the respondents (5 out of 11) have had their fundraising events cancelled, due to the COVID-19 crisis

Other unforeseen challenges organizations were facing during to COVID-19

- **Stress brought-on from working remotely/at home** (2 respondents gave this answer)
- Added internet expenses from working from home
- Cancellation of community-based programming (until the Spring)
- Closing of resource centre
- Adapting to distance learning

8 out of 11 respondents agreed that “availability of printed or digital education materials” was the least critical concern upon reopening

The biggest concerns facing most organizations upon reopening, in order of priority

- Volunteers stepping away/ availability of volunteers
- Students dropping out of literacy program
- Restrictions on social distancing



Only 4 organizations had policies & procedures in place for the reopening phase, which included:

Creating a "Policies and Procedures" committee



Purchasing personal protective equipment for staff and students



9 respondents claimed that they did not have adequate protective equipment (e.g. masks, sanitizer, plexiglas, signage etc.) needed for reopening, nor the budget to procure these items



Fortunately, 10 out of the 11 respondents *did* have supports in place for human resources

These included:

- Flexible work hours
- Check-ins twice a week via Zoom
- An understanding and compassionate Board
- Materials provided to work from home
- Open-door to discuss issues
- Alternating office hours



Final Survey Comments

*"Thanks for the survey...**Organizations in rural regions like my own are struggling with satellite vs wifi vs dial up internet. The cost to supply it seems to increase the future away people are from town centres.** A challenge I had not foreseen!! Look forward to seeing the results. Thanks. The kind of support our organizations need."*

*"**LQ has done an amazing job over the last months keeping the members engaged via the weekly meetups.** Lots of general member support was available. Care packages were well-received. **Main concerns would be for funding not to be delayed and for the government to realize that this year it is particularly vital for deposits to be made on time...**"*

cont'd

"Everything changes so quickly. It is hard to teach some individuals the technology. They need someone beside them most of the time until it sinks in. Only then can you move on to the 'other' tutoring. Some just can't do remote."



"I think we need to identify & quantify the real costs of making a shift, so that our funders do not assume that since our student levels have decreased we do not need funds. I think we are stuck in a difficult place, when the shift to digital is not realistic for the most vulnerable we are trying to reach. There is a huge need to advocate for affordable and accessible Internet. Creativity will be critical. We need to look at new opportunities: online support groups, digital tutors or coaches to help with the technical stuff, etc. We need to document our best practices so that we are not all re-inventing the wheel. We need to ask learners for their experiences and let that guide us."

"Definitely need more training and awareness on adapting to this online reality. All our community activities cancelled, working in the schools, so important to stay in contact with the other councils for strategies to be shared."

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