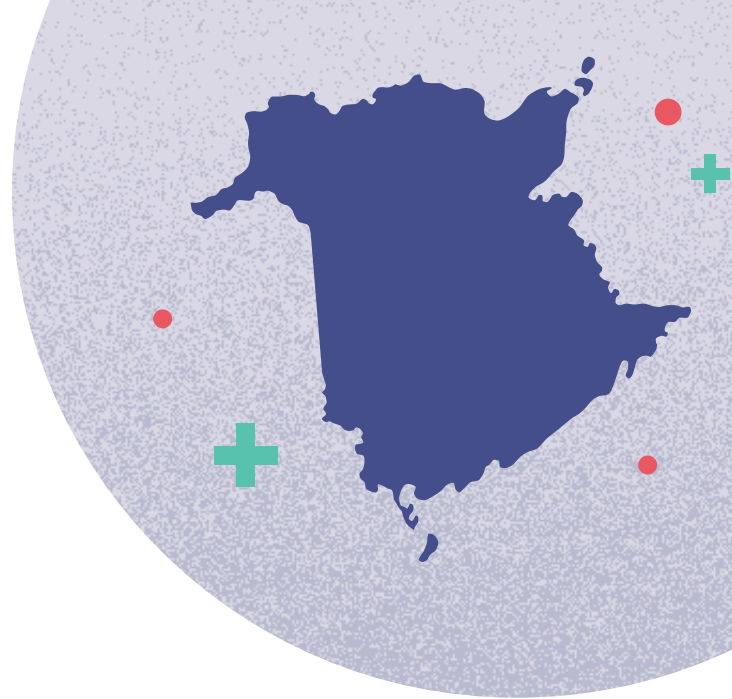




Early  
Childhood  
Education Lab



This booklet includes an overview  
of the prototype tested by the:

## Newfoundland and Labrador team as part of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Training Lab.

The NL team chose to tackle the lack of support for those who help educators plan their career and advance their education. Four provincial teams worked with an embedded design coach from the NouLAB team to design, implement, and evaluate a field prototype of their social innovation concept. A prototype is a preliminary model of something from which other forms are developed; a representation of a design idea used to get feedback and generate learning. Live testing of prototypes was conducted during spring and summer of 2023, and evaluation was conducted in May/June 2023.

To find summaries of the other three prototypes, their key findings and recommendations can be accessed at:

<https://ecelaboepe.ca/> or email [innovate@noulab.org](mailto:innovate@noulab.org).

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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and Signal49 Research.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.



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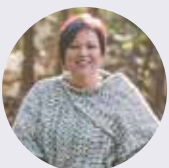
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## The Challenge

Team Newfoundland and Labrador identified the importance of relevant PL that is delivered as part of ECEs' paid work time (not on their own time and expense). Paid professional learning is an important part of enhancing quality within centres and ongoing development of practice for ECEs. Though supports exist to run a PL close out day (a day where a centre is closed to families and the staff engage in planned professional development together as their paid workday), many administrators are unaware of the options available to them.

The original concept the team developed focused on a database of professional learning opportunities (such as topics, programs, and available facilitators) in Newfoundland and Labrador that would be accessible to all. The database would help to improve administrator knowledge, reduce the time they need to spend on identifying PL opportunities, and assist with accessing support for PL days within a centre.




# The Prototype

## Supporting Two Centres to Host a Close Out Day with a PL Toolkit

The prototype evolved to focus on supporting access to the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) funding to host a PL close out day for two (or more) centres who have never previously hosted one.

### The prototype included:

- Collaboration and support from the government QEP consultant to help the administrator plan the close out day and access funding
- Collaboration and support from the PL Coordinator at AECENL to access top up funding for the close out day
- A detailed informational toolkit covering funding info, process checklists, sample templates such as a letter to parents



There was a good level of interest from centres approached to participate in the prototype. The prototype aimed to engage two centres in a shared region to participate together. Centres were selected based on regional location (two centres in rural areas in close enough proximity to potentially collaborate on a PL day) and existing relationships with the QEP team. Six centres were approached to participate in the prototype and of those:

- Four expressed interest, and two were selected because of their availability.
- Two never responded to the outreach email

The prototype aimed to explore two core learning goals:

- 1 Does the PL Toolkit make it easier and less intimidating for administrators to plan a PL close out day for their team?
- 2 Does the prototype approach of the government and association working together to deliver support and funding around PL close out days increase awareness and uptake of existing PL infrastructure in NL?

The prototype test resulted in two sister centres outside of the metro region (St. John's) running a PL close out day for the first time, using support from QEP and AECENL. The test included consultation, the information toolkit, templates, and the Lab prototype fund to run the day.



## The Test Findings

The prototype test findings indicated that the PL Toolkit and QEP and AECENL working together did make it easier for the administrator to plan the close out day. In addition, there are signals that the prototype has already increased awareness of the existing supports.

Some unexpected findings of the prototype included the level of collaboration and relationship building that took place as a result, signals of improving overall capacity in the system, and the surfacing of questions around PL funding structure and incentives in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Further details of each of these findings are outlined below.

### Increased Awareness of Professional Learning Supports

The toolkit prototype is innovative in bringing a 360 view of the different supports that centres can access for a PL close out day from across the ecosystem. The test findings indicate that this brings clarity and awareness to many different stakeholders, with early signals that it may increase interest and uptake in accessing the available supports.

- Other centre administrators are hearing about the prototype through word of mouth and reaching out directly to the prototype team to ask for help in Professional Learning Close Out days.
- One administrator who reached out had never heard of close out days.
- Professional Learning consultants are also noting an uptake in interest as a result of the prototype.
- In addition, the provincial government and AECENL teams expressed that by building the toolkit together and consolidating information on all available PL supports, they built additional clarity and knowledge about the existing QEP and AECENL grant programs, how they operate, what's included and how to access them.

*“We’ve kind of decided that this is gonna be the year now to try and push more professional development using those professional learning days and now [we’re] able to use this toolkit to help centers take advantage of those two close up days.”*

- Test Participant

*“It’s definitely the idea of bringing supports into one place. That didn’t exist before. A place where you could find out what OGP, QEP and AECENL was going to support you with for this one closeout day. You would have to have been sharp enough or keen enough to put all those threads together yourself.”*

- Test Participant



## Making it Easier to Run a Professional Learning Day

The prototype test findings show that the toolkit and wrap-around support from the QEP program and AECENL make it easier for an administrator to run a professional learning day and access the funding available.

- The QEP consultant and centre admin sat down together and went through the toolkit step by step as a way to scaffold the conversation about planning the PL day, indicating that having information centralised and in a logical order is a helpful tool.
- While reporting that the toolkit was helpful, the centre administrator felt that the most supportive element in planning the PL day was having access to the Quality Consultant, especially going through the process for the first time.
- AECENL has had 2-3 people reach out to request being added to the facilitator database, which is a step in the direction of having facilitators available across the province in different regions.
- The centre admin highlighted that now they had run one close out day that was a great success, it would be easier to get continued buy in from the owner, parents and staff to run future days.

*“The toolkit is wonderful cause it’s step by step. You can’t go wrong.”*

- Test Participant

*“I found the checklist quite easy to be able to go down and follow down through and to work with her and, and you know, it seemed to me that it was very easy for her to understand as well, like, what’s what you need to do each step along the way.”*

- Test Participant

## Adding Capacity to the System

By bringing stakeholders together from across the system and centralising information, the prototype test shows signals of adding capacity to the system.

For ECEs and administrators on the ground, the prototype close out day led to renewed excitement and morale building.

The prototype also shows potential for speeding up and catalysing efforts of both QEP and AECENL, by leaning on each other for input, collaboration, and being able to point administrators to the right person for support.

*“It’s a more complete picture for me, but it’s also a faster route to accomplishing things. For example, like I didn’t have to hunt anybody down to help get feedback on what should be in the reflective form.”*

- Test Participant

*“Like all the girls loved it. They even went home and looked up stuff that we talked about and signed up for their own PL hours.”*

- Test Participant

*“it helps us to maybe have a bigger caseload to be able to get through each quarter. One, we have a toolkit and two, we have AECENL as you know, as that resource to be like, okay, so you contact AECENL now you get this part of it all organized and then get back to me and then we’ll get on to the next part.”*

- Test Participant



## Cross System Relationship Building

Several people expressed that an unexpected but highly valuable impact of the prototype testing was the relationship building that it enabled. This happened at several levels, including the individual level between staff at the centre, and at the systemic level between organisations in the sector.

- Empathy building and understanding for ECEs in terms of the administrator's role and challenges.
- Relationship building between the centre teams, both within the centre staff and between the sister centre staff.
- Strengthening and accelerating collaboration between QEP and AECENL, who reported having ongoing meetings and in person collaboration.

*"I think [the impact is] just the broader spectrum of understanding, understanding of their coworkers, understanding of their role, understanding of their situation, understanding of the administrator, just a bigger understanding of each other."*

- Participating director

*"We don't get a lot of chances to interact [between the staff]. We're not disconnected, it's just work-wise, we're not connected. So, we spent three quarters of the day talking about team building and morale and motivation and team building and teamwork. It was absolutely fantastic."*

- Test Participant

*"We want to join forces so that, and then ECE are gonna see that collaboration and feel more supported. I think they're going to feel the ripple effects of these two organizations working closely together now, or these two programs working closely together."*

- Test Participant

*"I think honestly the biggest impact is that AECENL and the quality enhancement program are working hand in hand right now. I'm getting feedback from consultants instead of just ECEs. And so when I put those two pieces of feedback together, I get a much better picture of what is needed at a provincial level in terms of professional learning."*

- Test Participant



## I Surfacing Questions about Funding Structure and Incentives

Running a PL close out day through the lab prototype process catalysed several conversations regarding the funding structures and incentives to collaborate between centres on professional learning in the province.

- Current funding structures incentivize two centres coming together for PL in order to access the 90% multi service funding, meaning that 90% of the cost of the PL day is covered up to a certain amount. The prototype surfaced some conversations about the barriers to centres working together on a PL day (and thus accessing the funding):
  - Centres may be competing for staff or being concerned about headhunting
  - Since one centre ‘hosts’ and uses their quarterly grant and invites the other centre, questions have arised around making it equitable since one centre will have ‘used up’ their funding, with the second centre essentially getting to attend without using their funding.
  - The challenge of making the PL day topics relevant to both centres.
- The prototype highlighted the actual costs for running a PL day in an area outside of Metro (St. John’s area), with associated travel costs for bringing a facilitator to the region (Cornerbrook). This has opened up conversations within the QEP team about the upper limit of the grants.
- The administrator expressed that while the prototype fund meant the entire cost of the first close out day was covered made all the difference in running the first one, having had such a successful day meant there was now proof of the value and they were confident it wouldn’t be a challenge to cover the 10% cost that would remain to run a day after the 90% multi-service funding.
- There was an assumption in the development of the prototype that the 10% costs above the 90% QEP multi-service funding that centres need to pay out of their own budget would be a barrier to running PL days. So in the test, the prototype fund was accessed to cover any costs beyond the QEP funding limits. In the follow-up about this it was noted that now that there is proof of the value of the PL day the centre paying the remaining 10% isn’t anticipated to be a barrier.

*“Because of the success of this one, even our boss, he’s been hearing lots of raving about it. I know the QEP takes care of the 90%. So that 10%, I don’t think that will make a difference, honestly.”*

- Test Participant

*“And then there’s this question as well about if right now the way it’s set up is that it’s one center that puts in the application and then they’ve used their grant but the other center gets full advantage of this center’s funding and then they still have the ability to then go apply for material.”*

- Test Participant

*“We’ve actually had a provincial meeting with our quality program to discuss possibly with professional development that the quality amounts can go above what our current max is.”*

- Test Participant



## What's Next

*“Is there anything else you’d like to share about the experience of doing this closeout day and being part of this tryout of the toolkit?”*

*No, this was absolutely 1000% the best idea ever.”*

- Test Participant

As part of the next steps for this work, there are several ongoing efforts. Remaining lab funding will be used to test the prototype again in Fall, and to design a next iteration of the PL Toolkit document. In addition, stakeholders and the centre administrator are continuing conversations sparked by the Lab prototype and experience.

- QEP and AECENL will be testing the prototype again with another set of centres in Fall 2023, this time focusing on further understanding what it takes to do relationship building between two unrelated centres.
- AECENL will be stewarding improvements to the toolkit, for example making it available online, more interactive and more usable. Remaining prototype funding will be used to hire a service designer to help with this.
- AECENL is also further developing the facilitator list of people who can facilitate in-house PL in Newfoundland and Labrador. The hope is to have people to reach out to in each region, based on the learning that making it easier to run a PL day relies on having easy access to facilitators.
- The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is continuing conversations around funding amounts and structures, with a focus on the learning about the actual costs to run a PL day sparking discussions of the grant ceiling, and the issue of equity in the grant model for centres collaborating with others to run PL days.

*“The first closeout date went so fantastically well that we’ll definitely do the second one for sure.”*

- Test Participant

