



THE STATE OF LIFELONG LEARNING FOR 2019

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Overall, lifelong learning programs in North America are doing well in serving their communities. You are adjusting to the new economy and the millennial generation's different needs. Overall, you are stable financially even given the tight institutional budget times.

PRINT BROCHURE PROVEN

Over the past year, the print brochure has maintained its primary marketing importance. The print brochure continues to generate around 70% of registrations for most programs. This year's LERN survey shows that around 20% of programs are still in jeopardy of having their print brochure eliminated by central administrators. For most programs though, the "eliminate the print brochure" scare and disaster is in the past, with the print brochure again being recognized for its central marketing and enrollment generating role.

BROCHURE DISTRIBUTION MORE TARGETED

More lifelong learning programs in the United States are asking for LERN's exclusive carrier route analysis of their brochure distribution. This is a positive sign that programs are targeting their brochure distribution better. This suggests fewer programs are blanketing the population with brochures, instead focusing on more efficient marketing. At some point this increased awareness and identification of service areas will lead to some exciting new ventures into serving under-served areas more successfully.

YOU PIONEER INTEGRATED MARKETING

The most successful lifelong learning programs have been gaining in knowledge of successful integrated marketing approaches, and are in their second year of discovering what works for lifelong learning programs. LERN's work in gathering and reporting on those successes will be a major new source of *Information That Works™* for the field in the coming year.

OPERATIONS BOOMING

The area of operations in lifelong learning programming is now booming. Programs are centralizing more functions in operations. This is creating greater efficiencies, allowing programmers and marketing staff to focus on income generation.

ONLY HALF OF YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Perhaps the biggest weakness right now in the field is that only half of lifelong learning program professionals have the knowledge to do their job. This figure comes from LERN staff visiting programs all over Canada and the United States every week.

Continuing professional development is not just something for your customers. The most successful lifelong learning programs have staff trained by LERN. You can significantly increase your profitability, registrations, productivity and lower time and dollar costs by staying current with the benchmarks and ratios for success in our field.

ALL NEED MORE INSTITUTIONAL AND/OR CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT.

Almost every lifelong learning program deserves and needs more institutional or central administrative support. Financial support is less important than leaders' support for your mission and your critical role in your institution.

Every lifelong learning program requires an internal marketing plan to regularly (we suggest monthly) inform central administrators of your success, needs, and positive contributions.

Lifelong learning programs benefit their institutions in ways that even you do not fully understand. With public support for most institutions at an all-time low, your advocacy for your program can make a big difference in gaining support for your program moving forward.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION CREATES BARRIERS

No surprise, but central administrators continue to maintain barriers to greater lifelong learning program success. Those barriers almost always hurt the institution as well. While central administrators have been creating barriers for decades, those last century barriers are now more significantly damaging those institutions failing to adapt to customer needs and their own self-interest.

CLASSES AND PROGRAMS GREAT

Class offerings and programs have kept up with the changing times in both professional development and personal development. There are some notable exceptions, mainly in not adequately providing skills to knowledge workers.

Summer camps for children are growing, according to a LERN survey this summer, and meeting both kid and parent needs. Professional development offerings continue to help upgrade skills.

YOU EMBRACE NEW LEARNING AND TEACHING METHODS

Adult educators appear to be far ahead of more traditional school-college faculty in being open to the new research on learning styles, adapting teaching methods to respond to how participants learn best, and to respond to individual learning needs. This observation is supported by LERN's extensive classes for both those engaged in teaching adults, and those teaching in traditional college degree programs.

The creation by younger LERN members of LERN's new Engaged Sessions conference format, and the acceptance of the Engaged Sessions format by all ages attending the conference, suggest an understanding of the need to move from passive learning to more active learning.

PROGRAMMING DATA REIGNS SUPREME

Data analysis has now become central to creating and running and planning courses, camps, events and other lifelong learning offerings.

"Data is the oil" running the 21st century economy, as one software entrepreneur phrased it. Lifelong learning programs by and large have the data. And unlike five years ago, most of you can access that data.

SUMMARY

Millions of Americans and Canadians take an informal or formal lifelong learning class each year. The economic reward of professional and personal development for our advanced societies only strengthens the need and desire of people for lifelong learning, adding to the benefits of personal development, mental health, longer life, changing lives and the next as yet undiscovered benefit of lifelong learning.

Alongside responding to the external environment, which most lifelong learning programs do well, is another challenge. Now there is a current 2019 need to advocate and market internally within the institution to voice the value and critical role your program plays within your institution as well as within your community.

The State of Lifelong Learning is an annual report to LERN members and the field of lifelong learning programming by the Learning Resources Network (LERN), the world's largest association in lifelong learning programming, and the leading consulting and information organization. The Chair of the Board for 2018-2019 is Sandra Parker of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

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