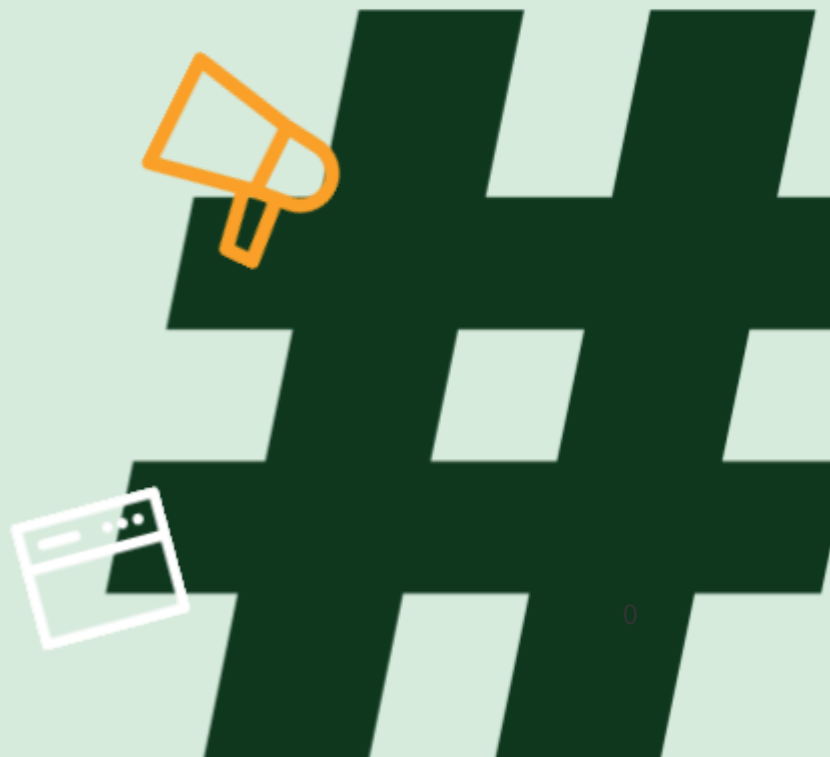




# From Barriers to Breakthroughs

Advancing Practitioner  
Development in  
Ontario's LBS Sector

April 2025



# General Summary

## About the Project

This research project was commissioned to better understand the barriers, drivers, and structural realities that shape how LBS practitioners participate in professional development (PD) across Ontario. Through focus groups and interviews with 30 individuals representing delivery sectors and cultural streams, we heard consistently about the conditions needed to improve PD access, engagement and impact. A literature review was used in a complementary way to shape discussion topics and corroborate recommendations.

The report offers a suite of interconnected recommendations, each designed to address the structural barriers that limit PD participation. Dedicating service delivery dollars without addressing these broader factors is unlikely to produce the desired outcomes — and may reinforce the very constraints the sector is working to overcome.

## What We Heard from You and Your Peers

Participants shared consistent experiences and priorities across a wide range of roles and organizations. Several common themes, addressing barriers and solutions, emerged from the data.

### Barriers to Participation

- Limited time, whether released or paid, to attend PD, including a lack of staffing coverage.
- Unequal technological readiness for delivering and accessing digital forms of PD (e.g. Internet connectivity, digital literacy, access to platforms).
- Gaps in PD content cultural relevance and accessibility, especially for Deaf, Indigenous, and Francophone practitioners.
- Imbalance between compliance-focused PD and practice-based learning opportunities.
- Existing PD delivery budgets are overstretched, undermining collaboration, staffing, and long-term planning.

### What's Needed

- Flexible and inclusive PD delivery formats (e.g. low bandwidth, blended, translated).
- Opportunities for designing and testing practical tools aligned with real-world needs, without increasing administrative burdens.
- Culturally responsive and holistic learning materials, co-developed across the delivery sectors and cultural streams.
- Structural investment, rather than redistributing or re-allocating existing funds, which could compromise service delivery.

## Challenges with the Idea of Using Current Service Delivery Funding for PD

*“If it’s just another line item in our service agreement with no additional support or flexibility, we won’t be able to do it – not without cutting something else.”*

Research participant, community-based program

Over the course of the research project, several consultation participants raised concerns about the feasibility and sustainability of professional development (PD) in the current funding environment. At the same time, the Ministry had previously suggested that one possible approach might involve allocating a portion of existing LBS service delivery funding toward staff PD – without increasing the overall funding envelope.

Participants across all sectors and streams expressed:

- **Concern** that existing budgets are already overextended, and reallocation would mean sacrificing core services or staffing stability
- **Frustration** with compliance-heavy PD models that do not support meaningful learning or teaching improvement
- **A strong preference** for practice-based, accessible, and flexible PD that is not driven by reporting requirements or rigid participation metrics
- **Interest in piloting paid PD models in targeted settings** to gather data on impact and feasibility – rather than imposing a sector-wide rollout without support or infrastructure.

### What the Evidence Indicates

The report does not recommend reallocating existing delivery funding as the best or sole solution. In fact, it explicitly avoids suggesting that this would be sufficient or desirable on its own. Instead, the report emphasizes that:

- Paid PD should be part of a broader, layered strategy – not a stand alone fix
- A reallocation model may carry the risk of reinforcing current weaknesses, especially if it leads to more compliance-based PD or is tied to administrative burden without enabling meaningful participation
- Embedding PD support into roles and staffing models is a structural investment that cannot simply be carved out of already stretched budgets.

## What We Took Away

The perspectives shared reflect both the diversity of the LBS field and a shared commitment to strengthening professional learning. While local solutions exist, many challenges stem from broader structural issues — highlighting the need for system-wide strategies to build capacity and enable meaningful, accessible PD for all practitioners.

### Key Takeaway

The field does not support reallocation of existing delivery funding as the sole or primary response to improving practitioner access to PD. Instead, the sector is calling for:

- New investments tied to sector capacity, digital infrastructure, and staff time
- Pilot initiatives that explore paid PD, peer mentorship, and hub-based models
- Collaborative planning that prioritizes cultural accessibility, equity, and relevance.

### What the Report Recommends

The [full report](#) outlines four proposed solution models:

1. Pilot paid PD time in under-resourced settings to assess its feasibility and impact.
2. Establish a provincial PD hub to centralize tools, learning events, and sector knowledge.
3. Support peer-led maker spaces and informal mentorship networks.
4. Explore micro-credentials to support recognition of practitioner growth and development.

These models were evaluated by research participants. No single solution is a silver bullet. However, maker spaces, a provincial hub, a mini-credentials program and paid PD processes could work synergistically.

**Supporting the four proposed solutions are system-wide investments designed to ensure equitable technological access, enhancement of curriculum design knowledge, including cultural relevance, knowledge sharing solutions and inclusive and collaborative decision-making. Without targeted investments and compensation for practitioners who spend time on professional development and other resource development, no matter how well-designed PD programs are, the existing barriers are likely to continue.**


### What's Next


While the research phase is now complete and project funding has concluded, AlphaPlus is considering a limited set of engagement activities to help share the findings and build alignment across the broader sector. We welcome your thoughts on whether this type of follow-up engagement would be valuable — even if modest in scope.



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