CEL STRATEGIC PLAN
2017-2021

COUNCIL FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
This fall, the Council for Experiential Learning (CEL), formerly known as the Provincial Partnership Council (PPC), embarked on a strategic planning process. Our Council is made up of volunteer members who are dedicated to promoting Experiential Learning (EL). We also advise the government on the opportunities and challenges related to expanding EL opportunities for all Ontario students. We bring wide-ranging expertise based on our roles in a variety of business sectors and community-based organizations.

From the outset, CEL members believed it was essential for us to gather input directly from stakeholders. This was especially important given that the CEL’s high-profile work over many years was followed by a period of relative inactivity during which the landscape for experiential learning changed. We wanted to ensure that our new strategic plan reflected the needs of our community. We engaged, therefore, with numerous stakeholders across Ontario, including: employers, educators and educational institutions, municipalities, Local Employment Planning Councils (LEPCs), workforce planning boards, employment services providers, industry education councils, and other organizations. We asked participants how experiential learning takes place in their region—what is working, and what challenges they faced. We also asked questions to assess awareness of the CEL, its activities, and the potential for partnerships going forward.

The goal was to develop a strategic plan based upon real engagement. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders offered their views, adding valuable insight to our future direction. We then assessed the CEL’s capacities and opportunities. Together we mapped out four new strategic directions to pursue:

1. Enhance Awareness of Experiential Learning
2. Build Stronger Partnerships
3. Ensure Sustainability
4. Renew Branding

These strategic directions will serve to focus our work over the next five years. They align with the CEL’s mandate and speak directly to the challenges and opportunities before us, as we strive to prepare Ontario students for the jobs of tomorrow, while increasing their skills and self-development. These directions should signal to all stakeholders invested in the success of the many and varied EL initiatives across Ontario that the CEL is ready to play a positive and active role.

We are proud of the outcome of this process and excited about contributing to an evolving public conversation that transcends narrow industries and interests. As advisors to government, we will continue to provide valuable information to guide policymaking. Our efforts will support the shared goal of expanding EL opportunities to reach all K-12 students with a broader range of EL opportunities, going beyond traditional forms of work placement, such as Co-Op. The CEL is ready to partner with employers and community organizations across Ontario to foster educational experiences that benefit students, employers, and the economy overall.

We thank everyone who took the time to participate, share ideas and give suggestions.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Hamovitch
CEL Chair
The Council for Experiential Learning (CEL), a volunteer body with members from the private, public and voluntary sectors, was created to foster EL connections, recognize businesses with the Experiential Learning Employer Excellence Awards and the Experiential Learning Employer Champion Awards, and advise government. The work of the CEL is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The CEL’s mandate is to:

• promote the value of EL in partnership with employers, educators, students, parents, and community-based organizations; and

• foster community-connected experiential learning opportunities that are meaningful to students and contribute to the development of skills, knowledge, and self-awareness necessary to succeed in the workplace of the future.

EL activities deliver positive impacts for students, businesses and local economies. EL may help address pressing labour market issues, including Ontario’s rapidly aging workforce and the ever-increasing demand for workers with higher levels of education, skills and experience.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education developed a draft policy, entitled “Community-Connected Experiential Learning: A Policy Framework for Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12”. Community-Connected Experiential Learning (CCEL) is defined as:

...an approach to student learning that provides students with opportunities to participate actively in experiences connected to a community outside of school (local, national, or global); reflect on those experiences to derive meaning from them; and apply their learning to their decisions and actions in various aspects of their lives.

Throughout this document, references to experiential learning (EL) should be interpreted to mean the same thing as CCEL, as defined above.

Participating in experiential learning offers real-life, first-hand experience, and exposure to fields and industries, which helps students develop a wide range of skills and work habits needed to be successful. EL has been found to support higher retention, graduation rates, and postsecondary participation rates, as well as boosting academic achievement, positive attitude, and preparation...
for careers. For employers, EL provides an early opportunity to engage Ontario’s future workforce and raise awareness about career options. EL activities are a cost-effective alternative for recruiting, training and retaining young workers. EL can also provide professional development opportunities for existing employees to build leadership, mentorship and communication skills.

During the strategic planning process, the CEL took note of several important developments focusing increased public interest in EL, including:

1. The draft Ministry of Education policy, Community-Connected Experiential Learning, which broadens the conventional conception of the activities considered to be part of EL and sets out the rationale and expectations for EL opportunities to be made available to children in elementary school, as well as high school; and

2. The white paper, “Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility”, by the Premiere’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, which calls for changes in a number of areas that intersect with CEL activities.

In addition, the CEL recognizes that many local and regional organizations are increasingly active in forging connections between local employers and students, including school boards, employment and workforce planning boards, industry education councils, and others. In the last several years, they have taken on the tasks that had been channeled through the Passport to Prosperity Program previously. The CEL intends to work with them to increase connections and promote shared goals. One way to do this is to shine a spotlight on employers successfully offering students rich and rewarding EL opportunities.
Planning Highlights
The CEL oversaw the strategic planning project. From September through November 2016, with the guidance of an external facilitator, the Council developed and executed its planning process.

An initial “kick-off” strategic planning session was held to:
• design a process that fit CEL’s needs and circumstances;
• ensure the planning project had the right scope;
• make certain that the process had opportunity for meaningful stakeholder input and that it would draw on data and knowledge to assist with decision making; and
• engage Council members to consider potential strategic themes and identify assumptions that needed validation and testing.

The CEL conducted a current-state analysis and consulted stakeholders through focus group sessions and an online survey. An environmental scan provided further information about the socio-political context of CEL’s work.

A report summarizing key findings from the stakeholder consultations was created to inform Council members prior to a day-long planning session. The process culminated in a draft strategic plan that was presented to the CEL for approval.

Stakeholder Consultation
Stakeholder consultation adds a critical lens and validation mechanism to the strategic planning process. Multiple stakeholder groups were engaged, including: Council members, the Ministry of Education, employers, educators and educational institutions, municipalities, Local Employment Planning Councils (LEPCs), workforce planning boards, industry education councils, and other organizations across Ontario.

Focus Groups
A total of 46 participants engaged in the process through six Focus Groups that were held between November 14th and 25th with stakeholders from Toronto, London, Barrie, Ottawa, Sudbury and Thunder Bay and surrounding areas. Representatives of organizations including schools, municipalities, unions, Local Employment Planning Councils, Workforce Planning Boards, Industry Education Councils, colleges and universities, Employment Ontario service providers, and employers attended.

The sessions had two general purposes:
• To engage stakeholders by gathering input, ideas, suggestions and including them in the planning process directly in a meaningful way
• To educate stakeholders about the CEL and promote participation in the current round of nominations for the Experiential Learning Employer Champion awards and the Experiential Learning Employer Excellence Award (as a positive legacy of the planning process).

Online Survey
The online survey was live from October 27–November 25, 2016. Invitations were shared widely with organizations identified by Council members, with encouragement for participants to share the survey broadly with their colleagues, as well. In total, 151 people took the survey, with 85 completing it.

Overall Engagement Summary
Throughout the engagement process, it was clear that there is potential for improvement in public awareness of the present-day CEL. While some stakeholders came with knowledge based on a past connection with CEL, most were unaware of its current activities. Given that the CEL had experienced a relatively quiet period prior to the planning process, this is not a surprising result. It demonstrates that there is work to be done, which CEL members recognized
in launching this project. New strategic directions will guide the Council in moving forward.

The six focus groups, as well as the survey results, spoke to a few broad themes:
1 the desire to see CEL add value to the frequently confusing process of connecting students and employers;
2 the need for CEL to reach out to a broader range of employers and other interested groups; and
3 recommendations for renewal, including a potential rebranding and refreshing of the communications methods CEL uses.

A full report with detailed feedback from stakeholders on a range of topics was provided to the Council and discussed.

**CEL Planning Session**

Council members came together for a day-long session on December 8, 2016. This meeting provided an opportunity to consider strategic themes as they relate to risks and opportunities for the organization. The open and energetic discussion included results from the stakeholder engagement process; CEL's mandate and profile; performance trends; and organizational strengths and weaknesses. The Council agreed on four high-level directions.
The CEL is committing to a five-year strategic plan. As such, the directions are broad and oriented to the future. This allows the Council to respond and adapt as circumstances change over the years. The directions offer a framework for the development of annual operational plans with measurable goals and objectives. These annual plans (not included as part of this document) are necessary to implement the strategic directions through daily operations.

Following are the four identified directions:
1. Enhance Awareness of Experiential Learning
2. Build Stronger Partnerships
3. Ensure Sustainability
4. Renew Branding

1. Enhance Awareness of Experiential Learning
Given emerging provincial educational policies, which will broaden the definition of EL beyond the traditional workplace to encompass a range of educational opportunities and expand EL to elementary school, the CEL anticipates increased demand for employers across the Province to get involved. There is a clear need to expand the service delivery network to match policy mandates, if more opportunities for students are to be created. The CEL will become a vocal advocate by promoting the benefits of a broad range of EL experiences to employers, educators, students, and parents.

Our Commitments
Over the next five years, we commit to “Enhance Awareness of Experiential Learning” by:
- Publicizing the changing nature of EL for K-12 students, including soft skills development and a variety of work-related and/or career education activities.
- Identifying and highlighting successful EL programs and stories, to share knowledge and best practices.
- Recruiting employers and other participating organizations from every region and sector, including small and medium-sized businesses and non-profit enterprises, to participate in EL.
- Recognizing exemplary organizations offering EL experiences through the Experiential Learning Employer Champion Awards and the Experiential Learning Employer Excellence Award.
- Extending recognition to other EL champions active in the field, such as educators and community-based organizations.
- Building a stronger online presence through the development of a website and use of social media.

2. Build Stronger Partnerships
To be successful in growing the network of organizations involved in offering EL experiences to students, the CEL must work in concert with a range of community-based partners. It is important to offer these organizations promotional support and explore ways to make EL system navigation easier for students, parents, teachers, employers, and other local and regional organizations. In effect, the CEL will act as a bridge among these groups, reinforcing the ongoing work of community-based agencies. The CEL aims to capitalize on, rather than duplicate, existing programs and services. As well, with the advent of the Provincial Partnership Table (PPT), which will advise government as the Highly Skilled Workforce Panel’s recommendations are implemented, CEL may have opportunities to help ensure the industry/employer voice is heard.

Our Commitments
Over the next five years, we commit to “Build Stronger Partnerships” by:
- Identifying new and existing partners, focusing on the varied community-based organizations and provincial associations across Ontario, and reach out to them with updated information about CEL’s activities going
forward and offers to collaborate.

- Participating in ongoing initiatives to map EL activity across the province, with the goal of avoiding duplication and adding value through CEL activities.
- Ensuring that CEL plays a positive and active role in fostering EL and advising the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development as recommendations of the Highly Skilled Workforce Panel are implemented.
- Engaging high profile, dynamic employers and organizations that have the ability to dramatically reshape EL opportunities in their regions.
- Contributing, through CEL's awards and recognition programs, speaking engagements, and participation in conferences, to thought leadership and positive action by employers and other organizations participating in EL to address workforce themes, such as:
  - Broadening EL opportunities in professions and workplaces with projected skills gaps to meet future workforce needs;
  - Increasing awareness of and appreciation for opportunities in the skilled trades;
  - The need for personal skills development, including “soft skills”, technology readiness, and realistic expectations/career preparation for students; and
  - Increasing awareness of and availability of a broader range of sectors (e.g., Forestry, and Food Processing) for the Ontario Specialist High Skills Major program.

3. Ensure Sustainability

All organizations require long-term planning to be sustainable. As a volunteer Council, CEL asks that members contribute their time, knowledge, and energy in the service of shared goals. It is important that CEL's membership be inclusive, broadly representative of the provincial economy, and forward looking. A renewed CEL agenda means that the CEL’s fundamental principles and structures should be reviewed and confirmed. As an entity funded by government, the CEL must ensure that its activities deliver value to all stakeholders effectively, which requires predictable resources and sound operational planning.

Our Commitments

Over the next five years, we commit to “Ensure Sustainability” by:

- Renewing the CEL’s agenda and building in continuity by updating and confirming our:
  - Mandate
  - Terms of Reference
  - Council size and composition
  - Member recruitment policies and procedures
  - Resources aligned with activities
  - Comprehensive communications plan
- Developing and adopting guidelines for Council composition to improve representation, including: regional, sectoral, small business, gender, youth, francophone, and First Nations representation.
- Developing and adopting member recruitment and orientation policies and procedures.
- Attracting and retaining new members with the necessary skills identified by CEL, by offering clear benefits and exploring innovative means of recruiting new members.
- Engaging in ongoing communications with government representatives involved with the CEL to ensure that expectations and resources align.
4. Renew Branding

With the nature of EL expanding and the CEL (formerly known as the PPC) entering a period of renewal after many years of operation, it is clear that a new, less generic, name and brand would help the CEL engage the public and community partners more effectively. The results of stakeholder engagement confirmed that there is ongoing confusion about CEL’s name and role, which can be addressed through rebranding.

Our Commitments

Over the next five years, we commit to “Renew Branding” by:

• Selecting a new name that better reflects the CEL’s EL mandate.
• Defining the CEL’s value proposition clearly, in a way that makes outreach to the varied employers and other organizations offering EL more likely to succeed.
• Creating a communications strategy, including a new name and branding language, to increase the CEL’s profile among employers, other organizations offering EL opportunities, community partner organizations, teachers, parents, and students.
Our new strategic directions provide the CEL with focus and a clear framework to drive change and progress. CEL members have committed to the following next steps:

- Goals and objectives will be developed that align and drive each strategic direction;
- A first-year goal package with targets and measurements will be set and developed;
- The strategic directions will be communicated internally and externally; and,
- Progress on the directions will be reviewed and strategies amended as the situations and circumstances change over the next five years.
The CEL is proud of our history and successes to date. In many ways, we were the innovators on experiential learning, promoting school to work connections in order to increase opportunities available to students. We are pleased that the value of career-related experiential learning has been recognized and adopted as government policy, and we accept the challenge of adapting to the changing landscape so that our role in fostering experiential learning opportunities will be effective and support the future economy. Our new strategic directions will help to keep us focused on improving everything we do for students, which in turn benefits local economies and the Province.

We thank all those who lent their voices by contributing ideas, suggestions and feedback. We have listened. The CEL looks forward to reporting on our progress over time, and to a strong track record of performance over the next five years.
## CURRENT CEL MEMBERS

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Terry Ann Adamo</td>
<td>Canadian Manufacturers &amp; Exporters</td>
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<td>Lisa Beckwick</td>
<td>St. Joseph’s Care Group</td>
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<td>Ian Cunningham</td>
<td>Council of Ontario Construction Associations</td>
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<td>Rodger Dusky</td>
<td>University of Western Ontario</td>
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<td>Steve Georgopoulos</td>
<td>Member</td>
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<td>Jonathan Hamovitch</td>
<td>CEL Chair</td>
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<td>Michael Harris</td>
<td>KEYS Job Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kelly Hoey</td>
<td>Halton Industry Education Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian Howcroft</td>
<td>Canadian Manufacturers &amp; Exporters</td>
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<td>Dianne Norman</td>
<td>Hamilton Health Sciences Centre</td>
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<td>Sherryl Petricevic</td>
<td>Waterloo Economic Development Corporation</td>
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<td>Susanna Scocchia</td>
<td>Ontario Cooperative Education Association</td>
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<td>Sandra Bickford</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>Nancy Britton</td>
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<td>Stephen Kelly</td>
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<td>Rachel Ryerson</td>
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<td>Naomi Silver</td>
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<td>Patty Zaroski</td>
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APPENDIX 1

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ABOUT THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EMPLOYER CHAMPION AWARDS AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EMPLOYER EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The Experiential Learning Employer Champion Awards and Experiential Learning Employer Excellence Awards were created in 2010 to recognize extraordinary employers that are supporting the futures of significant numbers of high school students across Ontario. Every time an employer provides a student with the opportunity to gain work-related knowledge, skills and experience, they make an incalculable positive contribution to the quality of a young person’s life and career prospects.

Today, more than 40,000 employers across the province have been actively involved in shaping Ontario’s future workforce by providing students with the vital work experience and skills needed for a successful working life.

The CEL Experiential Learning Employer Champion Awards acknowledge these important contributions and particularly recognize Ontario employers who have shown an outstanding commitment to providing meaningful work experiences for high school students in their communities through any of the following:

• Job Shadowing
• School-Work Transition Programs
• Mentoring
• Classroom or Worksite Visits
• Career Talks
• Cooperative Education
• Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.

Recipients of the Experiential Learning Employer Excellence Award are presented with a commemorative award and are publicly acknowledged for their important contributions. They also enjoy the right to use the Employer Excellence emblem in their corporate, marketing and communications materials.

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OVERVIEW OF THE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Who did the CEL reach out to, and how?
Representatives of groups involved in Experiential Learning (EL) and/or connected with the CEL were invited to engage with the CEL by attending focus group sessions and/or taking an online survey. Invitations were sent via email and social media. CEL members were asked to circulate the invitation to their contacts, as well.
To ensure regional representation, focus groups were held across Ontario during November, 2016. Representatives based in and around Barrie, London, Ottawa, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and Toronto participated in meetings.
In addition to focus group meetings, stakeholders were invited to take part in an online survey, which was live from October 27 to November 25, 2016. The survey was promoted through email, primarily, and was open to all stakeholder groups and individuals with an interest in EL. The survey was taken by 151 stakeholders, with 85 completing it.

Focus Group Review
A total of 46 participants engaged in the process through six Focus Groups that were held between November 14th and 25th with stakeholders from Toronto, London, Barrie, Ottawa, Sudbury and Thunder Bay and surrounding areas. Representatives of organizations including schools, municipalities, unions, Local Employment Planning Councils, Workforce Planning Boards, Industry Education Councils, colleges and universities, Employment Ontario service providers, and employers attended.
Throughout the sessions, it was clear that awareness of the CEL is generally low. While some stakeholders had knowledge based on a past connection with CEL, most were unaware of its current activities—and this was true in all locations. Given that the CEL has had a relatively quiet period leading to this planning process, this is not a surprising result. It demonstrates that there is work to be done, which CEL members recognized in launching this project to produce strategic directions that will guide the Council in moving forward.
The six focus groups each spoke to similar themes, the most consistent being:
1. the desire to see CEL add value to the frequently confusing process of connecting students and employers;
2. the need for CEL to reach out to a broader range of employers and other interested groups; and
3. recommendations for renewal, including a potential rebranding and refreshing of the communications methods CEL uses.
“There are limited places for students to get experiential learning. Rather than everyone working separately, we should work together. Also, students need entry points at all levels: college, university, and secondary school, so that everyone’s in the game.”

“We need to think about the full continuum of experiential learning, which includes kindergarten through to post-secondary and adult learning.”

“A push still needs to happen aimed at companies and industry from PPC [CEL]. The message should be: Experiential Learning is really important, and worth your while.”

“We’ve really been building momentum as a community, with a lot of connections made that create opportunities for students. What can be challenging is having a lead organization to keep it going, especially when people change roles, for example, at schools.”

“It would be useful if PPC [CEL] could make the pipeline seamless—be the link between the Ministry of Education and MAESD and act as a connector, including the full EL continuum, from K-12 through apprenticeship and postsecondary education.”

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