

Quality Assurance for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Canada

THE MANUAL

An Introduction



Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment
...supporting the recognition of prior learning since 1997

Association canadienne pour la reconnaissance des acquis
...œuvrant à la reconnaissance des acquis depuis 1997

2015



About CAPLA

The Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) was formed in 1994 and is the national voice for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR). It is a not-for-profit, incorporated membership organization that advocates for the use of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and promotes its implementation across Canada. It supports the active collaboration of individuals and organizations to develop equitable, effective and easily-accessed RPL services and programs. CAPLA's membership includes adult learners, RPL practitioners, researchers, and representatives of occupational bodies, organized labour, settlement agencies, employers, education and training organizations, equity groups, sector councils and non-governmental organizations. CAPLA is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors, drawn from different sectors and regions of Canada. Each director is actively involved in the development and implementation of RPL and each is elected by CAPLA Members at the Annual General Meeting.

CAPLA hosts yearly international conferences and webinars, undertakes research, supports several online communities of practice, and collaborates with partner organizations around the world to advance RPL in Canada and abroad.

What is RPL?

The recognition of prior learning (RPL)¹ is a systematic process of identifying, assessing and recognizing what a person knows and can do. The process takes various forms, depending on context. The outcomes enable individuals to:

- ▶ Benefit from their work and life experience
- ▶ Receive advanced standing, academic credit or recognition in education and training programs
- ▶ Acquire licences and certification in regulated occupations
- ▶ Improve employment opportunities
- ▶ Manage career transitions more effectively
- ▶ Increase opportunities across occupations and regions
- ▶ Enhance self-confidence

Finding better ways to assess and recognize the knowledge, skills and abilities of Canadians and newcomers enhances labour force mobility, increases social cohesion, and ultimately fosters the economic prosperity of the nation.

Around the world, RPL has been embedded into national policies. From Australia to South Africa to Europe and beyond, RPL is a national priority used to promote the development of individuals, enhance labour mobility and contribute to social cohesion.

In RPL, the focus is always on what individuals have learned rather than on where, when or how the learning occurred. RPL recognizes that individuals learn in all sorts of places, from formal to informal to non-formal—at work, through study, in community and personal activities, and at home.

Who Benefits from RPL?

Research over many years and around the world indicates that RPL fosters:

- ▶ Life-long learning
- ▶ Labour mobility
- ▶ Social cohesion

- ▶ Immigration and settlement
- ▶ Career development
- ▶ Valuable personal and professional networks
- ▶ Constructive change within organizations and institutions

RPL also makes good use of limited individual and organizational financial and human resources, since individuals do not need to be re-taught or retrained in what they already know and can do.

Many different types of organizations make effective use of RPL to promote learning and help people achieve personal and professional goals.

For example:

Professional organizations, employers and regulatory bodies use RPL to create and conduct fair competency-based assessments and recognize and value a person's experience and education regardless of where it was acquired.

Sector councils and industry organizations use RPL to identify and recognize the knowledge and skills of workers and actively motivate them to achieve personal and professional goals.

Educational institutions use RPL to attract, improve access and meet the needs of a wider range of adult learners; to increase efficiency by reducing duplicate education or training; and to provide an important skills recognition service for business and community partners.

Immigrant serving agencies and community organizations use RPL to assist clients and newcomers to articulate their skills and abilities effectively to prospective employers, to facilitate the match between job requirements and an individual's competencies.

Assessors, trainers, and educators use RPL to further the development of adult learning, teaching and quality assessment practices and to review programs and courses for continuous improvement in program planning and implementation.

1 - The term "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)" has been replaced in many jurisdictions with the "Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)". RPL has been used throughout this document and The Manual.

About the QA Project

In 2013, the CAPLA Board of Directors signed an agreement with the Foreign Credential Recognition Program at Employment and Social Development Canada, to undertake a project to create RPL quality assurance guidelines and a manual to enhance the delivery and effectiveness of RPL services across Canada. CAPLA undertook national and international research and engaged stakeholders through webinars, focus groups, conference presentations, online surveys and structured interviews. Advice and direction came from the CAPLA Board of Directors and a quality assurance Project Advisory Committee that included many national organizations. Provinces and territories were engaged through CAPLA's Strategic Advisory Panel for the Recognition of Prior Learning and a QA Project Steering Committee provided strategic direction and technical support throughout the project.

About the Manual

The purpose of the Manual is to provide a basic framework for the development and implementation of RPL. Organizations and institutions can use it to:

- ▶ Review current RPL practices and policies
- ▶ Identify potential areas for improvement or development
- ▶ Embed RPL principles into existing programs and services
- ▶ Enhance the professional development of RPL practitioners
- ▶ Develop a strategy to create and implement an RPL service
- ▶ Develop strategic partnerships to expand RPL services

The Manual is divided into six sections and includes Self-Audit Checklists to guide your review or enhancement of RPL. You will find

- ▶ the RPL Guiding Principles Self-Audit Checklist
- ▶ the Six Steps for Quality RPL Self-Audit Checklist
- ▶ the RPL Systems Self-Audit Checklist and
- ▶ the RPL Quality Procedures Checklist



About the Guiding Principles for Quality RPL Practice

RPL Guiding Principles provide the foundation of the Manual. They serve to ensure the fairness and reliability of the entire RPL process.

In a systemic model, reliance on these principles is key to all aspects of quality practice. The nine principles are meant to be referenced as a collective approach to practice and not to be used as stand-alone principles.

NINE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY RPL PRACTICE IN CANADA

a. Accessible

Processes provide information, advice and access by being

- responsive to applicant questions
- cost-efficient for both applicant and organization
- timely in both frequency of assessment and gap filling options
- adult learner-centred, voluntary, available, and inclusive of all abilities and differences

b. Consistent

Decision-makers (advisor, assessor, administrator) work together to be consistent with criteria, training, tools, procedures, and outcomes.

Definitions must be agreed across sectors to allow for transferability.

c. Fair

Processes are unbiased and recognize a wide range of ways people learn. Therefore, applicants are allowed optional ways to prove learning.

An appeal mechanism is provided.

Policies and procedures of the organization align with RPL principles.

d. Respectful

Processes reduce barriers by:

- being non-discriminatory, culturally appropriate and inclusive
- value uniqueness of the individual
- using plain language to ensure all communications are clear

e. Valid

Assessment methods align with the expected measures of achievement (e.g. competencies, occupational standards, goals, or outcomes).

f. Flexible

Assessment methods are time and cost efficient.

A variety of effective assessment options are available.

g. Rigorous

RPL assessment methods:

- reflect the purpose for the required learning
- have equivalent expectations to traditional assessment methods
- are conducted by subject matter experts
- meet requirements of work or performance criteria

h. Transparent

Information uses explicit and plain language to be understood by all stakeholders (applicants, advisors, assessors, administrators).

Policies, processes, and criteria are complete, fully disclosed, and accurate. For example:

- process steps are clear and simple to follow
- reasons are given for any action needed to complete the process
- methods of assessment and learning criteria are clearly stated
- results of RPL assessment are provided, including gaps and achievements

i. Professionally Supported

All staff involved in RPL services receives initial and ongoing training for their RPL functions. (e.g. advising, assessment, development and systems administration or other related services).

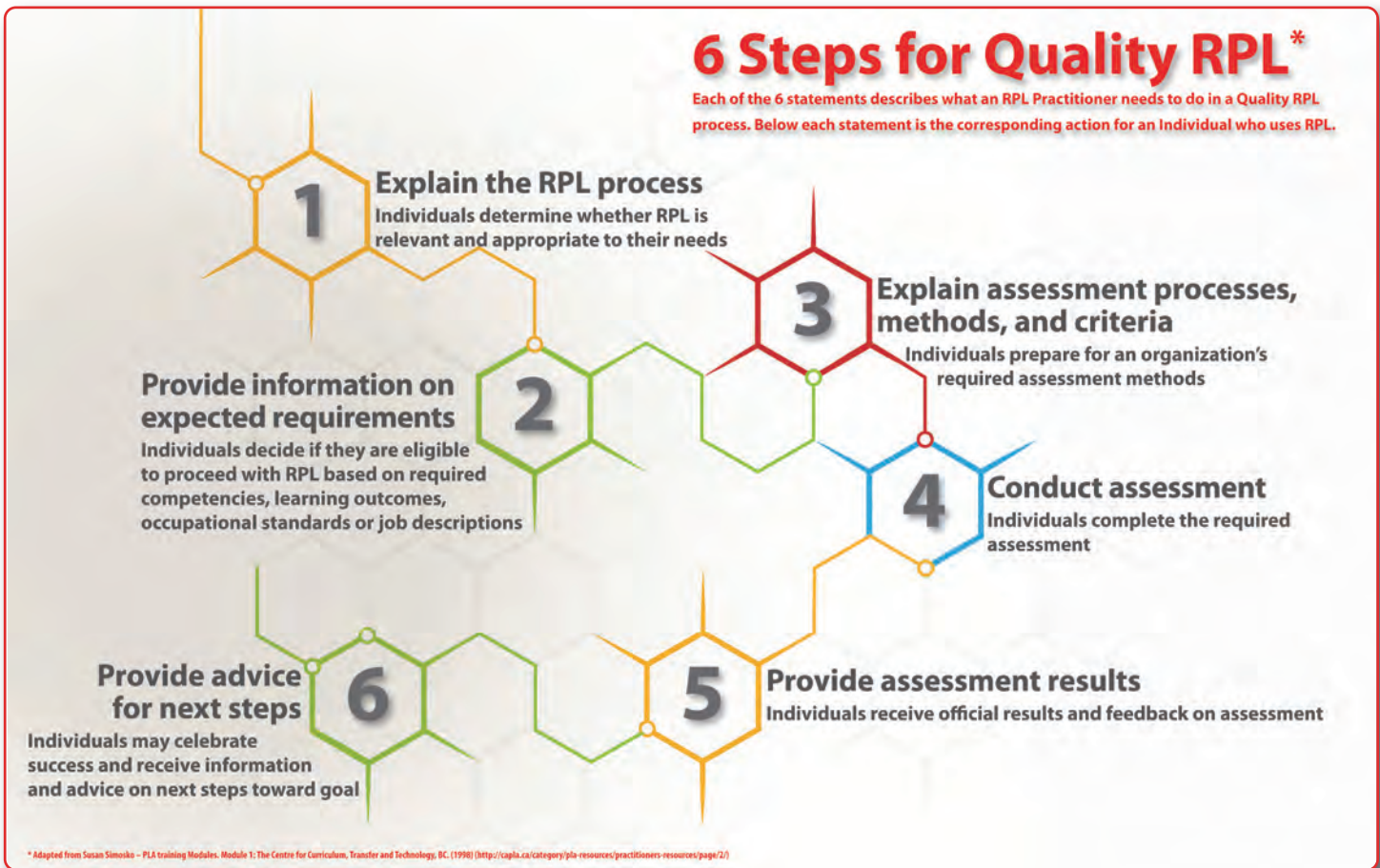
Why is Quality Important in RPL?

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a powerful tool to improve work and life opportunities. When individuals feel valued, when their skills have currency in the workplace, when their community contributions are recognized, everyone benefits: the individual, organizations, communities, and the country. Organizations fully committed to the principles of RPL are often more flexible, more client-centred, and respectful of learning regardless of how or when it was achieved.

Many people depend on the integrity of the RPL process and the validity of the outcomes: individual

learners, advisors, assessors and end-users such as employers, certifying bodies, education institutions and regulatory authorities. All need to have confidence that the assessment process is consistently fair, valid, reliable and in compliance with all professional and legislated standards for assessment.

It is therefore essential that each RPL system or program meet quality standards to ensure the integrity of each assessment decision and outcome. A diagram has been developed to describe each phase and how it fits together to form an integrated RPL process.



The manual provides important details which describe each of the six steps.

The elements of a quality RPL process help to ensure that an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities are acknowledged, valued, assessed, and recognized. In essence, RPL is a partnership between individual learners and the advisors and assessors who work with them. Depending on the context, individual learners may be referred to as:

- ▶ **Applicants** ▶ **Candidates** ▶ **Clients**
- ▶ **Employees** ▶ **Learners**

In the RPL partnership, individual learners are supported to showcase evidence or demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities in preparation for assessment. Advisors help learners to prepare for the assessment process. Assessors review and evaluate evidence and provide meaningful feedback to learners at the conclusion of the assessment process. The RPL process encourages all partners to work together to enable individual learners achieve their goals.

Get Started

Visit the CAPLA website at www.capla.ca, email us at info@capla.ca or call 877-731-1333 to purchase your copy of the RPL Quality Assurance manual.

Embedding quality RPL practices into your organization or institution will enable you to provide exciting new opportunities to individuals from all walks of life. You will give people the opportunity to build on what they already know and can do and help them to make important life, work and personal decisions. In so doing, you will strengthen your organization or institution by making effective use of limited resources, providing professional development opportunities for practitioners, and developing fair, equitable, and accessible systems.

If you have already begun assessing and recognizing prior learning, you can use the Self-Audit Checklists to review your current processes, identify gaps and develop a plan to develop or improve one or more aspects of your RPL service. If you are just starting to develop RPL in your organization, you will find important resources and examples of good practice which can serve as a guide to your future activities.

CAPLA welcomes your feedback and questions and stands ready to provide help and support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CAPLA wishes to thank the many stakeholders from across Canada who contributed their time and ideas to the development of the RPL Quality Assurance Manual.

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