

## **A FRAMEWORK TO PRIORITIZE CCLB'S ASSESSMENT PROJECTS**

### **A. Forward**

The CCLB is frequently asked to participate in and lend support to the development of assessment instruments aligned to the Canadian Language Benchmarks and the Literacy Benchmarks. These requests far exceed the resources available to the CCLB and, on occasion, may not even be in its best interests. It had become necessary to provide a written framework from which to work when considering requests for CCLB involvement in assessment instrument development.

### **B. Setting the Context**

The CLB were initially developed by the federal government with the support of provincial governments to assist immigrants to participate more fully in Canadian society. Immigrant advocates, both within and outside the ESL/FSL fields, argued persuasively that Canada needed a common set of descriptors of English and French language ability that could be applied in a number of contexts - ESL/FSL language instruction, the local community, the workplace and the academic community. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) accepted the lead in developing these descriptors and headed a group of ESL professionals that produced the CLB. CIC then provided additional direction and support to establish a body, the CCLB, composed of CLB stakeholders, to assume responsibility to support CLB use across the country.

The CCLB has matured and developed during the past five years and it now sees itself as a body with responsibilities to setting CLB-related standards. It remains, as well, responsible for advancing the use of the CLB wherever and whenever appropriate. Arguably, the single most important area of CLB use, and the area where standards are most critical, is the area of test development and test administration. The development of a decision-making framework for the CCLB with respect to test development has become necessary.

At the time of the writing of this framework, the CCLB, with the active participation of the Centre for Language Training and Assessment, is assuming some of the responsibilities of Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA) and Canadian Language Benchmarks Literacy Assessment (CLBLA) administration, the two most widely used CLB-aligned assessment instruments developed to date (and prior to the establishment of the CCLB). Also at the time of the writing of this framework, the CCLB has developed a more "streamlined", i.e. quicker to administer than the CLBA, placement test, called the Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT). Finally, it is developing a CLB-aligned assessment instrument for the nursing profession, and, in a related area,

it is aligning or articulating other assessment instruments currently in use against the CLB.

## **C. Developing a Decision-Making Framework for Assessment Instrument Development**

### **1. Preliminary Mandatory Preconditions**

Before moving to a stage of making judgements with respect to ranking or setting priorities with respect to assessment instrument development, four preconditions must be met.

#### **(a) *The assessment instrument furthers immigrant settlement and integration into Canada***

The first, and primary precondition to be met, is one of appropriateness of activity. Pursuant to the goals of the member organizations, the proposed assessment instrument must be designed to further immigrant settlement and integration into Canada, in a manner that benefits both the immigrant and Canada.

#### **(b) *There is not already a test in existence***

The second precondition to be met is the lack of existence of a CLB-aligned test instrument that satisfies the purpose proposed, i.e. no existing alternatives available. Failing an existing instrument it may be possible to articulate or CLB-align a comparable test. In some instances this can be accomplished at much less expense than the creation of a new instrument. Where this is the case, the decision to incur costs relating to articulation or alignment, must be weighed using the factor consideration process in part 2 below.

#### **(c) *Funds for assessment instrument development can be identified***

The third basic precondition is that there are funds, CCLB's or from other source(s), to develop the proposed assessment instrument. Consideration must also be given to costs related to post-development instrument use.

#### **(d) *Individuals/organizations with the necessary skills to develop the assessment instrument can be identified***

The fourth basic precondition is the availability of test developers. There obviously needs to be test developers with the requisite skills available to develop the test. Often this may not be known for sure until after the test development request for proposals has been placed in the public domain and the closing date has past, so in fact this may not always be a preliminary consideration, but an insurmountable follow-up consideration

## 2. Considering other Factors

With these four matters out of the way, the CCLB must then consider a number of factors that will assist in ranking competing assessment instrument development proposals and/or ensuring consistency in Board funding recommendations.

These are:

- The number of beneficiaries of the test
- The relative benefit of the test to the beneficiaries, e.g. to gain access to training, to knock down barriers
- The importance of the test to the non-test development objectives of the CCLB, e.g. introducing the benefits of the CLB to other important sectors, bringing in key partners to work with the CCLB, etc.
- The cost of test development and ongoing test administration to the CCLB
- The mandate of others to develop the test
- The likelihood of others coming forward to provide the funding necessary to develop the test
- The “buy-in”/commitment of stakeholders to the test, including the willingness of test administrators to use the test
- The risk of the test being used as a “false barrier” to access

Each of these factors needs to be weighted in terms of their order of importance. Each funding proposal or idea must then be assessed against these weighted factors and assigned points for each factor. This evaluation framework will evolve, with precedents established and precision developed through initial and then repeated application. It is anticipated, therefore, that this policy framework statement will undergo frequent revision as funding decisions become more exact due primarily to repeated application of the framework.