

Lessons Learned from Recent Experience

Lessons

Valuable lessons were learned from field tests carried out during the period of January to July, 2002. Among these are:

There are no shortcuts to using the S&Gs: It takes time and effort to prepare for and carry out a process that is effective and has an enduring impact.

There is no substitute for good planning and organization: Good preparation and organization save time and ensure that results are useful. Given the amount of information contained in the S&Gs, it is wise to set aside more time than presumed necessary. Making sure that adequate resources are available to support the application of the S&Gs is also essential.

One of the first steps in introducing the S&Gs should be to establish "buy-in" (or the support of practitioners): The benefits that can be drawn from the S&Gs are important to recognize and understand. A lack of knowledge of the S&Gs can easily lead to misunderstanding and suspicion about the intent of using the S&Gs. Methods for establishing "buy-in" might include, a) introducing the S&Gs as an educational and professional development tool, not as a tool for "rating" performance; b) helping practitioners make links to practical ways in which they can integrate the S&Gs into their work; and c) ensuring a participatory and transparent approach from start to finish.

Realistic and feasible objectives are crucial: It is important for any application of the S&Gs to be relevant to the organization's or practitioners' specific needs, circumstances and expectations and to be achievable within the current context. The aim should be to use the S&Gs as a professional development tool that builds on and strengthens current capacity.

The S&Gs bring benefits to both individuals and organizations: The focus on building professionalism – which the S&Gs can support – is an asset for individuals and organizations. The S&Gs are a tool for the lifelong learning of individual practitioners. At the organizational level, the S&Gs can promote a culture of professionalism among staff members. Where applicable, it is wise to link the two; in other words, to situate the goals of practitioners within the culture and vision of the organization. It is also important to keep in mind that the S&Gs are relevant not only to practitioners involved in direct service delivery, but anyone connected to the field. Organizations have found using the S&Gs beneficial for a variety of staff.

It is important to recognize that the promising practices in this booklet were not without their challenges. Some degree of difficulty or challenge may be an inevitable part of a process that is new and concerned with improving practice. Integrating the S&Gs into practice becomes easier and smoother as practitioners grow more familiar with them. Once familiar, there appears to be no end to the possibilities for creative and practical applications of the S&Gs.

The Steering Committee encourages practitioners and organizations to share lessons learned and promising practices in working with and applying the S&Gs. If you or an individual or organization you know has information about a promising application of the S&Gs, please contact the Steering Committee at the address below. The S&Gs, from their inception to implementation, have kept their roots in practice and their strength will continue to rely on the support and contributions of practitioners.

Further information can be obtained from

The Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners

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Promising Practices in the Application of the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners



PROMISING PRACTICES



**"The Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs):
A tool for the counsellor, mentor, teacher,
student, decision-maker, dreamer..."**

The Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) were released in January 2001, the fruit of several years of effort involving members of the career development community across Canada. Since then, practitioners and organizations have been involved in applying the S&Gs in different types of settings and for a variety of professional development objectives.

This booklet summarizes the lessons learned from these efforts and highlights several promising practices implemented by a range of different organizations.

Each promising practice presented in this booklet has the following features:

- The application was tailored to the specific needs, capacities and circumstances of the practitioners involved;
- The purpose was to enhance the capacity of practitioners and organizations to carry out their work;
- The approach was creative and innovative;
- The methods used were participatory and transparent;
- The application contributed to advancing professionalism and lifelong learning among practitioners.

The promising practices in this booklet demonstrate a range of diverse applications of the S&Gs. They are presented thematically and include:

- Orienting new staff to a program
- Using the S&Gs for professional development
- Developing a curriculum for training in career development
- Enhancing mentoring programs for students
- Defining quality indicators for front-line services
- Building teamwork
- Strengthening service delivery
- Addressing ethical dilemmas in practice
- Evaluating services

Organizations have provided their contact information (presented at the bottom of each page) for practitioners interested in finding out more about the initiatives presented in the booklet.

**"Matching organizational goals
with recognized standards in the industry"**

The **Centre for Employment** in Alberta is a non-profit organization providing employment services. The centre has been in operation for three years and has nine employees.

The Centre for Employment decided to use the S&Gs to conduct an evaluation of its services to determine whether they meet standards established by the sector. The evaluation process involved every member of the team. Each member was asked to complete an evaluation form in which they rated the centre's performance on the Core Competencies of the S&Gs. All of the evaluations were kept anonymous and compiled into one set of results.

A team was formed to lead and facilitate the evaluation. The team consisted of the coordinator of the Centre and two employment specialists. Together they designed and administered the evaluation tool, tabulated the results, and wrote a report that was distributed to everyone.

The evaluation was in three stages:

- 1) Staff members were asked to read through the Core Competencies of the S&Gs;
- 2) Each staff member completed an evaluation form in which they indicated whether the organization "needs", "meets" or "exceeds" each competency;
- 3) A report was prepared which shows the proportion of staff members who checked off each category; in other words, the percentage who answered "needs", "meets", or "exceeds" for each Core Competency.

The results revealed that staff members identified many of the same competencies as strengths and as weaknesses in the centre's services. Apart from providing the centre with these practical results (the centre is working to address the weaknesses identified) the evaluation has affirmed that staff share the same views on the expertise they demonstrate as a team.

According to the coordinator of the centre, the project was a success because of the cooperation of the staff. Each member of the staff was committed to ensuring that results were helpful and gave their assessment of the centre's services honestly and judiciously. The evaluation is also in keeping with other procedures the centre regularly undertakes to conform to industry standards, such as those defined by the parent agency, Accredited Supports to the Community.

Consequently, the evaluation has clarified the direction the centre needs to take in order to strengthen its services, and established the S&Gs as a point of reference for all team members. There is an understanding that the S&Gs serve as professional benchmarks for each and every professional in career development, whatever his/her level of experience, position, or mandate.

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"Enhancing the synergy between the individual and the organization"

The **Department of Human Resources and Employment** of the provincial government of Newfoundland has the mandate to provide income support and employment and career services, particularly to individuals confronting barriers to employment for economic and/or social reasons.

Since September 2001, the Department has been using the S&Gs as a tool in the process of reorganizing and strengthening its Employment and Career services. The process is quite extensive and involves conducting a thorough review of the competencies of staff, developing support tools for staff to assess and monitor their professional development, and preparing training packages to address the gaps identified. Approximately 250 staff members from across the province and from various levels of the agency have been involved.

In approaching this initiative, the department chose to start with identifying the competencies that staff members believe are important to their jobs, and then comparing this with the competencies in the S&Gs for career and employment services. The steps included:

- The department developed a computerized tracking system for staff to assess their competencies and monitor their training and professional development. Each staff member has access to the system from his/her computer;
- The department then held focus group discussions with staff members to prepare "competency statements" for each of their positions. (This included managers all the way to front-line workers);
- The competency statements were compared with the competencies in the S&Gs. (The descriptions were found to be fairly similar);
- Finally, each staff member is currently conducting his/her own self-assessment using the computerized tracking system. Results will be used to develop customized training programs for staff.

An important feature of the department's initiative is its concern with building on knowledge within the organization, as opposed to introducing the S&Gs as an external set of standards. The S&Gs were used as an adjunct to their existing competency statements in order to ensure that statements defined by staff would conform to standards recognized in the sector.

The initiative of the Department has benefitted from the complete participation of staff; however, the support from management has been crucial in guaranteeing that staff members are able to participate. An initiative of such size and scope could not have been possible if it had not been made a priority by management. The initiative clearly represents an important investment in human resources, which the S&Gs helped to strengthen and support. The Department has been given an award for the computerized tracking system, which is recognized for its comprehensive approach to developing competencies.

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"Instilling the S&Gs into the professional culture of the organization"

The guidance services of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, which oversee primary and secondary schools in the Laurentian, *Lanaudière* and Laval regions of Quebec, created an employee-training program for career counsellors using the S&Gs.

The purpose of the training is to foster a common vocabulary among career counsellors, in order to promote the sharing of knowledge among staff and a degree of uniformity in services. The training program consists of:

- A training manual that includes the S&Gs document in addition to reference material, such as relevant journal articles;
- Time for participants to read through the S&Gs on their own;
- A session in which counsellors work in groups to analyze their strengths and weaknesses in the Areas of Specialization of the S&Gs.
(Counsellors are restricted to the Areas of Specialization since these are perceived to provide the most opportunity for them to share their expertise and learn from each other. The Core Competencies are qualifications that all of the counsellors should be able to demonstrate.);
- The identification by each counsellor of the competencies s/he can coach their colleagues on;
- The delivery of a short training session by each counsellor on the competencies s/he has identified as her/his strong points.

This application is an interesting way to instill the S&Gs into the culture of the organization. This is partly achieved by having all of the counsellors use the S&Gs as the starting point for practice and as their reference document when speaking of competencies in career development. In addition, the application recognizes that counsellors can coach each other in acquiring and improving competencies (using the S&Gs as a guide); formal training does not always have to be the solution!

The results of the training indicate that this type of exchange and peer-to-peer training helps promote an atmosphere of cooperation and professionalism, which is beneficial to both the individual and the organization. A feeling of mutual respect and recognition has been fostered among staff in the department, which enhances their work as a team.

The coordinator of the field test recommends that in introducing the S&Gs, counsellors should be asked to read only a part of the S&Gs rather than the entire document, since the quantity of information can be overwhelming, especially for practitioners who are seeing them for the first time.

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"Encouraging practitioners to reflect on their own professional aspirations"

The **Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT)** is a provincial association of community-based trainers operating in British Columbia. The role of ASPECT is to represent and promote the interests of members of the association through advocacy, information-sharing, referral, training, professional development opportunities and networking.

The association held a workshop to introduce members to the S&Gs as a tool for self-assessment and setting professional development goals. The focus was on helping career practitioners identify the competencies that are important in their current work settings and those that will enhance their qualifications for the future. The format of the workshop consisted of:

- A brief overview of the S&Gs;
- A presentation of a self-assessment tool developed by the association;
- Self-assessments by practitioners on three competencies selected by the facilitator from the S&Gs Core Competencies and Areas of Specialization. These included Interpersonal Competence, Facilitated Individual and Group Learning and Work Search Strategies;
- The preparation of draft professional development plans that included steps to:
 - *Strengthen competencies that practitioners use in their current work settings;*
 - *Develop new competencies that will make them more effective in their jobs;*
 - *Maintain competencies that are less essential in their current setting, but will contribute to their professional development.*
- A plenary discussion to discuss ways to integrate the S&Gs into the culture of their organizations.

The workshop was valuable because it presented the S&Gs as relevant not only to the current positions of practitioners, but as a tool for lifelong learning. Career development practitioners focus on helping students and clients meet professional and personal goals, and may forget to pay attention to their own. The workshop gave an opportunity to career practitioners to reflect on their work experience and set goals for the future.

According to the coordinator of the workshop, the success of the workshop was due in part to the marketing strategy, which emphasized the benefits of the S&Gs in enhancing the employability of practitioners. The activities were also very interactive and facilitated by a professional with experience in human resource management and direct service delivery. The only change that ASPECT recommends is to have practitioners select the three competencies for the self-assessment, rather than the facilitator. This will increase the relevance of the workshop to the specific needs of practitioners.

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"Blending ethics with practice"

The **New Brunswick Career Development Action Group (NB-CDAG)** is a network of non-profit, public and private agencies involved in career development. The network maintains a strong interest in promoting professional development and providing leading-edge expertise to the field.

The NB-CDAG decided to organize two workshops for English and French speaking career practitioners on the code of ethics of the S&Gs. The code of ethics has been developed to serve as a practical guide for organizations and practitioners to follow in resolving ethical dilemmas.

The purpose of the workshops was to familiarize practitioners with the code of ethics and its relevance to career development, and to test specific applications of the code using case studies of ethical dilemmas.

Each workshop was organized and facilitated using the same format. Practitioners selected from across the province were sent invitations to attend the workshop in Miramichi, New Brunswick. In the invitation, they were asked to read through the code of ethics beforehand and to submit examples of ethical dilemmas they would like to address in the workshop. Two experienced facilitators, one fluent in French and the other in English, were asked to lead the workshops.

The workshop format:

- 1) An introduction to the code of ethics and its relevance to career development;
- 2) Small group discussions on specific examples of ethical dilemmas;
- 3) A plenary session in which participants shared the conclusions of the group and expressed their thoughts on the broader implications of ethics for their work.

The evaluation of the workshops revealed that participants found the sessions useful and instructive. The discussions centered on issues that many of them were concerned about, such as ways to ensure the quality of services, protect clients and maintain credibility. They found that the code of ethics was broad enough to be applicable in any setting, regardless of the geographical and social context, and they succeeded in coming up with practical solutions to some common ethical dilemmas.

The workshops were valuable because of their practical use to practitioners, and because of the opportunity they gave to explore, with others, issues of a more theoretical nature that often get relegated to the background but are still essential to professional practice. In other words, career practitioners were able to tap into two dimensions of their work: the reflective and practical.

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"Each part is essential to the whole"

The **Assessment and Referral Centre of Nanaimo (ARC)** in British Columbia and **Seneca College** in Ontario used the S&Gs to strengthen teamwork. The goal was to use the S&Gs to assist teams and individual staff members in setting objectives for professional development. Staff members holding different positions within the organization were involved, including front-line staff, managers and administrative personnel. The process relied on a combination of methods including individual self-assessments and group work.

ARC of Nanaimo

- 1) **Planning:** Staff met to review the purpose of using the S&Gs and to define concrete objectives. A decision was made to conduct self-assessments using the S&Gs Core Competencies and Specializations and to develop professional portfolios.
- 2) **Self-Assessment:** A tool was developed for staff to assess the skills they most often use, such as career counselling and assessment.
- 3) **Portfolio-Building:** Presentations on portfolios were given to staff. A brainstorming session was held to select the S&Gs competencies to present in the portfolio.
- 4) **Peer Assessment:** Anonymous and confidential assessments were held for staff to obtain feedback from colleagues and team members.

Seneca College

- 1) **Planning:** The competencies from the S&Gs that were relevant to the work of different staff members were identified, such as the competencies relevant to job developers and counsellors.
- 2) **Staff performance appraisals:** Individual self-assessments were completed and followed by formal feedback sessions with the manager.
- 3) **Assessment of job descriptions:** A comparison was made of the job descriptions with the S&Gs to clarify the standards for service provision.
- 4) **Job shadowing:** Job developers and employment counsellors exchanged roles for a limited period so as to gain a better understanding of the different tasks involved.

Important characteristics to highlight about these initiatives:

- 1) The creative use of different methods and activities;
- 2) The flexible approach towards the application of the S&Gs (the emphasis was on adapting the S&Gs to the organization, and not the reverse);
- 3) The participatory, interactive and transparent nature of the process.

The outcomes of the process were beneficial for both teams. According to coordinators, the application of the S&Gs has given teams a new and much clearer understanding of their work and raised the overall level of professionalism. In addition, staff members have gained a higher level of confidence in their abilities and their strengths as a team. It is interesting to note that in both cases, the assessment revealed that the competencies of team members were more complementary and extensive than expected, as one coordinator explained "*we realized how in sync we are as a team!*". In fact, one of the organizations has decided to develop an organizational portfolio, which will be presented to clients as the composite of skills and knowledge of their team.

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"Enhancing the link between theory and practice in the classroom"

Several educational institutions have used the S&Gs to enhance the link between training and practice in the field. They have all found that integrating the S&Gs into the curriculum has benefited both students and instructors who now have a better grasp of what is required for today's professional environment. They found that transferring the S&Gs competencies into a classroom setting is challenging but possible with a little creativity!

Chinook College in Alberta used the S&Gs to develop an on-line program for teachers to acquire a certificate to work as Work Experience Coordinators (WEC). The certificate was introduced to establish standards in the training of high-school teachers to work as WECs. Teachers follow the program online, at their own pace and are supported by an instructor. The program consists of five "competency self-assessments" that trainees have to complete. Each competency assessment includes specific competencies from the S&Gs that match the different roles of WECs. Benchmarks are set at the beginning for trainees to evaluate their progress. The program also includes a component for trainees to develop a professional portfolio that highlights their WEC qualifications.

The Career Practitioner Institute in British Columbia used the S&Gs to develop benchmarks for training. A team made up of instructors and managers met to explore the possibility of developing a curriculum built on the S&Gs. They created a grid with which to compare the "learning objectives" of existing courses with the S&Gs and analyzed specifically how texts, assignments and in-class exercises met competencies in the S&Gs. As a result, the institute has designed a set of new courses to address competencies that were not previously included. The institute is currently working on a self-assessment tool that will also allow students to determine their level of competency after the training.

Britannia College of Career Development in Ontario developed a training program for experienced workers based on the S&Gs. A team made up of a professor, manager, and curriculum designer worked together over a year to develop the curriculum for a 3-month diploma program for career development practitioners. They began by conducting a literature review on the content and design of other programs. They then analyzed the S&Gs and chose the competencies their curriculum would address. The course outlines and content for the 300-hour program were matched with experiential components in order to give practitioners effective techniques to develop competencies with methods such as assignments, in-class exercises, texts, and simulations.

The Open Learning Agency (OLA) in British Columbia and George Brown College in Ontario reviewed the match between their curriculum and the S&Gs. A review of the curriculum was conducted by comparing the learning objectives of courses with the S&Gs. Evaluation grids were developed to thoroughly review each course. Feedback was sought from everyone with ties to the program such as instructors, managers and students. In both cases, the objectives of the review were to identify the similarities and gaps between the curriculum and the S&Gs. As a result, both institutions are now revising and adjusting their programs to address gaps that were identified in order to enhance the fit between the courses and the S&Gs.

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"Enhancing the educational impact of a peer mentoring program with the S&Gs"

Landell and Associates Consulting Ltd. is an organization based in Vancouver, British Columbia that delivers career and employment contracts for the public and private sector. The organization manages an innovative Peer Mentoring Program for the Career Development Practitioner Certificate Program at Douglas College.

From its inception in 2001, the 100-hour Peer Mentoring program has drawn on the S&Gs to give students first-hand knowledge of how competencies are demonstrated in a work setting and to learn to master them themselves. The program gives students an overview of career development services and includes different sessions in which they observe and get briefed on theory and practice in career development. The sessions include: 1) spending 2-3 weeks in a Job Finding Club, 2) participating in a 7-day Career Planning Program, 3) observing 1 or 2 Case Management and Needs Determination Interviews with the client's permission, and 4) observing Resource Centre Facilitation.

A highlight of the program is the regular meetings scheduled for students to talk with their mentor and the program facilitator. Students also keep a journal as a record of the program and a tool they can use to reflect on their experience. The main aspects of the program include:

- An orientation to the mentoring program in which mentor and student agree on professional and personal objectives to achieve by the end of the term. For example, a student's goal was "to become more familiar with the Core Competencies", and "to gain an understanding of how specific Core Competencies can be applied in assisting clients with the job-finding process";
- For each program (mentioned above), the relevant competencies are outlined for students as their reference. Students constantly refer to this list as they progress through the program, taking notes wherever necessary;
- At the end, students complete an evaluation form that allows them to identify their achievements and the skills they would like to develop further.

The coordinator of the program reported that the S&Gs have greatly enhanced the educational and practical nature of the program. They have provided a clearer structure and set of standards for the program. The advantage for graduates of the program is to have had an opportunity to see and test the S&Gs competencies in real life situations and to go over their applications in discussions with experienced practitioners.

The interaction with the mentor and program facilitator is an essential part of the program and helps students to organize information, analyze issues, and formulate plans for their training and professional development. The S&Gs – as an objective and non-judgmental reference – were found to be particularly helpful in steering these discussions.

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"Using the S&Gs to define quality indicators for front-line services"

Career Circuit is a national network of over 5,000 non-profit organizations involved in helping youth plan for their careers and future. With a national team based in Ottawa and Toronto and 12 regional representatives from across the country, Career Circuit provides free practical information, tools, resources and training to support members in their capacity as service providers.

Career Circuit held a series of community forums across the country for youth-serving agencies and their front-line staff. The purpose of the forums was to test a process of using the S&Gs to define quality indicators for their services. The S&Gs provided the framework for identifying key competencies. Participants then drew on their experience as front-line service providers to identify indicators and types of evidence that would be acceptable and meaningful for a given competency.

In order for the process to run as smoothly and as successfully as possible, Career Circuit developed a comprehensive guide with information and workshop materials for the regional representatives (who facilitated the forums) and participants. The specific contents of the guide included:

- A sample Letter of Invitation
- A detailed Facilitator's Guide
- Overhead Masters (to present the S&Gs)
- An "At-A-Glance" Description of Career Circuit
- A step-by-step guide to organizing the forum
- Resources and equipment checklists
- A sample Competency Analysis
- A Participant Evaluation Form
- Competency Charts
- A full Participant's Guide
- Sample Follow-up/Thank You Letters
- A report template

A total of 13 forums were held in 10 provinces and 1 territory. Each forum defined quality indicators for a specific area (or areas) of the S&Gs. The results of all the forums are being integrated into a "Draft Quality Framework Workbook".

The forums involved a range of participants from the career development field, including members of the Steering Committee and the Stakeholder and Liaison Advisory Council for the S&Gs, as well as the Career Circuit Regional Representatives and, of course, many members of the network. Career Circuit was particularly gratified that the forums made it possible for the youth-serving sector to become more actively involved in the S&Gs initiative.

It is anticipated that the "Draft Quality Framework Workbook" will be made available to members of the career development field as a "tried and tested" process they can replicate to come up with quality service indicators that are relevant to their specific context.

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