# BC Open Textbook Project Narrative

## Introduction

The Minister of Advanced Education, John Yap, announced the B.C. Open Textbook Project in October 2012 at the Open Education Conference in Vancouver. Since that time the project team has been busy working toward the goals of the project. This document is intended to explain the project, its goals, milestones, hurdles and solutions.

The Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) has contributed funding (one million dollars) and BCcampus is tasked with managing the project. The funds will be used to pay faculty to review, adapt or create texts, as well as to cover additional costs associated with a project of this scale such as technical infrastructure and outreach.

A goal of the program is to provide flexible and affordable access to higher education resources, by making available 40 openly-licensed textbooks aligned with the most highly enrolled first and second year subject areas in B.C. public post secondary institutions. We also feel it is important to enable faculty to control the resources they use in their teaching environments, so they are able to better help students achieve deep and meaningful learning.

These texts will be available for selection by B.C. faculty, and digital versions of the texts will be free of charge to students. Printed copies will be available on demand to students for a low cost.

BCcampus has long been advocating for and actively working in the domain of open educational resources (OER). Since 2002, the organization has administered the Online Program Development Fund. This fund enabled faculty and staff in B.C. institutions to create OER, which ranged from small multimedia elements to full online programs, all of which were licensed openly. When the Open Textbook Project was announced, we were very excited by the prospect of improving access to higher education by reducing costs for students. In addition, providing faculty the ability to control the resources they use by adapting them to their own contexts was seen as a major benefit to the learning process.

## Discovery Phase

### Discovery phase: Our commitment to open

From the outset, we have been committed to licensing works produced from our project as openly as possible. While there are other models that would have accomplished the goal of increasing access to higher education by reducing costs, our desire to enable faculty control of resources drove us to pursue an agenda which not only allows for reuse, but also revision and remixing as described by Wiley (2009) in his discussion of the 4 R’s of Openness. One example of this commitment is that we will not be hosting resources in our collection licensed with the No Derivatives clause.

In addition to outreach with stakeholders and experts, we also had significant interest from the traditional publishing industry and at their request, met with representatives of every major publishing house in Canada at least once. Some of these conversations have included a discussion of potential collaboration but as our agendas are divergent with respect to cost, that has yet to come to fruition.

### Discovery phase: Determining the textbook subject areas

Before the project could begin in earnest, it was necessary to research enrollments across B.C. public post secondary institutions. BCcampus was provided data by the AVED Central Data Warehouse (CDW), as well as by institutions themselves. From this information we were able to determine where our focus should be. We wanted to ensure that our entire post secondary system was represented to the largest degree possible, so instead of focusing on courses, which vary greatly across institutions (for example a large institution may offer a number of courses within a subject area, where a smaller institution can only offer a single, more general course) we chose to focus instead on subject areas. To that end, we produced a [list of 40](http://www.bccampus.ca/top-40-courses/) to guide our work.

### Discovery phase: Outreach

To be truly successful, the project needed a formal method for getting feedback from our system partners. To that end, an advisory committee was formed which exists as a subcommittee of the [BCcampus Strategic Council](http://www.bccampus.ca/about-us-2/). This group, consisting of faculty, instructional designers, librarians, bookstore staff, students and senior administrators, volunteered their services to the project to provide feedback, advice and provided a conduit for communicating within the institutions. The constituency of the group was intended to represent a variety of roles within the system, as well as the system itself; geographically, and by institution type.

Phase one (described below) included a significant amount of outreach to stakeholders, like-projects and other experts. In addition to consultation with the BC Open Textbook Subcommittee, the Open Textbook team visited more than 10 [articulation committee](http://bccat.ca/articulation/resources/companion/committees/) meetings, presented at several conferences and meetings of groups such as the [BC Association of Institutes and Universities](http://bcaiu.com), [BC Colleges](http://www.bccolleges.ca/) and the [Canadian Federation of Students BC chapter](http://www.cfs.bc.ca).

BCcampus also hosted an Open Textbook Summit in Vancouver, which was attended by representatives from [OpenStax](http://openstaxcollege.org), [Siyavula](http://projects.siyavula.com), the [Washington Open Course Library](http://opencourselibrary.org), [Creative Commons](http://creativecommons.org), [The 20 Million Minds Foundation](http://20mm.org/homepage.html), the [University of Minnesota’s Open Textbook Library](https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/), the governments of [B.C](http://www.gov.bc.ca/aved/). and [Alberta](http://eae.alberta.ca), [Student Public Interest Research Groups](http://studentpirgs.org), the [Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition](http://www.sparc.arl.org), and the [Canadian Alliance of Student Associations](http://www.casa-acae.com). The goal of this meeting was to begin a collaborative relationship between projects such that we could build on each other’s work and look for future opportunities to produce better OER projects via partnerships.

Finally, BCcampus facilitated one-day adopting open textbook workshops at four B.C. institutions (TRU, UNBC, KPU and Camosun). The workshops were intended to introduce the topic of openness, OER and Open Textbooks, as well as information and instruction about how to find and evaluate open textbooks.

### Discovery phase: Technology

While the team worked on outreach efforts, we were also delving into our technology needs. We recognized that our existing repository and many others had a reputation for being difficult to navigate, and given that adoption is the goal of our project, we wanted to implement technology that would make finding and adopting resources as easy as possible. To accomplish that goal, we used a combination of several technologies. The textbooks are still hosted in our repository, which uses the Equella digital library system. Reviewers inputted their responses to the criteria questions into a web form hosted on Lime Survey. We also implemented a WordPress instance that displays the textbook records and their associated reviews, while the data is still hosted in Equella and Lime. We are also hosting forums for reviewers on the WordPress site to enable community building and conversation amongst those involved.

## Phase One: Review and adopt

In phase one, we researched and harvested existing open textbooks from the Commons and solicited reviews from B.C. faculty using a [review rubric](http://www.bccampus.ca/review-rubric/). Reviewers were paid a $250 honorarium. Thirty-eight reviews are now displayed on [our site](http://open.bccampus.ca/find-open-textbooks/) along with their texts.  During this phase, we were able to harvest resources that align with texts in 12 of the 40 subject areas.

During phase one, we issued a call for proposals for the print on demand service we needed to provide. We worked with the bookstore of one of our institutions to provide print copies of the textbooks to reviewers that wanted them, and this process helped us build a list of criteria for the print-on-demand service functions. The most important criteria was cost to students and the bid that we chose met that goal as well as others such as having the technology in place so that the service could be up and running very quickly.

We recognize that it’s vital we track adoption of our resources to ensure there is a return on the investment being made. To that end, we implemented an adoption tracker on our website during this phase. The tracker prompts users for information about their adoption when they begin a download of one of the texts hosted on our site. It asks the user to indicate their institution, the course in which the text will be adopted and how many students will be impacted. We are also tracking the number of visits to the site, downloads and the path users take to reach the textbooks via web analytics.

## Phase Two: Adaptation

In phase two, we are asking faculty interested in engaging in a process of adaptation of existing open resources to work with us to produce open textbooks. Adaptations are intended to:

* Extend an existing open textbook by creating accompanying instructional resources such as presentation files and test questions,
* Localize an existing open textbook so that the examples used within it are appropriate for a Canadian context,
* Enhance an existing open textbook so that its quality is consistent with resources used in BC post-secondary institutions,
* Bring together a number of existing open educational resources to create a single text.

The adaptations may be done in any of the remaining 28 subject areas.

In addition to this call for adaptations, we will also release a call for three targeted adaptations, which specifically address issues identified by reviewers of our texts. Open textbooks we harvested and reviewed in the areas of introductory psychology, sociology and chemistry have the potential to impact thousands of students if their instructors choose to adopt them. These texts will have new content inserted and will also be modified to reflect a Canadian context to improve the likelihood of adoption.

A peer review panel will review the proposals. The panel will include BCcampus staff, members of the subcommittee, and institutional representatives. Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

* Documentation of existing Open Educational Resources to be used in the adaptation
* The ways in which the proposals exhibits the characteristics of quality teaching and learning
* Demonstration of sustainability and cost-effectiveness
* Demonstration of collaboration between instructors within a single institutions and among two or more B.C. public post secondary institutions
* Commitment to create resources licensed openly
* Commitment to adopt the text in the adapters course(s) when the work is completed
* The inclusion of a budget that documents the proposed expenditure plan for the funding being requested.

Once the successful proposals are chosen, project teams will work with BCcampus to develop project plans, milestones and final deliverable dates.

### Phase Two: Developing technical capacity

While we anticipate some teams will want to use tools such as Microsoft Word and Google Docs, we are also hosting an instance of [PressBooks](http://pressbooks.com), an ebook creation tool built as a WordPress plug-in. We anticipate a wide variety of adaptation “use cases” during this phase. For example, some teams will be simply making minor additions to an existing, fully functional open textbook. In other cases, there will be a need to pull together a number of open resources that come in different file formats such as html, PDF or MS Word. Because of this diversity, we will be further developing our technical capacity by making use of conversion tools and further developing the PressBooks platform to enable importing these file types.

In addition to making technologies available, we will also need to provide training on their use. We will be using a combination of self-serve materials we adopt, adapt or create, and when necessary, a more hands-on approach.

We anticipate that some faculty will come to the project with institutional resources such as instructional designers and multimedia developers who can assist with the project. In other cases, such as when the instructor comes from a small institution, those resources may not be available to them, so BCcampus will engage contractors to assist. In addition, BCcampus will be contracting editors to work with project teams to ensure the final copy is cohesive and professionally rendered.

### Phase Two: Outreach and further review

The BC Open Textbook team will also continue outreach efforts in this phase, with presentations at Open Access Week events, conferences and workshops. In addition, the team will begin to engage institutional librarians. Librarians involved in the Washington Open Course Library have been consulted to assist us with learning more about the ways in which our project can develop relationships with institutional libraries and enable them to assist faculty who would like to explore OER. As a first step, we will deliver a workshop to the Council of Post Secondary Library Directors, British Columbia (CPSLD).

This phase also included the development and delivery of an online, asynchronous Open Textbook Adoption workshop. The content of the workshop was based on our work in face-to-face settings and was created as an open resource itself, licensed CC-BY.

We also released a second call for reviewers of texts we have added to the site since our last call. The process will be the same as it was for phase one; completed reviews will be hosted on the site with their associated texts.

We will also redesign the website on which the texts are hosted to make resources easier to find. The redesign will also include a prompt asking users to indicate adoptions they are aware of so we’re able to continue tracking the use of our resources.

## Phase Three: Creation

When we are underway with our first set of adaptation projects, we’ll be able to analyze which of our 40 subject areas have been covered via the review/adoption phase, which have adaptations in progress, and which still need to be addressed.

In phase three, we will ask faculty to create new open textbooks for the remaining targeted subject areas for which there is no existing or adapted textbook. We also anticipate more adaptation projects during this phase, as well as further reviews.

In areas that our research indicates existing OER are available, we will do a second call for adaptations. In order to ensure we reach all potentially interested faculty, in addition to the general call, we will be doing targeted outreach to institutional academic departments and asking our partners within the institutions to help us make contact with appropriate instructors. For those areas that likely do not have sufficient OER available to produce an adaptation, we will release a call for proposals asking for interested faculty to create textbooks from scratch.

During this phase, we will be delivering a workshop on how to adapt open textbooks with a view to enabling faculty to be self-sufficient in this pursuit.

**Citations**

Wiley, D. (Nov 16, 2009). Defining Open [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://opencontent.org/blog/archives/1123>