

NEW

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Directions

Staff photo



Members of the Action Learning Project (ALP) team that focused on encouraging voluntary accreditation by public health units, surround their sponsor, Allison Stuart, acting ADM, Public Health, seated. The team's cross-functional make-up enhanced the project, Stuart noted. On page 3, read how Stuart was recognized with an Exceptional Sponsor Award for her role in championing this project. Front row, from left: Cassandra LoFranco, Barb Cadotte, Alison Paprica and Julie Ingo. Back row: Christian Gingras and Kim Forster. Absent: David Pao and Rick Gaukel.

What is an Action Learning Project

ALP participants see great value in the experience and outcome of their work

Action Learning Project (ALP) teams are contributing to the work of the ministry while strengthening their stewardship skills and forging bonds with colleagues across the organization. Participants in Round 3 of the ALP initiatives explain, below, what they gained from their involvement in the project.

"I am happy to have done it. It's hard work but there are lots of benefits. I would absolutely encourage others to do it," said Alison Paprica, manager of the Planning Unit, Planning and Research Branch, Health System Strategy. Paprica's ALP team focused on developing a strategy to encourage voluntary accreditation of public health units in Ontario. "One of my personal goals was to develop relationships and share ideas. I honestly didn't anticipate how strong the relationships would become and the amount of trust that would be created."

Mark Grudzien's ALP team focused on developing a plan to inventory the ministry's knowledge needs and devise a knowledge transfer plan. Grudzien is the senior manager of Business Operations and Claims, Registration and Claims Branch, Corporate and Direct Services. Grudzien said he was very pleased by the collective expertise and talent that resided on his ALP team. "There was great value in having so much brain power with different backgrounds and perspectives committed to one topic

Action Learning Projects (ALPs) are a key component of the Stewardship In Action Leadership Program. They provide an opportunity for senior managers, working in cross-functional teams, to apply stewardship principles to resolve an issue that is part of the ministry's work.

Each project consists of six to eight team members with a sponsor, usually an assistant deputy minister. Each team is also paired with a coach from the Shulich School of Business to help guide them through the process. There are one or two subject matter experts on a team, but they are there to provide background and information, rather than to lead the group. ALP teams give all members the opportunity to stretch their knowledge, test out new skills and forge new relationships.

The projects run for a six-month period and at the end of the process each team presents a recommendation document to Ministry Management Committee (MMC).

To date, nearly 130 senior managers have participated in one of the three rounds of ALPs. Round 4 began in October. ■

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to resolve a problem. I was very happy and impressed with the outcome,” Grudzien said.

Grudzien noted that the sponsor of the project, John McKinley, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health System Information Management and Investment (HSIMI), did a good job in setting the tone for the importance of the team’s work. “He (McKinley) said: ‘Don’t kid yourself. This is not a make-work project. Let me be very clear. You’re doing a real work initiative.’ He was passionate and it led to us being passionate about the project.”

Applying stewardship principles

Tiffany Jay, interim co-director, Emergency Management Branch, Public Health, explained that the ALP was a great opportunity to apply the principles of stewardship. “We used many of the strategies that we learned through the stewardship leadership training, like appreciative inquiry, understanding the evolution and sustainability of complex systems, and asking wicked questions,” said Jay, whose ALP team focused on exploring strategies to monitor the performance of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs). “Stewardship principles helped us define the scope of the issue and have meaningful conversations that led us to be innovative and chart a course together,” Jay said.

Kim Forster, manager, Knowledge Services, Knowledge Management Branch, HSIMI, said being introduced to new subject matter through the ALP was of great benefit.

“You have to rely on other skills when you are out of your area of expertise,” said Forster, who was also a part of Paprica’s

What are wicked questions?

Wicked questions challenge our assumptions and encourage creativity by asking us to think about two apparently opposite sides to a situation. For example, “How can we deliver faster service and reduce costs at the same time?”

team. “You were dependent on other people. It was really about teamwork,” she said. “We all agreed we should keep in touch to be mentors for each other in the future.”

MMC presentation a highlight

Forster’s team presentation to the Ministry Management Committee (MMC) was definitely a highlight of her ALP experience. “For me it was the first time presenting to MMC. It’s a good experience and was one of my learning goals from the project,” Forster said.

Alison Blair, director, Information Strategy and Policy Branch, HSIMI, also found her team’s presentation to MMC to be a high point of her ALP experience. “The reception at MMC was superb. They listened and agreed to a course of action,” said Blair.

“We were really committed to this project and it was great to see a positive response to our work. There is definitely value in going to MMC. Being able to convince and influence senior leadership is an excellent skill to practice.”

Peter Andru, manager of Knowledge Transfer, Knowledge Management Branch, HSIMI, said it was important for the work of the ALP teams to be recognized and shared across the ministry. “It would be helpful for new teams coming in to review the work of past ALPs,” said Andru, who was a subject matter expert on the knowledge transfer project team. “This would give them a sense of which processes and approaches were helpful in accomplishing similar objectives.

“The learning aspect of the ALP is valuable in and of itself. But, I think that it’s also important to know that we are contributing knowledge and enhancing the work of the ministry,” Andru said. ■

* *The ALP presentations to MMC from previous rounds are stored on MIKE, a content management system on The Exchange’s web portal. Visit MIKE’s **space/elibrary** to look at the body of ALP work to-date. Register to access MIKE through [The Exchange](#). Also stay tuned for information about upcoming FYI Series sessions featuring ALPs.*

What is appreciative inquiry?

Appreciative inquiry is a strength-based approach to promote positive change. It focuses on what’s working well and building on strengths, rather than focusing on what’s not working.

Attention: Future ALP participants

Former ALP team members offer you tips on how to tackle your project successfully:

- ✓ Use project management tools. For example, create a project charter and a work plan.
- ✓ Establish rules and guidelines of how team members will work and interact together — set out expectations and responsibilities.
- ✓ Discuss what each team member would like to get out of the process — i.e. take on a leadership role, develop research or IT skills. Support team members to realize personal goals.
- ✓ Book meetings in advance and be upfront about how much time you are prepared to commit to the project.
- ✓ Communicate with your manager or supervisor about time commitments required for ALP and balancing ongoing workload.
- ✓ Connect early with your sponsor and coach to help focus and clarify the topic and get the team off on the right foot.
- ✓ Use stewardship tools and principles to help focus the work, build team dynamics and move the project forward to achieve desired outcomes.
- ✓ Use The Exchange tools to help set up meetings, manage documents, etc.
- ✓ Expect challenging work with worthwhile rewards.

Committed ALP sponsor honoured with OPS award

Allison Stuart, acting Assistant Deputy Minister of the Public Health Division, has received an Exceptional Project Sponsor Award from the Ministry of Government Services' Project Management Centre of Excellence (PMCoE) for her role in championing one of the ministry's recent Action Learning Projects (ALPs). Stuart was nominated by the ALP team she sponsored, in recognition of her strategic guidance on the Strategy to Encourage Voluntary Accreditation by Public Health Units project.

"She really paved the way for the project's success," said Alison Paprica, Manager of the Planning Unit, Planning and Research Branch, Health System Strategy. "She took time out of her very busy schedule to provide us with clear direction on the scope of the project."

Paprica said Stuart responded promptly to questions and draft presentations and that she personally e-mailed the public health unit stakeholders to introduce the ALP team. Once the team had presented their recommendations, Stuart also made the commitment that where appropriate they would be incorporated into the performance plan of senior managers.

"From planning through to execution, Allison was very supportive and committed to our team achieving its goals. She was a terrific sponsor," Paprica said.

Stuart said she was honoured to receive the award because it was an acknowledgement from a group of

her ministry colleagues. "I am appreciative and humbled that the team took the time from the demands of their busy schedules to nominate me for this award," said Stuart.

"Sponsoring this ALP team was a rewarding experience, and having the team recognize me in this way is a lovely end to a worthwhile journey."

The OPS Project Management Awards are presented by PMCoE to celebrate the achievements of those who are leading the way with project management best practices. A panel of project management experts from across the OPS selects one Exceptional Project Team and one Exceptional Project Sponsor. ■

Visit the [PMCoE](#) website to learn more about their consulting services and other award and recognition opportunities.

"From planning through to execution, Allison was very supportive and committed to our team achieving its goals. She was a terrific sponsor."

Alison Paprica
Member of the Action Learning Project team
that nominated Allison Stuart for an Exceptional
Project Sponsor Award



Melanya Liwanag Aguila photo

Allison Stuart, acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health, center, is presented with an Exceptional Project Sponsor Award from the Ministry of Government Services' Project Management Centre of Excellence. Stuart was nominated for the award by one of the ministry's Action Learning Project teams that she championed. Joining Stuart at the Nov. 4 award ceremony are Leslie Slater, Assistant Deputy Minister, Modernization Division, and Nick Stea, director, Project Management Centre of Excellence, both with MGS.

ALP sponsors also reap rewards

John McKinley, ADM Health System Information Management and Investment, has sponsored six projects in the various rounds of the ALP initiatives. From his perspective, he sees many benefits from both the experience of participants and sponsors. "The value I see is from exposing senior managers to the concept of teamwork across divisions. They have to take into consideration expertise from other areas and other ways of thinking," McKinley said. "It helps managers to better understand the dynamics and challenges their own staff members will face working on cross-functional teams. Our division has taken and incorporated learnings of these groups into

the redesign of our business processes." McKinley added that MMC has been duly impressed by the ALP team presentations. "Some people were very surprised by the breadth of knowledge across the ministry." He also encouraged other potential sponsors to get involved in the ALP process. "My advice is to give this a chance. It provides you with an opportunity to hear from a broad spectrum. It has worked well for me."

Allison Stuart, acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health, explained that she found great value in participating as sponsor of a recent Round 3 team that developed a strategy to encourage voluntary accreditation by public health units in Ontario. "The ability to have a group of

people who are tasked to take on a project and bring it to completion was a gold mine," Stuart said. One of the benefits of the ALP team is its cross-functional makeup that pulls talent from across the ministry, she noted.

"Many of the team members were not familiar with the subject matter and the things you're not allowed to suggest. Sometimes they were in a better position to ask the wicked question because they came fresh to an issue with no preconceived ideas," Stuart said. "They asked really probing questions and provided Public Health with sound recommendations and next steps to build on." ■