- WHAT IS ADULT LITERACY?

- WHY START AN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM?

- HOW DO YOU PLAN AN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM?

In 1984, the issue of adult literacy was highlighted in *Illiterate America*, a best-selling book by Jonathan Kozol. The book pointed out that most estimates placed at 20 to 25 the percentage of Americans reading and writing below the level needed to function in the society. Illiterate America caused a sensation, and moved government to pay more attention to the issue. The National Adult Literacy Study (NALS) was ultimately established by the Bush administration, and in 1993 published a report that confirmed the fact that there was a problem with the literacy rate in a country that had always considered itself nearly 100% literate.

For individuals, lack of basic skills can lead to unemployment or low-paying, dead-end jobs; to status as permanent political outsiders, with no opportunity to have their voices heard; and to the possibility of watching their children repeat the cycle. For your local area, low literacy levels can affect economic development, diminish the effectiveness of local government and citizen participation, and place a heavy financial and educational burden on the school system. For all these reasons, many communities support adult literacy programs. This section provides some information about adult literacy and some guidance about how to plan an adult literacy program. The next section will help you to actually get your program started in the community.

WHAT IS ADULT LITERACY?

This may seem like a simple question to answer -- adults being able to read and write, right? - but in fact educators have been puzzling and arguing over it for at least a hundred years. It encompasses reading and writing, of course, but at what level? A hundred years ago, people were considered literate if they could write their names, a qualification that would certainly be woefully inadequate today. And what about math? To be literate, do you have to be able to at least add, subtract, multiply, and divide, so you can balance your checkbook and figure your gas mileage? Do you need a certain amount of general knowledge in order to be literate? A lot of educators who use the term "cultural literacy" think so. How about people who can't speak or read or write English: are they literate, if they can read and write in their own language? And do you have an obligation to help learners understand how to use their literacy?

COMPONENTS OF ADULT LITERACY

As you can see, adult literacy can be looked at in a number of different ways. In planning an adult literacy program, you have to consider all of them, and decide what your community needs and what you have the resources to do. The areas that are generally referred to when adult literacy is discussed are:

- **Reading**: "Functional literacy" is often defined as the ability to read at a particular grade level.
- **Writing**: Written literacy might best be considered to be an individual's capacity to write what she needs to in clear and reasonably accurate language.

- **Math**: "Numeracy" or "mathematical literacy" usually refers to the ability to perform the basic mathematical operations - addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and whatever else - normally needed in everyday life.
- **English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL***)*: The teaching of English speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills to those for whom it is not the native language.
- **Cultural literacy**: Familiarity with the background knowledge that is everywhere in American culture. This can include everything from the great classics of western literature to knowing the names of Elvis Presley hits from the '50's.

THE USES OF LITERACY

The uses of literacy also have to be considered in any discussion about the subject. Mark Twain said that someone who can read and won't is considerably worse off than someone who can't read, because the latter can be taught to read, while the former is stuck in ignorance. It is the use of a skill that matters: there may be many athletes with the potential of a Michael Jordan, but only one of them developed his basketball skill to the point where he was considered the best in the world.

So what do adults want to use literacy skills for? Sondra Stein, of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), conducted a nationwide survey and reported the results in "Equipped for the Future." Adult learners in literacy programs, asked why they were pursuing literacy skills, gave three equally important reasons:

- *They wanted to improve their employment situations*. Whether that meant gaining more responsibility on their jobs, becoming more competent at what they did, being promoted, finding a better job or career, or just being able to work at all, most learners felt that improving their skills could lead to improving their work life and finances.
- *They wanted to be better parents, spouses, and family members*. Reading to children or helping them with homework, keeping better contact with faraway relatives, even writing love letters to husbands or wives were all cited as reasons for learning to read and write better.
- *They wanted to be better citizens, and to participate in the political life of their communities*. Learners wanted to be able to read about and understand the issues in political campaigns or local controversies, so they could make their own reasoned decisions, and wanted to be able to work in their communities to influence or change the things they cared about.

As you plan an adult literacy program, you need to consider what learners want and need. Their motivation comes not from what you think they should have, but from what they see as necessary in their lives. Often, as learners gain competence and confidence, learning itself may become one of their goals, and that is certainly to be encouraged. But don't lose sight of the fact that their lives dictate the uses of their newly acquired skills.

WHY START AN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM?

There are two general reasons to start an adult literacy program: to meet community need, and to support a larger initiative.

COMMUNITY NEED

Communities can assess and interpret their own needs in a number of different ways. Once you've determined to start a program, it's necessary to take a careful look at the community and determine how many people need what kinds of literacy services. But before you look at numbers, you have to listen to the community to understand how it views the issue of literacy, and what kinds of needs resonate with its residents. Some community reasons for establishing a program may be:

- **Economic concerns**. Do local employers have difficulty finding qualified and competent workers to keep their businesses and industries competitive? Is the local unemployment rate high? Is the area depressed? Literacy could be closely related to all of these conditions.
- **Immigration**. A community may experience growth in its immigrant community, creating a need for ESOL services. Employers, merchants and service industries, and health services may have difficulty communicating with immigrants, often because of cultural as well as language differences. The local schools may also be seriously affected.
- **Children's education**. It is often mentioned that the one clearly significant literacy statistic that applies under virtually any circumstances is that mothers (i.e. primary caregivers) with low literacy levels have children with low literacy levels. If the community and its schools are concerned about the literacy of children, one component of addressing the issue may be literacy services for parents, or a family literacy program that works with parents and children together.
- **Health issues**. Literacy is often a factor in health issues, particularly preventive health and health maintenance. Do parents understand the need for good prenatal and infant care? Are elderly residents aware of how their medication is to be taken and stored? Does everyone understand the instructions to be followed if the water treatment plant breaks down? Concern for public health may be a motivator for literacy services.
- **Quality of life**. In many communities, raising the quality of life for all citizens is a priority. Thus, a community may decide that literacy services are important simply because there are community members who need them. More often, this concern links with one or more of the others mentioned to strengthen the determination of the community to support a program.

A LITERACY PROGRAM AS PART OF A LARGER INITIATIVE

Literacy programs may be seen either as integral to the achievement of the goals of a larger community initiative (one on education, for instance), as one part of a multi-pronged approach to a community problem, or as a component of an all-out assault on poverty and other conditions that produce unwanted consequences in the community. Some initiatives that might include adult literacy services:

- Violence prevention
- Substance abuse prevention
- Community health (either a general push toward a healthier community, or a campaign aimed at a specific health problem or concern)
- Voter registration

- Economic development
- Job training
- Education (an effort to fulfill President Clinton's promise to assure that every child is reading by third grade, for instance)
- Specific early childhood or school-based initiatives (Head Start, Even Start Family Literacy)
- Anti-poverty (comprehensive initiatives including many of the above areas and others as well, designed to address the issue of poverty from many different angles)

HOW DO YOU PLAN AN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM?

In my own experience, planning for most literacy programs extends only to what goes on in the classroom. A community need becomes apparent, funding becomes available, and a group or organization jumps in to tackle the issue. The funder wants a response now, and the program has to start right away. There isn't time to assemble a planning team, talk with the community, and design a program to meet actual community needs.

What follows is an ideal scenario, with the understanding that you probably won't have the opportunity to do things in an ideal way. Remember that all of this can happen while a program is already going on as well, and that what you're doing can - and should - change continually to conform with the real needs and desires of learners and the community, and with your experience of what works and what doesn't.

STEP 1: ASSEMBLE A PLANNING TEAM

Putting together a group representative of the community at large to guide the planning will help you get accurate information about the community and create community ownership of the program.

Some groups and individuals you might encourage to participate include:

- **Local government**. In addition to someone from the mayor's or town manager's office, a town planner or economic development director may be a good candidate.
- **Libraries**. Besides being obvious allies for literacy programs, libraries may be the daytime haunts of the homeless, and librarians often receive queries about literacy resources and services.
- **Human service providers and representatives of agencies that serve the disadvantaged**. Many agencies, especially those working specifically with low-income groups, have contact with many who need literacy services.
- **Schools and other educational programs**. The public schools, Head Start, and other adult education providers might be invited to join.
- **Law enforcement.** The police, probation office, Clerk of Courts, and judges.
- **Health providers and community health programs**. Hospitals are often major employers, especially of unskilled labor; and they and community health programs may serve a disadvantaged population that includes potential adult literacy learners.

- **Employers and other members of the business community**. Employers may be acutely aware of literacy needs in a community because of their inability to find qualified workers.
- **Labor unions**. Union members may have their own literacy needs, and unions are often willing to support initiatives that benefit the disadvantaged.
- **Representatives of community institutions**. Service organizations (Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, etc.), community coalitions, the YMCA, United Way, the Red Cross, social and sports clubs, and veterans' organizations.
- **The faith community**. Contact with churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious institutions, particularly those that serve the target population, can provide an efficient way of getting the word out to large numbers of people, and can take advantage of clergy's and congregants' knowledge of the community.
- **Key individuals in the community at large and in the target population**. People who hold no specific position, but who are well respected and who have their fingers on the pulse of the community.

STEP 2: ASSESS THE NEED

Once you have a planning team assembled, the next step is to look carefully at the community and determine the nature and magnitude of the community's most urgent literacy needs. Who are the people that need services? How many people fall into this category? What kind of services do they need? These are the questions that must be answered before you can address program planning. To find accurate answers, it is helpful to explore a number of sources of information.

- **Census data and other statistical records**. Aside from the U.S. Census (available on the Internet and at libraries), important sources of data may be town or state websites, universities, municipal or county economic planning departments, community development corporations, and city halls or town offices.
- **School systems.** School officials are usually willing to discuss such issues as dropout rates and numbers of students in special education and ESOL or bilingual programs.
- **Human service agencies and health providers**. Some agencies may be able to estimate the percentage of their participants who lack basic skills (those unable to fill out forms correctly or at all, those who avoid or have obvious trouble coping with printed material, etc.) and/or high school diplomas. Others can be made more aware, and may develop into good sources of information.
- **Community focus groups**. Drawing groups from various elements of the population, including, if there are any, current adult literacy learners from the community, can yield much helpful information.
- **Key individuals and pre-existing formal or informal groups rooted in the community**. Key individuals might include clergy, especially those serving immigrant or disadvantaged populations; "natural helpers," those individuals whom their neighbors seek out for help and counsel; officers of social clubs and similar organizations ; and merchants or business people who have a lot of contact with individuals (barbers, bartenders, small grocers, insurance agents, pharmacists). Community centers, sports clubs and teams, and informal groups (friends who gather in a particular restaurant, teens who play basketball every evening) might all be good sources of information about literacy needs.

I recently participated in a community assessment that used many of these sources of information. In the town we focused on, over 30% of adults lacked a high school credential. From census data, we found that, in a county of well over half a million people, this town of less than 20,000 claimed nearly half of all county residents of Portuguese descent. The planning team, which included representatives of town government, the school system, local politicians, other literacy providers, health care, and the employment training system, volunteered that a large proportion of this ethnic community was made up of immigrants. No one on the planning team - and this was confirmed by both census data and professional and community feedback - saw a great need for English-language adult literacy services in the community. Armed with this knowledge and an assumption that it indicated a need for ESOL services, we established contacts in the Portuguese community itself. Several meetings with key individuals and groups in that community confirmed the ESOL need. The volume of services needed was determined by a community survey and by circulating a sign -up list, both individually and through the church and a social club which are the hubs of community life. Ultimately, using all this information, the community was able to obtain funding for an ESOL program that answered the demand.

As you assess the need for services, be aware that need and demand are not the same. The *need* represents the number of people who could benefit from or make use of adult literacy services. The *demand* is the number of people willing to use those services, and is always much smaller than the need. Especially when the economy is good, demand may be less than 20% of need. When planning a program, it's important to understand what the actual demand for services is, because that will determine how large a program the community can support.

STEP 3: DESIGN A PROGRAM TO MEET THE DEMAND

There are four elements that go into designing a program: First, what services will it provide to whom? Second, who will run the program? Third, what are the program's assumptions: i.e. what will it actually look like, should it be staffed by professionals or volunteers, etc.? And finally, how will it be funded? All are interrelated, but looking at each element individually will make the possible choices clearer.

What services will the program provide, and to whom?

Is the community most in need of English-language Adult Basic Education (ABE) or ESOL services - or both? What levels are most learners likely to need? In general, ABE and ESOL are each divided into three, but all three levels may not be needed in a particular community.

Who are members of the target population for this program? Will it be limited to people of certain income levels? (Federal adult education funding prohibits this, in most cases, while employment training funding often requires it.) Will ESOL instruction be limited to people of a certain language background? (Again, funding restrictions may apply, depending upon where your money comes from.) Will learners have to live in certain communities? Will learners be defined in other ways (women, young parents, adolescents, homeless, etc.), either by funding or by the purposes of the program? If there are to be any restrictions, there should be a clear rationale for the exclusion of others and for the inclusion of the target group, and some simple ways to identify members of the target group.

What entity will run the program?

The answer to this question may depend on what funding is available, since the funder may have requirements about who is to run the program. If not, there are many choices here: the establishment and oversight of adult literacy programs vary widely from state to state and from country to country. Organizations and entities that might establish adult literacy programs in various situations include:

- **Federal government**. In many countries, the national government has established literacy programs as part of an overall development effort, to improve the status of a particular group, or simply to try to alleviate extreme poverty. In the U.S., the federal government funds states, but conducts no programs itself, although it has done so in the past.
- **State agencies**. In many states, agencies such as the Department of Education, the Department of Welfare, or the Department of Labor may establish adult literacy programs, either as the primary oversight agency for the state (in which case, programs are contracted to existing local organizations), or as a direct provider (the Department of Education through the public schools, for instance).
- **Local governments**. A county or municipal government may decide that a local program is needed, and establish one with local funds.
- **National organizations**. Organizations such as Literacy Volunteers of America run local programs across the country through local and state chapters.
- **Community based organizations**. An existing community based organization - often an "umbrella organization," which offers a number of different services - may respond to a local need by seeking funding for a literacy program, or a separate entity may actually be formed to respond to a community concern about literacy.
- **Employers.** Workplace education programs are becoming increasingly common, as employers realize that they can improve accident records and increase production by increasing workers' basic skills or command of English. Employers often grant work-release time (i.e. paid hours which are part of a worker's regular job time) for on-site adult education.
- **Public higher education**. State colleges or, particularly, community colleges, may establish adult literacy programs, sometimes as the result of a mandate (in Illinois, until a few years ago, all state funding for adult literacy went to community colleges), sometimes as a response to a funding opportunity, and sometimes as a community service.
- **Schools or education partnerships**. Public school systems are often the founders and operators of adult literacy programs. Typically, these programs use already existing school facilities, equipment, and personnel (many adult literacy teachers in school system programs are moonlighting public school teachers, and program directors are often part of the system's administrative structure).

WHAT ARE THE PROGRAM'S EDUCATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS?

There are several facets to this question:

How will the program view students?

Many programs see adult learners in the same way that many schools see children: as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. These programs set up a situation which generally

looks a lot like a traditional school, sometimes right down to desks in rows facing a larger teacher's desk at the front of the room. Teachers lecture, write on the blackboard, etc., and are "in charge" of the learning. While such programs work for some students, they are ineffective for most, both because they repeat the circumstances of students' past failures, and because they fail to address the issues that often kept adults from learning in the first place.

Other programs see the school model as one that has already failed for adult learners, and try to create a relaxed atmosphere in which adults are treated as such, in which their past experience and knowledge is respected, and in which they are encouraged to control their learning. In many such "empowerment" programs there is an assumption that the purpose of adult literacy instruction is to help people gain more control over their lives, and that literacy experiences extend far beyond what happens in the classroom. These programs often help learners, as they gain skills and confidence, to take on tasks in the real world that use their new skills and encourage further learning.

At one of my program's sites, a local supermarket closed, creating a situation where all the available grocery shopping was in the next town, to which there was no public transportation. After one car-less learner described her difficulties doing her weekly shopping (having to hitchhike with two young children, avoiding sexual assault in the process, humiliating herself by begging strangers for rides in parking lot), a class discussion grew into a group to study and try to solve the transportation problem in the area.

After two years of working with politicians, the local transit authority, and others with lots of encouragement but no results, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Ultimately, partnering with another agency, the members of the group procured a grant to buy a van, and became the operators of a transportation service that provided the means for people to gain access to shopping and other necessities. In the course of this endeavor, they also learned and practiced math, marketing, contract negotiation, writing, and numerous other skills. One student who had entered the program with minimal reading and writing skills found herself taking and passing several Business Management courses at the local community college.

While most programs probably fall somewhere between the two models described here, it is important to realize that empowerment can't take place without an educational plan that works: learners need to improve their literacy skills significantly, and to change their definitions of education from "a thing that you get" to "a process that you continue throughout your life." A program can achieve empowerment goals not by ignoring the educational process, but by emphasizing it, putting learners in charge of it, and helping them to integrate it into their lives.

What will take place in the classroom?

There is no one right way to run things, and certainly no one right curriculum, but in general, a successful program needs to do the following:

- Find ways to present material, and education in general, that don't repeat what learners have already failed at.
- Maintain the understanding that all adults should be encouraged to see the value of their own life experience and knowledge, and to bring those to their learning.

- Seek to relate learning in the classroom to the real world, and try to help learners find ways to practice their learning in meaningful ways (using math skills to save money in the market, writing a consumer demand letter, etc.).
- Incorporate into instruction critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills as well as academic subjects.
- Help learners to set their own reachable short-term and long-term learning goals, and to develop plans for reaching those goals.
- In a group situation, encourage learners to teach one another, and to use the group for support.
- Foster the development of abstract reasoning (being able to think about and work with things and ideas that aren't present) and of critical, analytical, and creative ways of thinking.
- Encourage learners to struggle with new concepts, rather than handing them answers. In this way, they will actually understand what they have learned, and will understand also that the learning belongs to them, rather than to a teacher or tutor who has pushed them through it.

Will the program be staffed by professionals or volunteers, or a combination of the two?

To some extent, the answer to this question depends on resources. A program that can't afford to hire a full professional staff will have to depend on volunteers to some extent. A program run by a public school will usually have to have a professional staff, because the school system will only employ certified teachers.

The fact that a teacher is certified doesn't necessarily imply that he can teach adults. In most states, there is no adult education certification, so an adult literacy teacher might in fact be certified in elementary education, or in high school Latin. Neither of these backgrounds necessarily equips one to work with adults, who need a very different approach from those generally used with children in a classroom. Current or former public school teachers sometimes have difficulty retaining adult students because they use the same methods and assumptions that they would in a school setting.

In the best of all possible worlds (again, depending to a great extent on resources), *a program staffed with professionals* would have most or all of the following characteristics:

- *Full-time or nearly full-time staff*, so they could devote all their energies to the program.
- *A shared vision of goals, philosophy, and methods*, so that every learner is approached in the same way, and so learners and staff are working together toward the same ends.
- *Careful hiring practices to assure staff "fit."* This doesn't mean that everyone has to agree about everything, but rather that all can work together harmoniously, and that disagreement leads to productive discussion and the strengthening of the program, rather than to bitterness and division.
- *Regular (ideally, weekly) staff meetings and staff development*, to assure that all staff members stay in touch and learn from one another.
- *If the program is concerned with learner empowerment, then staff members must be empowered also* - i.e. have adequate control over their jobs and adequate say in the organization - so that it's clear that the organization practices what it preaches. Staff

members can't be expected to help learners gain control over their lives if they have none themselves.

Volunteer programs are often very different from those staffed by professionals. First, they most often employ one-on-one tutoring rather than group instruction. This arrangement means that learners have little or no contact with one another, and implies a particular dynamic between learners and volunteers. Second, volunteers are seldom able to give more than two or three hours a week, rather than the six to as much as twenty hours available in most professional programs. And third, volunteers are just that - volunteers - and may leave on short notice. While some are totally committed, and may remain reliable volunteers for years, others, after an initial flush of excitement, lose interest and disappear.

Although both volunteer and professional programs have pros and cons, professional programs by and large provide a better quality of instruction and services, are more reliable, can provide more hours a week, are more likely to allow learners access to group support, etc. However, volunteer programs have advantages as well.

First, nothing works for everyone, and everything works for someone. While one -on-one instruction is not the ideal, it's appropriate on occasion for many, and the preferred method for some. Having a variety of instructional options is a positive in adult education. And one-on-one need not be the only option in volunteer programs.

Second, many learners, especially those who are reasonably successful and well -known in the community, would rather not have services at all than have their friends and neighbors find out that they have a literacy problem. A volunteer program can provide the privacy and security they need in order to learn.

Third, volunteers, being unpaid members of the community, are credible spokespersons for the issue of literacy in general and the program in particular. They can help raise the level of community understanding of the issue, dispel myths about learners, and act as ambassadors in the community. Anything that can be done to increase the number of people in the world who have a better understanding of adult literacy is a plus.

Finally, there are many excellent volunteers - people who continually strive to improve their work with learners, are committed to those they tutor, and truly make a difference. Without a volunteer program they might never have the opportunity.

To work well, a volunteer program needs several elements.

- *Initial screening*: Potential volunteers should be interviewed. Those who clearly have no sense of what the work involves, or who seem unsuited for working with adults - or who are simply inappropriate, because of such conditions as substance abuse or prior sexual offenses - should be gently but firmly discouraged from volunteering. (Some programs even do CORI checks - background checks for criminal records.)

In addition to the initial screening, it might make sense to have a second screening interview after training. At that point, some people will have determined that volunteering in a literacy program is not for them. Others may have revealed, by their behavior during the training, that they simply aren't going to work out. It's better to catch these people before they actually begin

working with learners. An interview at this time could also serve to help place volunteers, discuss issues they might have, allay fears, etc.

- *Serious initial training*: Volunteers, before they start, need an initial training (ideally at least 15 to 20 hours) which includes an educational and philosophical framework, instruction and practice in technique, and some supervised practice with lots of feedback. If, at the end of training, a potential volunteer decides that literacy work is not for him, that's fine: it's better to make that decision than to start working with a learner and quit in a month, or to discourage the learner. By and large, those for whom the work is inappropriate, or vice versa, will know it by the end of the training, although some may have to be told.
- *Ongoing training*: While they're working, volunteers should be offered at least one to two hours a month of continuing training.
- *Regular supervision*: Each volunteer, either individually or in a group, should meet with a supervisor at least once a month to discuss specific issues, problems, technique, etc. Volunteers should also be observed and given feedback on their work with learners at least three or four times a year. This level of involvement probably means a paid supervisor position, but could be accomplished using experienced volunteers as well.

"Supervision" is used here in the same sense as it is in counseling and psychology: a collaborative arrangement in which the supervisor acts as a mentor to help the volunteer get some perspective on what she's doing and improve her performance.

- *Commitment from volunteers*: At the end of the training period, the volunteer needs to make a commitment if he's going to follow through. One way of doing this is to sign a contract, committing him to a particular period of service (usually a year), a particular number of volunteer hours a week, perhaps a particular number of hours of ongoing training, and the responsibility to notify the learner and the program if he's going to miss a session for any reason.
- *Volunteer recognition*: This can take many forms: certificates at the end of training and/or at the end of each year of service; an annual celebration for volunteers, learners, and their families; awards for outstanding or longstanding service; etc.
- *Administrative function*: A program needs someone - perhaps the same volunteer or paid person who functions as supervisor - to keep track of volunteer hours, arrange (and often conduct) training, match volunteers with learners, coordinate program -wide activities, etc. A volunteer program can't function without structure.

Professional and volunteer programs are often combined in some way. My own program used a lot of volunteers, either to supplement classroom work or to work with individuals in particular areas or on special projects, and hired a part-time volunteer coordinator to manage them. Other programs use volunteers to work with those who are unable to attend classes, or to work on such specific areas as resume writing. Volunteers working in a professional program need training, supervision, and all the other elements that go into making up a good all-volunteer program.

HOW WILL YOU EVALUATE THE PROGRAM?

The program design isn't finished until it includes a way of evaluating its effectiveness and the extent to which it has adhered to the philosophy and goals it started with. Some areas that are generally worth looking at are:

- *Student numbers*: Is the program full, or nearly so? Is recruitment a problem?
- *Student retention*: How many students are staying long enough to achieve their educational goals?
- *Student satisfaction*: What do students say about the services they're getting?
- *Staff satisfaction*: How do staff members, professional or volunteer, feel about what they're doing and about working conditions and atmosphere?
- *Attendance*: If students are getting what they need, attendance is usually high. If students are satisfied, but attendance is low, there may be transportation or other issues that the program needs to address.
- *Student goal achievement*: Are students reaching their short-term and long -term goals? Assuming they are, how long does it take most students to achieve their goals?
- *Academic achievements*: How many students passed the GED (if that's a program goal)? How many have made significant progress in their educational program (gaining reading or math levels, for instance)?
- *Students' non-academic achievements*: Are students involved in their communities? Are their kids doing better in school than before they entered the program? Have they learned valuable skills (running a meeting, conflict resolution, Internet research, etc.)? Have they become more self-confident, more independent, more socially adept? Have they gained more control over their lives? Have they gotten jobs more suited to their potential, or with the possibility of advancement?
- *Staff development*: Have there been opportunities (courses, workshops, learning circles, in-house seminars, etc.) for staff members to improve their skills and learn new ones? Have they taken advantage of those opportunities?
- *Dynamism*: Is the program continuing to experiment with new ideas and techniques? Is there support for trying new things, or improving on current methods?
- *Practical issues*: Is your space adequate? Is funding sufficient to run the program?

How will the program be funded?

There are several possible sources of funding for adult literacy programs, each carrying its own set of assumptions, regulations, and expectations.

- **Public money.** This might come from the state or from local government sources (city, county, etc.). Gaining access to such funding usually requires that your organization have 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, and that you write a response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) from a particular state or local agency. Public money almost always comes with a long list of restrictions, regulations, and demands, and it's important that you understand those and that your organization have the capacity to keep track of and report the use of funds in the ways required. On the other hand, public money can be the easiest to get, and generally comes in fairly large amounts.
- **Foundation money**. By and large, foundations require simpler applications than public funders and have fewer restrictions on how funding can be used. They also only tend to fund projects for a limited time, often refuse to fund administrative or operating

expenses, and, in the case of smaller foundations, usually make only small grants (in the $2,000 to $10,000 range). In addition to the large foundations with familiar names - Ford, Robert Wood Johnson, MacArthur, Mott, etc. - there are also:

- o Less-familiar large and small foundations, many with specific educational purposes
- o Business and corporate foundations, established to fund either specific causes or more general "good works"
- o Family foundations, which distribute the assets of a family trust to charitable and nonprofit organizations
- o Community foundations, which draw on both other foundations and contributions from the local community
- o Local education foundations, which fund local educational projects
- **Community funds**. United Way, Community Chest and other such community funders could be sources of funding. Sometimes they are reluctant to fund a new program, and they almost always require some proof of the organization's financial responsibility and of its chances for survival.
- **Fundraising.** There are as many ways to do this as there are organizations, but if it's done well, it can raise a fair amount of money. Some possibilities are:
  - o Simply asking individuals, organizations, and businesses in the community for contributions (often through directed mailings)
  - o Staging events (a carnival, for instance, or a concert) for which the public is charged
  - o Staging events such as a read-a-thon for which participants solicit pledges from friends and family at a set amount per page
  - o Offering for sale a product related to literacy, such as a book of writings by adult learners
  - o Raffling off a donated prize. Sometimes, if local businesses are sympathetic, the prize might be a car or other major item; such a prize can raise many thousands of dollars
- **Memberships.** You can offer people the chance to join your organization, for which they might receive a newsletter (typically two to four times a year) and an invitation to some activity in the course of the year. My program raised upwards of $10,000 a year this way.
- **Endowment**. If you can convince one or several wealthy people either to include you in their wills or to donate a large amount of money, stock, or income -producing property to you as a tax write-off, you may be able to start an endowment. This is a sum of money that functions as the core support of the organization. In general, you use only the interest, or some part of it, leaving the principal to grow and continue to fund the organization indefinitely.
- **For-profit arm of the organization**. If you have something valuable to offer - consulting, curriculum development services, etc. - you might form a separate, for -profit organization to feed money back to the literacy program.

It's best to aim for a combination of several of the above funding sources, rather than putting all your eggs in one basket. A single funding source puts you in danger of being out of business if your funder runs out of money or decides it doesn't like what you're doing. In addition, the restrictions on a single source of funding may make it impossible to do something that you could

easily do with money from another source. The ideal is to try to find as much money with as few restrictions as possible: the work necessary for community fundraising is worth it if it gives you a large pot of unrestricted funds.

However, keep in mind that sticking to the organization's mission and philosophy is more important than a few extra dollars. If you're committed to a particular way of doing things or of looking at literacy, don't take money that demands that you compromise that commitment. The amount of money, no matter how large, will not be worth the damage to your organization.

Once you've put together a plan for your program and secured initial funding, you're ready to enter on the next phase of program development: actually establishing the program in the community.

IN SUMMARY

Adult literacy encompasses more than just reading and writing, and it's important to understand what the real literacy needs of your particular community are before you start planning a program. Once you've assessed the demand as well as your community's needs and assets, you can start planning a program. Consider what services you need to provide, and to whom; what entity or kind of entity will run the program; what the program's philosophical and educational assumptions are; and where funding might come from. When all of that is in place, it's time to actually establish the program in the community.

Contributor
Phil Rabinowitz

Online Resources

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) is the world's largest digital library of education literature.

The Encylopedia of informal education includes pages on a number of important thinkers in the history of adult education, including John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Malcolm Knowles, Eduard Lindeman, and others.

Literacy Information and Communication System, the federal literacy agency, which includes a **long list of important free publications** many available on-line (including the full text of Sondra Stein's "**Equipped for the Future**."

National Adult Literacy Database of Canada provides resources, articles, links, etc. on literacy.

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy is a federally -funded national adult literacy research and policy center at Harvard. Site includes research reports, copies of the NCSALL journal, and links to other adult education sites.

Print Resources

Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and Education*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Dewey, J. (1963). *Experience and Education*. New York, NY: Collier.

Freire, P. (1983). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York, NY : Basic Books.

Hirsch, E. (1987). *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Knowles, M. (ed.) (1984). *Andragogy in Action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Knowles, M. (ed.) (1970). *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Pedagogy vs. Andragogy*. New York, NY: Association Press.

Kozol, J. (1988). *Illiterate America*. New York, NY: New American Library,

Lindeman, C. (1926). *The Meaning of Adult Education*. New York, NY: New Republic.

Merriam, S., & Caffarella. R. (1991). *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey -Bass.

National Adult Literacy Survey. *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS*). Sept., 1993.

Walsh, C, (ed*.)* (1991). *Literacy as Praxis: Culture, Language, and Pedagogy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.