



# HOW TO START AN ADULT VOLUNTEER LITERACY PROGRAM

*Getting  
started  
in your  
community*



**JESSE WHITE**  
SECRETARY OF STATE  
AND STATE LIBRARIAN



As Secretary of State and State Librarian, I am aware that many people in Illinois who want to improve their reading, math, writing, and/or English as a Second Language skills are not being served. I also know that there are local groups and individuals who are interested in helping them learn those skills.

Many of those people and organizations have contacted my office wanting to know how to start an Adult Volunteer Literacy Program in their communities. The Illinois State Library Literacy Office staff has developed this booklet to address those requests. This booklet describes the basic steps and components of starting a successful Adult Volunteer Literacy Program.

Once you have read the material, please contact the Literacy Office in Springfield for further assistance. Thank you for doing your part in providing literacy services to the people in your community.

*Jesse White*

JESSE WHITE  
Secretary of State  
and State Librarian

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## PURPOSE

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The purpose of adult volunteer literacy programs is to provide literacy instruction to adult learners who read below a specified level using trained adult literacy tutors. The adult learners come to the project because they want to improve their academic skills.

### EXISTING AGENCY

An adult volunteer literacy project can fit into a variety of agencies whose work may include job training, social service, community development and youth education. It also can be part of a church's mission. Review the mission and purpose of the organization before launching an adult volunteer literacy project. If adult literacy (or English as a Second Language) fits the purpose of the agency, the project will be successful. An adult volunteer literacy project takes a commitment of personnel and resources. A literacy project should only be considered when there is a clear understanding of its place within the overall organization, and when it has the organization's full commitment.

### NEW AGENCY

Beginning a literacy project is a major undertaking, requiring a clear plan for its operation, support, instructional content and place in the community. However, if a group is determined to address a clear need in the community, this booklet can help. Joining forces with an existing agency may be more effective than beginning a new project because many organizational elements will already be in place. If funding is required for the project, the group will need to become incorporated as a not-for-profit organization and to establish a board of trustees (see page 10 for more information).

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## DETERMINING NEED IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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Although it is apparent that literacy skills and skills in reading and speaking English are sorely needed by many people in Illinois, determining the extent and character of the need in your particular community is of primary importance before designing a program. Statistics are available in local communities by census tracts. Local libraries have community statistics. Community colleges often have statistics on the community.

In addition to these sources, surveys of requests for literacy services, neighborhood studies, and results of tests for program admittance are all appropriate determinants of community need.

Although poverty, welfare and unemployment statistics may indicate the need for adult literacy programs, these conditions alone do not necessarily determine the need for a literacy program in the community. Similarly, the lack of a high school diploma does not always indicate a lack of reading skills, as a high school diploma does not guarantee that reading, math and other basic skills have been mastered.

Of particular assistance in designing a program is knowledge of what potential adult learners want to achieve: e.g., read to their children, obtain a job, get a better job, obtain a GED or pass the citizenship test. These are indicators of need.

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## RECRUITING ADULT LEARNERS

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For a literacy project to be successful, a lively flow of adult learner applicants is necessary. Although it may seem like potential adult learners are not in short supply, recruiting those that your need study targeted will take vigilance and effort.

Following are ideas for sources of potential adult learners:

- Department of Human Services
- Community colleges
- Other social service organizations
- Community organizations
- Local schools
- Neighborhood events
- Local churches

For each of these sources, provide brochures or flyers about your program that staff can hand out for referrals. Word the materials carefully to reflect your respect for and sensitivity to persons who have difficulty reading. Using negative terms such as “illiterate” or “illiteracy” is not appropriate.

For direct recruitment of potential adult learners, a simple card with an announcement of free classes or free tutoring with the phone number can be effective. Be sure that the phone number listed is attended most of the time because callers will usually not make several attempts. Once a person works up the courage to make the call, they need to get through to a person.

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## SCREENING AND TESTING ADULT LEARNERS

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A literacy project should focus on potential adult learners who fit in the mission of the organization or who are particularly in need of basic skills. Therefore, many literacy projects focus their efforts on specific kinds of skills: e.g., teach basic conversational English to recent immigrants; teach basic math, reading and writing in preparation for employment; or teach parents basic reading skills so they can work on a computer or read to their children. Other organizations prepare adult learners to take and pass the GED test.

If your organization wishes to receive State Library funding for an Adult Volunteer Literacy Program, participants must fall below maximum skill ranges. These have been established to ensure that the grant program serves those persons most in need of services.

Participants must:

1. be adults over age 16 and no longer in school, and
2. have reading and/or math skills below the 9th-grade level, or
3. have limited English proficiency no higher than 6 Student Performance Levels (SPL).

There are a number of standardized tests which, when properly administered, give an approximate level of vocabulary, reading or math skills. The State Library Literacy Office requires that all English-speaking reading students be tested using the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT) or the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The program may give additional reading tests, but if State Library funds support the program, the SORT or TABE must be reported as the pre-test and in subsequent post-tests.

If the program accepts math students, the TABE test is used.

For projects teaching English as a Second Language, a number of tests are acceptable, including the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), Best Plus, Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), and English as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA). See page 11 for contact information.

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## RECRUITING VOLUNTEER TUTORS

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Recruiting volunteer tutors is an art and a skill, which requires a deep respect and appreciation for those who volunteer their time, talent and energy. State Library Adult Volunteer Literacy funding requires a strong volunteer component. The strength of your volunteer component will increase over time but must have a firm foundation.

Companies that contribute funds for the betterment of their communities often encourage employees to volunteer their time in the same effort. Some businesses value their employees' selection of worthy charities so much that they will contribute money only to those agencies for which their employees volunteer. Volunteer development and building your funding base often go hand in hand. As volunteers learn more about the needs of students and the solution that your agency has developed for meeting those needs, they become the spokespersons for your agency, often bringing in more volunteer tutors and spreading the word to others.

Following are some sources of volunteer tutors:

- Local clubs and churches
- Colleges
- Businesses in the community
- Employees of corporate donors
- Retired Service Volunteer Project (RSVP)
- Board members and their contacts
- Friends and relatives
- Residents of the neighborhood

Provide brochures or flyers about your organization and its volunteer opportunities to distribute to these agencies and other potential volunteers. Standards for volunteers are a matter of policy development, usually in collaboration with your organization's board. Creating a job description will help volunteer tutors understand their responsibilities. Selection of appropriate volunteer tutors is based on the sound judgment of staff and the needs of clients.

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## TRAINING VOLUNTEER TUTORS

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Volunteer tutors will be as effective as their training and experience have prepared them to be. Even highly educated volunteer tutors expect and deserve proper training. The training should be rich in content, well-organized, thorough, and appropriate to the population that your agency serves. The training should prepare volunteers for their tutoring or teaching role with adult learners. Although further development opportunities may occur throughout the volunteer tutor's service, initial pre-service training is of primary importance.

The State Library Literacy Office requires a **minimum of 12 hours** of pre-service training for volunteer tutors. The content varies according to the needs of the agency and the adult learners it serves. An outline of the core content is on page 12.

Matching volunteer tutors with adult learners takes some skill. A successful match can produce remarkable results. If the pair is not happy, is frustrated or not showing up, the match is not working. In that case, a speedy reassignment will provide both parties with a new opportunity for a successful match.

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## DESIGNING AN INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM FOR ADULT LEARNERS

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The instructional program should be tailored to meet the needs of adult learners. It is particularly important that the instruction and materials be geared to the targeted adult population and be practical in application.

Selection of appropriate instructional materials will require a significant time commitment and, like many aspects of the program, develop over time as adult learners teach the staff and tutors what materials work best.

Communication with literacy colleagues is a good place to get recommendations for instructional materials. See page 13 for materials covering the full range of basic skills.



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## KEEPING RECORDS

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For effective operation of a literacy project, records of volunteer tutors and adult learners must be maintained.

- **Applications:** A basic application for adult learners and one for volunteer tutors will provide the information necessary for communication and matching volunteers and learners.
- **Attendance or instructional hours:** A record of attendance for each adult learner should be maintained. Time that a volunteer tutor gives to your program also should be tracked and reported. These reports will include hours in which a volunteer instructs students as well as hours investing in their own training and skill development.
- **Pre-tests and post-tests:** Copies of the tests should be kept in the adult learner's file. Post-tests are given at the discretion of the project but should be administered at least once a year.

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## LIBRARIES AND LITERACY

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Libraries and literacy programs have a common interest in fostering a literate society. Libraries often are the point of entry for persons seeking literacy services. If the library does not offer these services directly, referrals are made to local literacy programs. Cooperation among literacy programs and libraries is key to their mutual success. In Illinois, this cooperation is particularly encouraged by Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White, whose office promotes partnerships between libraries and literacy projects.

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## COOPERATING WITH OTHERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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In addition to libraries, other agencies and individuals in your neighborhood or community can be sources of referrals and support for your literacy project. The Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois Employment Security Department, local health departments, social service agencies, job training programs, employers, schools, churches, food pantries, senior clubs, Head Start projects and countless others will want to know about your literacy project. These community contacts are mutual support opportunities with referrals, donations, volunteers, equipment, students, speakers and knowledge being exchanged among colleagues. Strengthening relationships with other agencies in your community also will strengthen your literacy project.

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## COOPERATING WITH OTHER LITERACY AGENCIES

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Literacy agencies are a community of providers with common concerns, interests and challenges. Cooperating and communicating with other literacy advocates will bring valuable support and information to your project. Area coalitions exist throughout the state. For example, in Chicago, the Hispanic Literacy Council and the Literacy Coalitions for the South, West and North sides meet monthly.

In addition to area and regional coalitions, groups often meet by type of provider, such as family literacy providers, workplace literacy providers, etc. These meetings are conducted and organized by the members to meet their particular needs. Agencies discuss topics of mutual interest, share schedules of events and often share procedures and solutions to problems.

To find out about meetings in Illinois, contact the meeting coordinator listed at <http://literacy.kent.edu/illinois/calend.htm>.

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## FINANCE AND BUDGET

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Sound fiscal management is important no matter the size of your budget. As a not-for-profit agency, your financial statements are a matter of public record. Proper use of funds and grants is required by law; however, it is often the day-to-day procedures that can cause frustration for literacy practitioners. Finances are as important to the overall health of your agency as the instructional program. Fiscal procedures should be straightforward, as simple as possible and as thorough as necessary. Following them consistently will save you, your staff and the financial officer much unnecessary effort and tension.

Advice from other non-profit organizations may be helpful, and free advice is available from Certified Public Accountants for the Public Interest (check your local telephone directory). Communication with the financial officer is very important in order to balance your agency's need for funds and the financial director's need for accuracy and timeliness.

Your budget is a projection of what you expect to spend in various categories for the upcoming fiscal year. Your fiscal year is either the calendar year — January 1-December 31 — or, if you adhere to the school calendar and receive money from state agencies, you will probably have a fiscal year such as July 1-June 30.

Your project's budget will be larger than the funding you receive from any one source. But each grantor may want a separate accounting for the funds they have contributed. To determine if a separate accounting is necessary, determine if the funds are "restricted." If so, you must spend only in categories designated in the grant and for purposes outlined in your request for funding. State Library Literacy funds are "restricted."

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## **STAFFING**

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Staffing needs are determined by the amount of work to be done and the skills necessary to do the work. The most common staffing pattern of a basic literacy project consists of a coordinator who is responsible for recruiting, training, testing, matching and providing instructional materials and focus. Support personnel often assist the coordinator with record-keeping and other clerical tasks.

If you apply for funding from the State Library, a minimum of a bachelor's degree is required for a project director.

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## **LONG-RANGE PLANNING AND BUSINESS PLAN**

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To ensure that your project will be there to meet the needs of your community three, five and even 10 years in the future, long-range planning is necessary. Every agency and board of trustees will approach this differently. What is important is that the leadership engage in planned growth based on a clear vision of the mission of the organization, including increased services, funding and staffing.

A business plan can be short- or long-term. It outlines how the organization is going to accomplish its goals. It includes an outline of how the functions and jobs relate to one another (staffing plan), what the resources are that will be applied to each function (budget), and what methods will be employed to meet the needs of clients (instructional program).

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## PROGRAM EVALUATION

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An evaluation of the effectiveness of your project is required to assess the overall health of your program. The identification of strengths and weaknesses will enable your organization to adjust its business and long-range plans. Program development based on evaluation is an integral part of the growth of the organization.

You may use evaluation to assess whether you are making a difference by doing this work. If you discover weaknesses in your project, you can correct them. If you discover successes, you can celebrate them with the adult learners, staff and volunteer tutors.

Evaluation can be used to adjust goals and to develop specific outcomes. Outcomes are the measurable changes in skills and behaviors that the adult learners achieve. These changes can occur because of the services your organization offers. Skills can be developed; lives can be changed.

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## FUND DEVELOPMENT

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Like long-range planning, raising monetary support for your organization does not happen without leadership and direction. This aspect of your business is often called fund development. This development or growth has two aspects: longevity and persistence. Development happens over time, often years.

Many agencies have a professional staff to organize fund development. This is not always necessary or possible in small organizations, but committed and articulate people can be very effective in raising support for your organization. These could be board members, volunteers or staff members.

Approach prospective donors with respect. Have confidence that your project is worth supporting. Have some basic materials prepared — a brochure, project budget, goals, outline of achievements and a list of current supporters.

Begin with donors who are your neighbors and who have an interest in your agency. This may include local businesses, local foundations and individuals. Large national foundations and businesses, unless they have a particular interest in your community and in literacy, will be more difficult to access.

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## INCORPORATION, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The Secretary of State's Department of Business Services provides a booklet called *A Guide For Organizing Not-For-Profit Corporations*. A copy may be downloaded at **[www.cyberdriveillinois.com](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com)** (click Publications, then Not-For-Profit Corporations). Refer to this booklet for rules and procedures governing non-profit organizations. Charitable organizations also must register with the state and report to the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Division annually. All not-for-profit corporations must have a minimum of three persons serving on a board of directors or board of trustees. The board has fiscal and legal responsibilities for the organization.

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## ADULT BASIC EDUCATION & ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TESTING MATERIALS

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### **Adult Basic Education:**

Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT)  
Slosson Educational Publications, Inc.  
P.O. Box 544  
East Aurora, NY 14052-0280  
888-756-7766  
800-655-3840 (FAX)

Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)  
Wright Group  
220 E. Daniieldale Rd.  
DeSoto, TX 75115-2490  
800-621-1918  
800-998-3103 (FAX)

### **English as a Second Language:**

BEST (Basic English Skills Test) and BEST Plus  
Center for Applied Linguistics  
4646 40th St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20016-1859  
202-362-0700  
202-362-3740 (FAX)

CELSA (Combined English Language Skills Assessment)  
Association of Classroom Teacher Testers  
1187 Coast Village Rd., Ste.1, #378  
Montecito, CA 93108-2761  
805-965-5704  
805-965-5807 (FAX)

ESLOA (English as a Second Language Oral Assessment)  
New Readers Press  
1320 Jamesville  
Syracuse, NY 13210-4224  
800-448-8878  
866-894-2100 (FAX)

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## ADULT VOLUNTEER TUTOR TRAINING GUIDELINES

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The ultimate success of the Adult Volunteer Literacy effort rests with the effectiveness of volunteer tutor training. Training must be high quality, systematic and ongoing. It must prepare volunteer tutors to meet the reading, math, writing or English-language learning needs of the adult learners in the program. Specific strategies, methods, techniques and training delivery methods (i.e., lecture, home study, observation, mentoring or shadowing, and online) should be developed by local coordinators and trainers to fit the specific needs of their adult learners and volunteer tutors.

Adult education professionals recommend that initial (pre-service) volunteer literacy tutor training be a **MINIMUM OF 12 HOURS** and that at *least* the following eight topics be included:

- 1) **Introduction** — Introduces the problems and challenges facing adults with low-literacy skills and an orientation to the literacy efforts at the local, state and national levels.
- 2) **The Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor** — Provides the expectations, rights, responsibilities and roles of volunteer tutors within the local program's administrative structure and to adult learners.
- 3) **The Adult Learner** — Explores the needs, goals, uniqueness and characteristics of adult learners; provides methods to establish rapport, initiate goal-setting and self-esteem builders, and spot learning barriers.
- 4) **The Adult Language Learner** — Explains the language acquisition process and the reading process (definition of reading/comprehension) for speakers of other languages.
- 5) **Assessment Techniques** — Provides informal ways to detect possible hearing, vision and learning difficulties; introduces assessment tool(s) and other methods of evaluating student progress.
- 6) **Instructional Techniques** — Provides teaching guidelines for adult literacy learners at beginning, middle and advanced levels as appropriate, including vocabulary/word analysis comprehension, writing and basic math skills for native English speakers. For English language learners, instruction should include listening, comprehension speaking, reading, writing and basic math skills. Computer-assisted instruction is a method of delivery of instruction not a content area for adult learners.
- 7) **Materials/Resources/Support** — Includes an overview of commercial materials available to tutors on loan or on-site; tips on preparation of authentic materials such as newspaper, bus schedules, etc.; orientation to continuing education opportunities; and support services provided by the project or other agencies, especially the local public library.
- 8) **Goal-setting and Lesson Plans** — Offers guidelines on organizing instruction to meet individual needs and goals.

Regular in-service professional development opportunities may include the following: instructional Web sites for additional learning; family learning strategies and parent-child activities to share with adult learners; workplace literacy adaptations; life-skills useful to adult learners such as financial or health literacy; testing and assessment skills; study skills; counseling techniques; retention strategies; problem solving; and advanced writing strategies.

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## SOURCES FOR LEARNING MATERIALS

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Contemporary Books  
Wright Group/McGraw-Hill  
220 E. Daniieldale Rd.  
DeSoto, TX 75115-2490  
800-621-1918  
800-998-3103 (FAX)  
[www.mhcontemporary.com](http://www.mhcontemporary.com)

Curriculum Associates, Inc.  
153 Rangeway Rd.  
North Billerica, MA 01862  
1-800-225-0248  
1-800-366-1158 (FAX)

Delta Book Distributors  
(Random House)  
800-323-8270

Harcourt Steck-Vaughn  
[www.harcourt.com](http://www.harcourt.com)

New Readers Press  
1320 Jamesville Ave.  
Syracuse, NY 13210-4224  
800-448-8878  
866-894-2100 (FAX)  
[www.newreaderspress.com](http://www.newreaderspress.com)  
e-mail: [nrp@proliferacy.org](mailto:nrp@proliferacy.org)

Oxford University Press  
2001 Evans Rd.  
Cary, NC 27513-2009  
800-445-9714  
919-677-1303 (FAX)  
[www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com)

Pearson Education-Prentice Hall  
145 S. Mount Zion  
P.O. Box 2500  
Lebanon, IN 46052-8186  
800-848-9500  
877-260-2530 (FAX)

Redmedia Publications  
15887 N. 76th St., Ste. 120  
Scottsdale, AZ 85260-1696  
800-826-4740  
877-661-9901 (FAX)  
[www.rempu.com](http://www.rempu.com)

### **Training and materials:**

Adult Learning Resource Center  
2626 S. Clearbrook Dr.  
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-4626  
224-366-8500  
847-803-3231 (FAX)  
[www.thecenterweb.org](http://www.thecenterweb.org)

Literacy Volunteers of America-Illinois  
30 E. Adams St., #1130  
Chicago, IL 60603-5621  
312-857-1582  
312-857-1586 (FAX)  
[www.lvillinois.org](http://www.lvillinois.org)

**[WWW.CYBERDRIVEILLINOIS.COM](http://WWW.CYBERDRIVEILLINOIS.COM)**

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**For more information and assistance, contact:**

Illinois State Library  
Gwendolyn Brooks Building  
Literacy Office  
300 S. Second St.  
Springfield, IL 62701

800-665-5576, #3  
or 217-785-6921

***WWW.CYBERDRIVEILLINOIS.COM***

(click Programs, then Literacy)

**For referral of students and volunteers  
to literacy programs:**

ILLINOIS ADULT LEARNING HOTLINE  
800-321-9511