

# VOLUNTEER LITERACY PRINCIPLES: Comprehensive Program Quality Standards

developed by and for  
Volunteer Adult Literacy Programs  
in Washington State

State Board For Community and Technical Colleges  
Office of Adult Literacy  
Volunteer Literacy Programs

# Elements of Quality Volunteer Adult Literacy Programs

## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to promote quality standards for volunteer adult literacy programs. The document was designed with three uses in mind:

- as a set of written standards for quality adult literacy programs;
- as a self-assessment tool for program coordinators and boards/advisory committees; and
- as criteria by which the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges can award grant monies and monitor performance of grant recipients.

It is likely that no volunteer adult literacy program in Washington has implemented *all* the elements outlined in this document. However, elements included here do reflect high yet attainable practices.

## Common Definitions

1. The members of the work group intend the standards included here to apply to **volunteer adult and family literacy programs** which are...

- Local education agencies;
- Community-based organizations;
- Institutions of higher education;
- Public or private nonprofit agencies;
- Libraries;
- Public housing authorities;
- Consortia of organizations listed above, and
- Other nonprofits that have the ability to provide literacy services.

2. **Literacy**

The term “literacy” means an individual’s ability to speak, read, and write in the English language, compute, solve problems, and relate effectively with others in order to exercise the rights and responsibilities of a family member, worker, and community member.

3. **Instructional Volunteer**

This term refers to volunteers who teach ESL and literacy as one-to-one tutors, small group and classroom instructors, teacher aides, and Talk Time facilitators.

4. **Volunteer**

Throughout the document, volunteer usually refers to instructional volunteers. People who volunteer to perform program management duties are regarded as non-paid staff

## Development

In 1992, the Volunteer Literacy Program of the Office of Adult Literacy of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges initiated and supported the development of the original program standards. In 2002, the Volunteer Literacy Program convened another group of literacy program managers and consultants to revise the standards. The following people contributed their time and experience to make this document possible:

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## **PHILOSOPHY**

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A quality volunteer literacy program has purposeful, interconnected management practices driven by a purpose statement. The result is a team of carefully selected, well-trained and supported volunteers that implements the instructional philosophy.

### **STATEMENT OF PROGRAM PURPOSE**

**The program has a current written program purpose statement that:**

1. states why the program exists
2. is officially adopted by the Board of Directors/Advisory Committee
3. specifies what services the program provides, for whom, and how the learners will benefit from the services
4. is based on community needs
5. is collectively developed/written
6. is achievable and within the program's capacity
7. is inspiring
8. is constantly reaffirmed and evaluated

### **STATEMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

**Every program articulates in writing a learner-centered instructional philosophy statement that includes:**

1. flexible and strategic teaching activities that address learning differences
2. sufficient frequency, duration, and intensity of instructional time to facilitate learning
3. a variety of instructional modes (i.e. one-to-one, small and large group instruction and/or lab)
4. a definition of substantive gain
5. flexibility of service provision (i.e. place, time, etc.)
6. effective methods, activities, and materials geared to learner levels and goals
7. regular review and reflection utilizing learner and volunteer input on learner progress toward goals
8. relevant real life needs and goals of learners in their roles as worker, family, community members and seekers of personal fulfillment
9. the role of the volunteer as facilitator of learning and creator of a stimulating, safe and participatory environment

## **MANAGEMENT**

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### **PROGRAM PLANNING AND EVALUATION**

**1. The program has current written goals and objectives.**

- a. needs assessment and other information is gathered regularly
- b. the program solicits information from learners, staff, volunteers, and board
- c. the program incorporates information from external community needs assessments into its goals and objectives

**2. The program develops an annual plan that:**

- a. is based on the previous year's annual performance
- b. incorporates a community assessment
- c. has stated goals/objectives addressing community linkages, resource development, and program issues
- d. has goals and objectives that are measurable, with corresponding activities and timelines

**3. A variety of methods is used for program evaluation.**

- a. the program has an overall program evaluation plan
- b. program evaluation utilizes input from students, staff, volunteers, and others (e.g., social service agencies)
- c. there is a describable relationship between evaluation design/methods and the program's purpose statement/goals and objectives

## **GOVERNANCE**

**1. The program has a functioning governing/advisory body that:**

- a. has a current written roster and by-laws \*
- b. is demographically diverse and representative of the community served
- c. addresses issues of policy and program direction
- d. is demonstrably supportive of the program, contributing resources and time
- e. monitors and approves the budget\*

**2. The governing/advisory body has defined goals and responsibilities. The body:**

- a. has written job descriptions for members
- b. meets at least twice yearly
- c. has an orientation for new members
- d. participates in ongoing board development
- e. maintains minutes of meetings
- f. understands its legal and financial responsibilities\*

\* Applies to governing bodies only. Only literacy programs which are stand-alone, community based organizations with their own 501©(3) status are required to have a governing board.

## **COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

**1. The program has methods for promoting its mission and service in the community.**

- a. the program implements a formal or informal community relations plan that promotes community linkages and targets potential volunteers and learners, decision makers, funders, social service agencies, and the general community
- b. the program employs a variety of public relations/community awareness methods and activities
- c. the program involves volunteers, learners, and others (e.g., staff) in community relations activities
- d. learners' achievements are publicly recognized through news articles, certificates, social events, bulletin boards, etc.

## **RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

### **1. The program has resources (cash, in-kind) in addition to the Volunteer Literacy Program grant.**

- a. non-VLP grant resources will be greater than or equal to the VLP grant by end of program year
- b. the program seeks to develop diversified resources
- c. time and effort are devoted to fundraising by the staff and others
- d. the program seeks partnerships to enhance services

## **FISCAL, LEGAL AND RECORD-KEEPING**

### **1. The program maintains appropriate and adequate financial policies, procedures and checks and balances.**

- a. the program has a detailed, realistic, written annual budget
- b. the program addresses its legal responsibilities: (e.g., liability, non-profit status, employer and employee taxes)
- c. the program has a demonstrable system of financial checks and balances (e.g., books, checks, audits/review)
- d. the program tracks and documents the use of funds in compliance with funding requirements
- e. records are maintained for required periods of time

## **PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**

### **1. The program has a staffing plan adequate to support program goals and objectives.**

- a. the ratio of staff time to volunteers and learners enables the program to provide the spectrum of activities necessary to sustain a quality volunteer program
- b. the program continuously evaluates and modifies the staffing plan in response to program needs
- c. There is a plan for involving learners in program operations (e.g. newsletters, recruitment and outreach, recognition events, program planning, volunteer orientation and training, learner support groups, etc.)

### **2. The program has policies and procedures for managing, supervising, and supporting staff (volunteers and learners).**

- a. the program has published personnel qualifications, job descriptions, and hiring and termination procedures
- b. new staff take part in a formal training/orientation process
- c. the program communicates and supports a plan for volunteer and staff development
- d. staff evaluation procedures are regularly conducted, communicated and implemented.
- e. the program has a personnel policy manual (including, but not limited to, grievance policy, employee rights and responsibilities, benefits, etc.)
- f. the program has safety procedures for personnel, including volunteers and learners

## **FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

### **1. The program has adequate office facilities.**

- a. the program has an identifiable office space with furnishings, computers and appropriate communication linkages (e.g. message phones, e-mail)
- b. the program has access to learning materials and training and meeting space
- c. services are delivered in approved and safe locations

### **2. The program has made provisions for tutoring and classroom space.**

- a. tutoring and classroom spaces are defined, safe and adequate
- b. tutoring and classroom spaces are easily accessible to learners
- c. off-site tutoring spaces have been arranged by the program, if necessary

## LEARNERS

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### LEARNER OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

1. **The program uses a variety of effective methods for recruiting learners.**
  - a. the program can describe its service priorities
  - b. the program can identify whom it's targeting in outreach and recruitment efforts
  - c. the program evaluates the effectiveness of recruitment efforts

### LEARNER INTAKE

1. **Initial contact with the program assists learners in making educational choices.**
  - a. the program determines with the prospective participant whether there is a good match between learner and program services and structure
  - b. the program refers the learner to other services, based on learner's educational and support needs
2. **Each learner actively participates in the development of an individual education plan.**
  - a. the program determines the learner's ESL or basic literacy levels and abilities
  - b. the learner sets both personal goals and learning objectives
  - c. the program identifies factors in learner's life which will hinder and/or help learning process

### LEARNER ORIENTATION

1. **The program conducts services/program/staff orientation for new learners.**
  - a. program opportunities that match learner goals are explained
  - b. learner is introduced to staff, materials, and resources
  - c. program explains all expectations and policies related to participation and checks for learner comprehension
  - d. orientation introduces learner to physical location where instruction will take place

### MATCHING

1. **The program ensures a successful match by:**
  - a. having program staff person present at first meeting between the volunteer and learner
  - b. facilitating the establishment of a mutually agreeable time, place and procedures for instruction
  - c. sharing the learner's educational and personal goals and initial assessment information with his/her volunteer match
  - d. clearly communicating goals and expectations (e.g. contracts)



- e. providing the learner and volunteer with an opportunity to get to know each other (motivation/goals/background/etc.)
- f. giving the learner and volunteer initial supplies and instructional materials
- g. ensuring that both the learner and volunteer have an opportunity to privately express any concerns about the match

## **ONGOING LEARNER SUPPORT**

### **1. The program provides learner support services.**

- a. the program monitors changes in learner's life that affect learning, and attempts interventions as needed
- b. learner goals are updated periodically
- c. the program maintains contact with the learner and solicits learner feedback in order to ensure continued effectiveness of educational experience
- d. the program recognizes and celebrates learner progress
- e. the learner is re-matched as needed

## **LEARNER ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

### **1. The program has a system in place to document learner progress in meeting individual needs and goals, and in achieving literacy competencies.**

- a. the learner, volunteer and program staff actively participate in ongoing assessment of learner progress
- b. valid and reliable assessment procedures and tools give the learner an opportunity to demonstrate learning and impact
- c. assessment is congruent with learner goals

### **2. The program monitors, supports and evaluates learner progress.**

- a. the program periodically reviews and revises the education plan with the learner
- b. the program has a process for ensuring alignment of instruction with learner goals
- c. the program uses an evaluation process that involves contact with the learner, volunteer, and staff

## **LEARNER RECORDS**

### **1. The program maintains records on individual program participants.**

- a. learner intake information is documented
- b. attendance and instructional hours are documented
- c. an individual education plan is on file
- d. evaluations, progress reports and/or other assessments are documented
- e. a record-keeping system is maintained with aggregate reports based on this data

## VOLUNTEERS\*

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\* For the purpose of this section, “volunteers” is used to refer to *instructional* volunteers.

### VOLUNTEER OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

- 1. The program uses a variety of appropriate methods for recruiting basic literacy and/or ESL volunteers.**
  - a. volunteer recruitment methods target specific groups to meet specific learner and program needs
  - b. program and volunteer opportunities and expectations are clearly described
  - c. the program uses a variety of effective methods and materials in recruitment efforts
  - d. the program evaluates the effectiveness of recruitment efforts
  
- 2. The program has written volunteer job descriptions.**
  - a. job descriptions include rationale, time commitment, responsibilities, reporting, qualifications and eligibility requirements, accountability, training and benefits
  - b. the program has different job descriptions for each instructional volunteer position (ESL tutor, literacy small group instructor, Talk Time facilitator, etc.)

### VOLUNTEER INTAKE AND SCREENING

- 1. The program exchanges information when volunteer makes initial contact.**
  - a. clear information about the program is provided (e.g., information packet sent; program orientation session scheduled)
  - b. personal contact is made; initial screening of volunteers takes place
  - c. the program describes types of volunteer opportunities available (instructional and non-instructional)
  
- 2. The program conducts an interview with every prospective volunteer.**
  - a. individual, personal, and face to face interviews are conducted with every volunteer prior to training
  - b. motivation, expectations, attitudes, background experiences and preferences are identified
  - c. an exchange of information leading to mutual decision making takes place; program makes assessment; volunteer is given time to make decision
  - d. the program has a plan for dealing with inappropriate applicants

## **VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION**

- 1. The program conducts an orientation for prospective volunteers.**
  - a. orientation is regular and required
  - b. the program uses a variety of activities to convey comprehensive program information (philosophy, services, site, staff, materials, students, etc.)
  - c. orientation is separate from the interview
  - d. the program clearly defines and communicates volunteer's role and boundaries in meeting learner support needs

## **VOLUNTEER TRAINING**

- 1. The program provides and requires a group workshop-style training for all new volunteers.**
  - a. initial/pre-service tutor training is conducted in a group
  - b. initial/pre-service tutor training is regularly scheduled and required
- 2. The program provides quality training for basic literacy/ESL volunteers.**
  - a. The program uses trainers with appropriate professional preparation and relevant teaching experience in adult education
  - b. initial/pre-service training is 9-12 hours long
  - c. the program conducts separate and comparable ESL and basic literacy trainings
  - d. the training utilizes quality curricula, including methods (presentation, demonstration, practice, questions) and content (socio-cultural information about the learner, volunteer/learner relationship, learning theory, teaching skills, learner centered approach to assessment, goal setting and lesson planning)
  - e. the program provides a handbook
- 3. A high percentage of volunteers who attend training become active tutors.**
  - a. the program tracks the number of volunteers who attend pre-service training to determine the percentage who become active volunteers
- 4. The program offers volunteers in-service training opportunities.**
  - a. the program provides in-service workshops/volunteer share sessions
  - b. the program provides information on other training opportunities
  - c. in-service offerings are based on learner and volunteer needs

## **ONGOING VOLUNTEER SUPPORT**

- 1. The program provides a variety of volunteer recognition events and activities.**
  - a. recognition events are public and volunteer efforts are publicly promoted (e.g., news articles)
  - b. recognition activities are designed to address individual volunteers' motivations
- 2. The program maintains current ESL/basic literacy materials for volunteer and learner use.**

- a. the program has appropriate, sufficient, and varied materials for volunteer and learner use: printed, visual, and realia
- b. materials are learner-centered and cover basic skills and community resources
- c. the program has a system for learners and volunteers to access materials
- d. staff assistance in identifying and obtaining materials is available

**3. The program maintains a system of regular and supportive contact with volunteers.**

- a. volunteer contact is personal and regular (at least monthly)
- b. the program maintains a record of contact
- c. contact encourages feedback and offers support
- d. program information is provided to volunteers (e.g., newsletter, notices)
- e. the program provides opportunities for volunteer group interaction

**VOLUNTEER EVALUATION**

**1. The program evaluates volunteers' effectiveness.**

- a. the program uses a regular volunteer evaluation process
- b. a mutual exchange of information takes place
- c. training and development needs are identified
- d. the program assesses volunteer's instructional methods and skills
- e. volunteer evaluation is documented in writing