

CHAPTER 6:
**Training
and Development
for Volunteers**

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the processes of selecting, training and maintaining volunteers in your program. It provides suggestions for training content that hopefully will give programs the tools needed to train inexperienced volunteers so they can begin to provide instructional support in the classroom. However, it is strongly recommended that volunteers work closely with a certified teacher who will continue to provide knowledge and guidance to them.

Also, be sure to check out the many resources and free online courses at Verizon Literacy Campus (www.literacycampus.org). This site provides self-paced courses that volunteers can take to explore the world of volunteering in a literacy program. There are also courses for program administrators and staff to help prepare them for working with volunteers.

The following program description emphasizes the value of ranking volunteer training as a high priority.



Program Description

Volunteers have been the mainstay of The Learning Source's adult basic education, GED preparation and family literacy programs since its inception in 1964 in Aurora, Colorado. Unlike many literacy programs, the program always has used volunteers as primary teachers rather than teachers' aides. Over the years the program's founder, Sister Cecilia Linenbrink, has often attributed this use of volunteers to the program's continued existence and success. While The Learning Source started with a handful of volunteers that first year, in 2003 it was fortunate to have 209 volunteers that provided 8,641 hours of instruction. The program's growth over the years could not have happened without the many community volunteers from all walks of life who have come forward to help others learn.

Without a volunteer training plan, however, the program would not have been able to provide the large number of service hours to participating families. Volunteers clearly need the opportunity to continue to gain knowledge and training throughout their period of service. Of course, the first steps are attracting and then training volunteers in your program. What follows are some ideas on how to begin your volunteer training process.

Off to a Good Start

Response to inquiry by potential volunteer

Maintaining diligent public relations with potential, current and past volunteers is integral to a strong and effective volunteer program. When a volunteer inquires, it is important that he or she gets a response from your program quickly. Remember, volunteers have many opportunities to work in the community and will be more inclined to volunteer for a responsive program.

To be able to respond to a potential volunteer's interest quickly, it's helpful to have a packet of materials ready to send or e-mail that includes things such as a welcome letter, a description of volunteer roles, and other basic information about your program. Your initial contact with potential volunteers will set the stage for their participation. Some will realize from the information you provide that, for a variety of reasons, your program is not an appropriate fit for their skills or interests. And that's okay, because you've just saved time and resources that you can put into developing more appropriate volunteers.

Initial interview

An initial interview is a valuable way to discuss the expectations of both the agency and the volunteer to determine if the relationship appears to be a fit. This can be done by telephone or in person, but is an important step in establishing a relationship with a new volunteer. Some organizations ask the volunteer to contact them if they are interested in volunteering. Other programs with a larger staff will follow-up with everyone who requested an information packet. Whoever is your program's main point of contact for volunteers should be able to describe the program, its goals and target population, and the roles volunteers do or could do. If you are making a concerted effort to engage volunteers, it may be worthwhile to regularly schedule volunteer orientation meetings, so that potential volunteers can plan to attend them in advance.

Orientation

For The Adult Learning Source program, a volunteer orientation takes approximately one hour followed by an instructional strategies training on topics such as adult learning styles, critical thinking skills and the Equipped for the Future framework. It may take approximately another two hours. A second training session may cover topics such as curriculum and instruction for either Adult Basic Education and GED preparation or English language instruction. Each of these training sessions takes about three hours. Programs can spend many more hours training volunteers, but at the same time, you don't want to overwhelm them with information or intimidate them before they get a chance to experience your program.



While this example has served The Learning Source well, it's important to consider your program's needs and the needs and interests of your volunteers when planning an orientation for volunteers.

Volunteer orientation is an opportunity to give people a good understanding of what your agency does and why it does it. A comprehensive orientation might include such things as:

- The background and history of the agency including your mission or vision statements and any guiding principles you may have developed for your organization. This is a way to begin to introduce the values of your agency and the resulting expectations you may have for your volunteers.
- A Tutor Profile. Providing concrete examples of how previous tutors have flourished in the program is a good way to reassure new volunteers that their lack of teaching experience is not a hindrance to the ways they might support classroom instruction.
- A Student or Family Profile. Sharing the success story of a current or past student is a good way to introduce new volunteers to the people they will be working with. It is also a way to give people notice they will be working with families from different cultures and opens up the opportunity to discuss culture and cultural differences. This is critical to establishing a solid foundation for a new volunteer to go into the classroom and work with students for the first time.

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It is critical that you be honest in describing your program, participants and the work that's needed to ensure services are high-quality. Not everyone is suited to volunteering in a literacy program and there are no benefits to placing someone in a situation in which he will not be comfortable. For

instance, if you have a program site in an elementary school and another in a correctional setting, very different people may be drawn to the different settings. As professional educators, it's our job to help volunteers find the best environment in which to work.

Remember that students who are English language learners come from many cultures and have diverse customs and beliefs. Learning about these cultural differences shows an understanding and respect for students. This will go a long way in helping you develop a positive relationship that will enhance English language learning. Part of working with English language learners also has to do with helping them understand United States culture. Your staff and your volunteers are often the "bridge" between cultures. If your program serves ELL families, be sure to explain this aspect of the program during orientation.

Your expectations of your volunteers are another key component to an orientation. This may include such things as:

- A more comprehensive explanation of volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Your agency's code of ethics and confidentiality policies
- What will be expected of volunteers regarding meetings and trainings
- Other agency policies such as:
 - Copyright policies
 - Computer policies
 - Child abuse reporting policies
 - Conflict resolution policies

It is also very important to tell volunteers what they can expect from your organization. This may include such things as your capacity for ongoing training and how you will provide ongoing communication and feedback on performance. A few forms you may wish to develop are:

- Dear Prospective Volunteer Letter (See *Sample I*)
- Volunteer Application Form (See *Sample J*)
- Training Evaluation Form (See *Sample K*)
- Center Contact Form for New Tutors (See *Sample L*)

Preparing Volunteers for the Classroom

Working in the four components of family literacy

Whether volunteers will be working directly with parents and children in the various components of family literacy or only working with adults through the adult education component, it is important that they have a full understanding of the family literacy model and the purpose behind it. The intention of the comprehensive model is that learning is strengthened and reinforced throughout an individual's educational experience, so it's helpful for volunteers to understand how all the pieces fit together. Volunteers can help support component integration by talking with adult students about their learning experiences in the other components.

Everyone working in a family literacy program—both paid and unpaid—should know and understand what the program's goals are. Not only does this help everyone see the “big picture,” it also makes your volunteers better advocates for your program when they are out in the community.



Planning and teaching classes

Volunteers can provide instructional support in the classroom—under the supervision of a certified teacher. As discussed earlier in this guide, volunteers may work in a variety of literacy settings, but tutoring is usually most needed in the adult education classroom.

One area where volunteers likely will need assistance is in planning a lesson. A well planned-out lesson is worth the effort—volunteers will be more comfortable in the classroom if they are well prepared, and students will learn

better if the lesson has clearly defined objectives. While some volunteers may have some prior teaching or tutoring experience, the certified teacher should work with every classroom volunteer to make sure that each knows:

- What is to be taught
- What materials will be needed to teach this information
- How the information is to be taught
- How the students will practice with the materials

Lessons may consist of a series of objectives, but each individual objective should be clearly defined for the students. The tutor/volunteer can then help make connections between these objectives and the overall lesson. Usually, lessons proceed from easy to more difficult and from the known to the unknown.

It is important that volunteers understand that the content of a lesson should be relevant to their students. Adult learners especially need to feel that what they are learning is relevant to their daily lives. For example, if a student shows interest in child development, learning materials could be geared to this interest. Or, if a student's goal is to obtain a job, information about job search, interviewing, and résumés would be helpful in facilitating the learning process.

Template K provides a guide for creating a lesson plan that teachers and volunteers can use. A teacher may invite a volunteer to create a lesson plan, but the teacher should review the plan before the volunteer shares the lesson with the class.

Working with adult learners

Whether volunteer or paid, teachers must develop a positive learning climate for their students. Praise and encouragement go a lot further than criticism. Individualized, self-paced instruction allows adult learners to move as quickly or slowly as is necessary to achieve their goals. Volunteers are often useful in multi-level classrooms, providing one-on-one tutoring or working with small groups so that the teacher can work with other students. Volunteers also may have very valuable second-language skills. The key to utilizing volunteers effectively in the adult classroom is providing clear instruction and defining expectations.

Meeting students for the first time

When volunteers first meet the students in your program, it is important that they are introduced by a staff member. This will demonstrate to your participants that volunteers and your staff are members of a team. Getting acquainted with students is an important first step for volunteers, one that will influence their tutor relationship. Help volunteers strive to create a warm, secure environment where students feel comfortable. Learning takes place best in a relaxed environment where students feel accepted and free to take risks and make mistakes. Remind volunteers that starting this class may be one of the most difficult things a student has to do. Praise volunteers for small steps as well as large ones and they in turn will praise participants for their efforts and achievements.



Suggest to volunteers that their first session (regardless of students' levels) might include:

- Informal discussion so students get to know each other and them. This discussion can include names, native countries, number of children, etc. Even low-level learners can show others their native countries on a wall map or globe.
- Showing students text and learning materials. Some students, especially from traditional educational backgrounds, will appreciate this.
- Information about themselves. Students will be curious about these new faces in their classroom and want to know about them.
- Ice breaker activities. These activities are usually fun and help the students (and the volunteer) get to know each other

It is important to structure *successful* experiences for students and volunteers. Encourage volunteers to share their commitment to the program and to the students, and ensure that they are respectful of students' existing knowledge and cultures.

It is important to structure successful experiences for students and volunteers.

In-service opportunities for volunteers

The orientation and training described above will give volunteers a strong basis upon which to begin their volunteer experience. It does not make them experts in this field. It is important to provide ongoing in-service opportunities for your volunteers. A volunteer development plan might incorporate a variety of strategies such as:

- A handbook with general tips for the volunteer tutor
- Regular in-service opportunities that are determined through a needs assessment. These opportunities can be strengthened (and more cost-efficient) when you partner with another literacy program in your area.
- A regular newsletter for volunteers with teaching tips and information about your program. This is an easy way to recognize volunteers and staff who have gone above and beyond in their work.
- Annual (or more frequent) volunteer recognition activities. These are often more special if students are asked to participate and talk about their experiences with the volunteers.

Evaluation for Continuous Improvement

A key part of volunteer management is to provide formative, ongoing feedback to volunteers. This can be done by giving volunteers a self-evaluation form, through classroom observations, or a more formal external evaluation of their performance. Probably, you'll want to consider using some variety of all three. While this is not unlike staff evaluations, remember that volunteers need to know their work is appreciated. *Template L* provides a simple self-evaluation tool for volunteer tutors.

To maintain a vital volunteer program, it is important to evaluate your program at least annually to determine strengths and areas in need of development. Some ways in which you can do this are to:

- Provide exit interviews and annual surveys asking for volunteers' input.
- Conduct a retreat of volunteers and staff to get ideas for improvement. This is a good time to review and modify your volunteer program's strategic plan.
- Ask another local program to conduct an evaluation of your program. This form of peer review is an inexpensive way for two programs to help one another.

Putting It All Together

None of the groundwork described in this chapter will be effective if program staff don't fully commit to expanding and enhancing your program's capacity to work with volunteers in the classroom and throughout the program. Take the time to help staff understand the value volunteers bring to your program. Their contributions are many, but staff may need ongoing reminders. Some regular team building with staff and volunteers can be beneficial. Nothing is more beneficial than for both staff and volunteers to share in your program's success. It is also important to train all staff in basic volunteer management techniques. These can be as basic as:

- Greeting volunteers as they arrive and thanking them as they leave.
- Providing volunteers with periodic feedback on their work. Both praise and constructive feedback are welcomed by most volunteers.
- Ensuring that volunteers have the materials and supplies they need to teach their classes.
- Letting volunteers know what kind of progress their students are making.

No matter the strategies you implement to build your team, the most important goal is to focus the entire team's efforts on helping families become successful.



SAMPLE I

Prospective Volunteer Letter

The following letter is from *The Learning Source for Adults and Families in Colorado*.

Dear Prospective Volunteer:

The staff and students at The Learning Source would like to welcome you and thank you for the decision you have made to donate your time and efforts to adult and family literacy. We are confident you will enjoy the experience as well as find it rewarding.

As a volunteer at The Learning Source, there are some things you can expect from the agency:

- **We will make sure you receive the training necessary to do your job.** In addition to the training this week, you will receive an orientation at the learning center you select and will be informed of additional training and in-service opportunities throughout the year. The lead teacher at each learning center also serves as a resource for you.
- **We will keep you informed of relevant matters within the agency.** Several times a year, the Center Update will be mailed to your home. This provides important upcoming dates, highlights of events within the agency, job openings and tips for working with students. You also will receive the agency newsletter, relevant announcements and invitations through the mail. Other materials may be given to you through the lead teacher at your learning center.
- **You will receive feedback on the work you perform.** As time permits, the lead teacher will informally observe your interaction with students and offer suggestions as needed. If you would like additional feedback and assistance, the lead teacher and administrative staff are available.
- **You will be treated as a partner within the agency.** The Learning Source relies heavily upon volunteers in its programs. Periodically, the agency conducts program evaluations in which the input of our volunteers is solicited. Staff strive to be available to respond to any concerns, input, suggestions or needs you have throughout the program year. If you find your placement is not meeting your needs, please give us the opportunity to find another placement for you that is a better fit.

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In return, there are some things that the agency expects from you as a volunteer:

- **We expect that you will honor the commitments you make.** Staff and students depend on your support during the sessions you have chosen. Your reliability is valuable to the work of the agency and you are a role model for our students. Your lead teacher will give you a phone number to call in case of a last-minute emergency.
- **We expect that you will respect confidences entrusted to you.** There may be information you learn about a student through our records or through conversations with your students. We trust that this information will not be shared with others.
- **We expect that you will follow agency policies and procedures.** Our learning centers must maintain records pertaining to student activities, progress and attendance. Your role in this may vary from center to center. According to The Learning Source policies, volunteers and staff may not transport students in their vehicles. We also prohibit staff, students and volunteers from selling products or services at our learning centers. The Learning Source also asks that you set appropriate boundaries in your relationships with students and remember that your primary purpose is to assist students in the attainment of their educational goals.
- **We expect that you will be open-minded and respectful of the differences you may encounter.** You probably will have students who have made different choices than you have made and whose values are different from yours. Please recognize that this may be as much of an educational experience for you as it is for our students.

Again, welcome to The Learning Source for Adults and Families. We look forward to having you volunteer with us. Have fun!

Presentation Evaluation from The Learning Source

Title of Presentation: _____

Name of Presenter: _____

Date of Presentation: _____

Please indicate your evaluation of the following items by checking the appropriate box.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Overall					
Organization					
Preparation					
Clarity					
Knowledge of Topic					
Responsiveness to questions					
Quality of handouts/visuals					
Length of time					
Learning environment					

Which topics covered during the presentation would you like to know more about?

How could this presentation have been improved?

Comments:

Center Contact Form for New Tutors

*The Learning Source
455 South Pierce
Lakewood, CO 80226
(303) 922-4683*

Center Information for New Tutors

Center Name: _____

Address: _____

Center Assignment

Day(s) of the week: _____

Class time(s): _____

Center Telephone Number: _____

Center Staff Members

Lead Teacher: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

Objectives: _____

Texts and Materials: _____

Steps:

1. Warm-up/Review

- Start the class with a “success” experience, getting students ready to learn
- Review something learned previously, review something important to the day’s lesson

2. Presentation of new material

- Set the stage, attention-getter or hook

3. Guided practice (more controlled)

4. Comprehension check (done during the guided practice)

- Watch faces
- Ask questions
- Check to see if pairs or groups are understanding the new material

5. Independent practice (less controlled)

- Other extension activities

*Remember this is just an example. Adapt to your needs and your students’ needs depending on where you are in a unit, the level of your students, etc.

(Adapted from The Learning Source for Adults and Families, Aurora, Colorado.)

Tutor Self-Evaluation Checklist

Self-evaluation is an important aspect of your tutoring experience. You may reflect on a tutoring session and review what was good, what needed improvement and what you plan to change the next time.

An ideal source for feedback is your students. Again, you may ask for a general response from them or you may use a formal evaluation. Students should always be encouraged to let you know what works best and what they liked or didn't like.

Other tutors or staff may be willing to observe and share their thoughts with you. This is best done when specific items are evaluated and discussed. You can write out a list of specific questions or points you want your observer to watch for or use a formal evaluation form. You also may choose to observe other tutors to see their methods and teaching styles.

The following list of questions may be used as a guide for evaluating yourself. It is useful to regularly ask yourself these types of questions:

Did I have a lesson plan? _____

If so, how closely did I follow it? _____

How was it useful? _____

To what degree did my student(s) help plan the lesson? _____

How did I make good use of our time together? _____

Did I use a variety of activities? _____

Could something have been improved or omitted? If so, what? _____

Were the materials I chose relevant and motivating? _____

Did I use materials beside the core texts? _____

Did I incorporate activities that used different learning styles? _____

What was particularly successful? _____

What could I have done differently? _____

Did I give positive reinforcement and motivation? _____

What made the tutoring fun and enjoyable? _____

Did the session end on a positive note? _____

What will need review or additional practice? _____

What are the plans for the next session? _____

(Adapted from The Learning Source for Adults and Families, Aurora, Colorado.)