



## A Framework *for* Program Improvements *in* Adult Literacy

the **literacy**  
**cooperative**

# A Framework for Program Improvements in Adult Literacy

**A**ddressing literacy -- and its link to education, employment, health, community-building and civic participation -- is vital to the economic and social viability of communities.

Fulfilling the promise that learners will have the opportunities and support they need to achieve their full potential begins with providing quality programs designed around current research, the life realities of adult learners and reasonable assurances of a good return on learners' investments of time and effort.

No single tool, practice or factor is the 'silver bullet' for improving literacy levels and learner outcomes. Rather, many factors interact to produce the changes we would like to see: motivated learners, learner gains, increased percentages of high school graduation and GED attainment, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and successful entry into career-ladder employment.

This Framework includes:

- (1) A summary of *research-based best practices in adult literacy* organized in an easy-to-use reference format. Featured practices and implications -- synthesized from a cross section of adult-education research published over the last decade -- describe steps that innovative programs around the country are taking to prepare clients for success in education, postsecondary education and work;
- (2) Highlights of *factors that impact learner outcomes* and associated implications for key stakeholders. It outlines systems and supports that should be considered when designing and evaluating adult literacy programs; and
- (3) *A Program Self-Assessment Tool* that breaks down elements of quality adult education programs. It is presented in a format that allows programs to self-assess and to track improvements over time. *The Program Self-Assessment Tool is available online at [www.literacycooperative.org](http://www.literacycooperative.org)*

These tools can provide a framework for dialogue, continuous improvement, assessments and accountability. They are designed for practitioners who are seeking roadmaps for program improvements. The Framework is also a relevant resource for grant makers and policy makers who wish to identify, support and incentivize high-performing adult education programs.

## Guide for Using the Tool Set

Research-based Practices for Adult Literacy	
Practitioners	Serves as a quick reference about research-based practices in adult literacy.  Can be used as a tool for assessing and improving quality.
Grant Makers	Builds an information and knowledge base relative to research-supported practices in literacy.  Promotes dialogue with grant seekers.  Can be used as a quality-assessment tool.
Policy Makers	Builds an information and knowledge base relative to research-supported practices in literacy.
Factors that Impact Outcomes	
Practitioners	Helps inform conversations with grant makers.
Grant Makers	Promotes informed dialogue with grant seekers.  Identifies specific roles for grant makers in promoting positive outcomes.
Policy Makers	Supports effective policy setting and assessments.
Program Self-Assessment Tool	
Practitioners	Offers a guideline and tool for program development.
Grant Makers	Serves as a continuous-improvement and review tool for grantees  Offers guidelines and tools for onsite program audit.
Policy Makers	Offers a framework to assess current systems and practices.  Serves as a guideline and tool for systems of accountability in adult literacy





*the***literacycooperative** is a nonprofit intermediary organization working to improve literacy levels in Cuyahoga County. The Quality Framework is a product of The Literacy Cooperative's Capacity-Building Initiatives. Capacity-Building programs seek to support ongoing improvements in service quality by facilitating client-centered service delivery, advocating alignment of resources across multiple funding systems, supporting outcomes-based services, promoting program accountability and addressing policy issues that pose barriers to learners and educators.

*Fostering learning to build  
a thriving community*



# Research-Based Best Practices for Adult Literacy Programs

*Information and links to helpful resources for implementing highlighted practices are available in an online copy of the Quality Framework at [www.literacycooperative.org](http://www.literacycooperative.org).*



## Implications for Service Delivery/Providers

## Investment/Costs

## Resources

### Set Goals and Implement Strategies to Support Post-Secondary Transitions

*Adult literacy clients need additional support beyond the GED credential to develop skills and competencies that they must demonstrate in order to enroll in college-level, credit-bearing classes at two- or four-year institutions.*

- Focus on the GED credential as a springboard to postsecondary degrees, credential programs or employment training -- not as an end in itself.
- Enrich curriculum with content that supports clients' acquisition of the academic and non-cognitive skills they need to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Introduce contextual learning options related to high-growth career fields in the region, such as health care and manufacturing.
- Forge partnerships with post-secondary institutions and leverage additional resources to better support clients' educational goals.
- Structure the social, financial and academic support systems of the ABE/GED program to facilitate students' transition from ABE/GED to postsecondary education (should mirror high school transition process/programs).
- Develop concurrent learning opportunities so learners can co-enroll in a workforce or postsecondary preparation program.

Low/no cost – Costs are associated with acquiring contextual curriculum resources and committing time to building partnerships for post-GED transitions.

[Guide for GED Instructors – Beyond the GED: Making Conscious choices](#)  
[About the GED and Your Future](#)

[GED Preparation – online 74-Unit GED lessons and sample questions](#)  
(choose GED prep under 'Most Popular Destinations')

[GED Prep at LiteracyLink](#). This free curriculum supports the TV series that can also be shared through the local PBS station

[Instructional model for instructors on transitional skills](#)

[The Jobs for the Future work guide for ABE programs provides an overview and description of how to incorporate workforce curriculum into programs:](#)

The Literacy Cooperative's Integrated Workforce and Literacy Curriculum & Experiential Learning Program – 'Rhythm Rack'

[www.collegeforadults.org](#)

### Using Managed Enrollment to Support Effective Teaching & Learning

*Classes that offer continuous enrollment, with clients moving in and out, constrain effective teaching and learning. Classes that are relatively homogenous and in which learners share a common quality, such as age, promote sharing and community.*

- Implement managed enrollment. Offer classes in sets of pre-determined lengths and allow clients to join at the beginning of a cycle. This also promotes "cohorting/clustering".
- Design programs that include alternative learning options – such as computer labs, one-on-one tutoring and/or video lessons -- for clients who enroll in the middle of a cycle.
- Include goal-setting in orientation. Clients who identify clear and specific goals have higher persistence rates.

High/moderate costs, depending on computer software acquired and if the program already has a computer lab equipped with literacy software and staffed with volunteers to support one-on-one tutoring.

Low-cost computers available through one community computers or Cleveland Housing Network

McGraw Hill Interactive Pre-GED software

[www.pbs.org/literacy](#)

### Organize Classes by Cohorts

*Cohorts are important to supporting and challenging adult clients. Tight-knit, reliable, common-purpose groups, formed by clients, provide learners with emotional support and challenge them to broaden their perspectives.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement managed enrollment.</li> <li>• Train teachers to deliver small-group, collaborative instruction whenever possible.</li> <li>• Ensure that activities are in place for clients who are waiting for a new class cycle to begin; this helps prevent attrition.</li> <li>• Implement systems of support and retention to encourage group progression.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Low cost</b></p> <p>The Literacy Cooperative trainings on cohort planning/modularized curriculum – Check training schedule and calendar at: <a href="http://www.literacycooperative.org">www.literacycooperative.org</a></p> <p><a href="#">Instructional model for instructors on collaborative learning</a></p> <p><a href="#">Instructional model for instructors on delivery modes</a></p> <p>Provide fun group activities they can play together, for instance – <a href="#">Funbrain Math Games</a></p> <p>Try out a group newsletter – <a href="#">look at The Learning Edge</a>.</p>
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## Include Self Study in Program Design

*Program participation, self study, or a combination of the two learning methods, are all associated with GED attainment. Adult literacy programs that not only provide classes but are also known to support self study can serve more learners (because many adults who self study never come to formal classes), attract new learners to classes, and increase the overall persistence of adult literacy learning.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support learning for adults engaged in self study activities and link self study to onsite program activities.</li> <li>• Use technology tools to support independent learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Medium/low cost – Programs can leverage the Internet and local libraries to provide self study opportunities at no financial cost. Interactive software that includes online client support and activities may require some investment.</p>	<p>Learner Web, an online learning support system is being piloted in Boston</p> <p><a href="#">California Distance Learning Project – work, law and government, family, school, health and safety, housing, money, services, etc.</a></p> <p>Provide online self study for ESL students to supplement classroom activities – Pumarosa is a good example of a free bilingual interactive site for Spanish speakers</p> <p>McGraw Hill GED Online Learning Center – free online GED study can be used at home to supplement the text book series used in class.  <a href="http://www.gedwriting.com">http://www.gedwriting.com</a>  <a href="http://www.gedsocialstudies.com">http://www.gedsocialstudies.com</a>  <a href="http://www.gedscience.com">http://www.gedscience.com</a>  <a href="http://www.gedreading.com">http://www.gedreading.com</a>  <a href="http://www.gedmath.com">http://www.gedmath.com</a>  Information on Literacy Cooperative trainings and resources are available at <a href="http://www.literacycooperative.org">www.literacycooperative.org</a>.</p>
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## Establish a Supportive Learning Environment

*A vibrant classroom or community-center environment is important to stimulating learning and independent exploration.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise creativity and flexibility in working to improve the physical learning environment.</li> <li>• Design learning facilities that encourage collaboration and active participation. Active engagement, through exploration and manipulation of objects, promotes greater retention and information transfer.</li> <li>• Make the environment comfortable and engaging. Group furniture around a coffee table and include accessible bookcases, displays, pictures, posters, study and research centers, a career corner and a coffee bar.</li> <li>• Include computers and other technological tools for learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Low/no cost</p>	<p>Worksheets to assist in increasing awareness of the role the <u>physical environment</u> play in instructional design.</p> <p>Contact area businesses, colleges, and universities; they often offer to give away furniture and computers with carousels when they purchase new technology and furniture. A wish list maintained for all providers through the coalition can coordinate this.</p>
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## Use Reading Profile Assessments

*"Adult students do not all share the same reading 'profile.' Adult students whose reading comprehension skills place them at the same grade-equivalency-level score often have entirely different 'reading profiles'; their instruction needs to vary according to different skill levels in vocabulary, fluency, spelling, and decoding. Identifying those components at intake will determine the type of reading instruction that may help them make faster reading gains."*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess beyond the TABE or other standardized test using sub-tests that reveal information about each learner's vocabulary, fluency, decoding and spelling skills.</li> <li>• Organize the classroom to offer instruction targeted to clients who are at the same skill level in vocabulary, fluency, decoding and/or comprehension.</li> </ul>	<p>Low/moderate cost – Curriculum materials for targeted instruction may need to be purchased.</p>	<p>Free <a href="#">online reading assessments</a> are available through LINCS (Literacy Information and Communication Systems)</p> <p><a href="#">A Jobs For the Future work guide for ABE programs</a> provides an overview and description of how to incorporate appropriate assessments into programs</p> <p>Small learner led reading groups can use the same reading books or choose passages from different books – New Reader's Press has a variety of paperback series as does Grass Roots Books.net (low readability/high interest)</p>
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## Implement Experiential Learning Activities

*Participatory learning is more effective than instructor-dominated learning. When learners are involved, learning efficiency increases. Learners experience personal growth, develop leadership skills and are retained in programs. Contextualized, relevant lessons engage students.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a context or activity inventory of students during program enrollment and design.</li> <li>Build on what learners already know.</li> <li>Design programs to involve learners in selecting projects, themes and materials.</li> </ul>	Low/no cost	<p>Students can explore <a href="#">on-line lessons and themes</a></p> <p>Building learner technology skills at <a href="#">Baycon Group</a></p> <p>The <a href="#">bare bones</a> on how to use the internet</p> <p>Contextualizing your own math problems to meet learner needs – <a href="#">Click here</a></p> <p>Worksheets learners can <a href="#">download at home</a> – <a href="#">www.adultliteracy.org</a></p> <p>Financial literacy – <a href="#">The Bee Hive</a> – plain English information on Managing cash and Credit, Paying Bills and Taxes, Individual Development Accounts, Budget Basics and more – <a href="#">thebeehive.org/money</a></p> <p>For students fascinated by history try – Picturing modern America</p>
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## Use Pair Work to Promote English Language Acquisition

*"Negotiating meaning" is an important element of language learning. Students who have the freedom to negotiate the meaning and form of what they are saying to their peers begin to notice which areas of their language they need to develop. Client-to-client interaction is important to second-language acquisition*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require instructors to participate in professional development related to "pair work" and client-to-client interactions.</li> <li>Include and respect learners' prior experiences.</li> </ul>	Low /no cost	<p>Information on Literacy Cooperative trainings and resources are available at <a href="#">www.literacycooperative.org</a></p> <p>Have pairs of learners work at spelling assignment together online at <a href="#">Funbrain spelling</a></p>
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## Use Authentic Materials in Literacy Instruction

*Clients who participate in classes that use activities and texts related to their real-life experiences show increases in literacy practices in their daily lives. Clients are more likely to engage in learning activities when content is related to their interests and realities.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At orientation, assess clients' literacy practices and their daily literacy demands and interests.</li> <li>Design lesson plans that include materials and practices from clients' lives.</li> <li>Develop theme-based instruction around issues of common interest to clients, such as health, financial literacy, etc.</li> <li>Develop assessment tools to gauge clients' literacy-practice baselines and progress.</li> </ul>	Low/no cost – Most materials are available on the Internet. Some materials may need to be purchased.	<p>Coupons, community newspapers (Call &amp; Post, Hispanic dailies), and other print resources can be found at <a href="#">www.lacnyc.org/resources</a></p> <p>Free authentic materials (developed by local practitioners through the ILN) lesson plans available at <a href="#">www.literacycooperative.org/InstructorsLearningNetwork.htm</a></p> <p>Handbook for practitioners on creating authentic materials and activities</p> <p>Learning Resources from CNN links learning to news and events – <a href="#">www.literacynet.org</a></p> <p>Literacy Practice Assessment Tool under development for the Literacy Cooperative to be available at <a href="#">www.literacycooperative.org</a></p> <p>Jobs for the Future work guide for ABE programs provides an overview and description of how to incorporate workforce curriculum into programs</p>
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## Assess Learner Progress and Program Outcomes

*Assessments provide important information to the learner and instructor during all stages of the learning process. Implementing progress- and outcome-measuring tools and processes allows organizations to track learner progress and program outcomes.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine important measures of learner progress and program performance.</li> <li>Identify and maintain a reliable data-management system that supports short- and long-term tracking of and reporting on learner progress and program performance.</li> <li>Conduct periodic assessments of learner progress and share progress reports with the learner.</li> <li>Use periodic-assessment results to design appropriate interventions and instructional plans for learners.</li> <li>Assess program outcomes, persistence rates and progression levels.</li> </ul>	Moderate/high cost, depending on technology tool used.	
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Program-Self Assessment Tool and other Resources are available at [www.literacycooperative.org](#)