Creating Successful Literacy Partnerships Part I

Introduction

Library literacy programs have the opportunity to increase their services by forming partnerships with other community agencies and organizations. These partnerships can enhance both the quantity and quality of services for adult literacy students. Libraries are uniquely situated to take the leadership role in forming partnerships with other literacy providers.

In this Issue

Part I of this Tip Sheet provides an overview of partnerships as they relate to literacy programs. An explanation is provided as to why partnerships are dependent on the types of linkages and support that libraries do or do not establish with other agencies and organizations. Then, the management responsibilities for the intake and support of students and volunteers are identified by type of partnership formed.

What are Partnerships?

Partnerships are arrangements made by people who have a common goal, interest, and commitment in some type of experience that reaches out to others. For our purposes, these people represent agencies and organizations that serve adult literacy learners.

Why Partnerships are Useful

Partnerships:
- Create a win-win situation where both libraries and community agencies and organizations share in the success of a particular arrangement
- Help adult literacy learners realize that libraries and community agencies and organizations care about providing quality services as they work toward a common goal
- Capitalize on the strengths and capabilities of each other
- Avoid duplication of effort and more efficiently use the community's human and fiscal resources
- Result in well-planned, well-managed program services
- Enable libraries to integrate services in a unified community approach
- Are often required by various founders as an indicator of collaboration

The Most Important Elements for Individuals in a Partnership

The most important elements are:
- Open communication
- Interpersonal skills
- Willingness to invest time and effort
- Established priorities
- Shared expectations and goals
- Mutual respect
- Commitment

Benefits of Forming Partnerships

Partnerships enable libraries to:

- Increase their visibility in the community
- Become more interactive with community agencies and organizations
- Enlarge their volunteer base through the mutual recruitment and support of volunteer tutors and administrative staff
- Address the needs of the adult literacy learners and the community
- Share valuable human and fiscal resources with other programs

Types of Linkages and Support

Library literacy programs can form partnerships with other agencies or organizations through one of five types of linkages and support systems:

Type 1: Parallel

There is no organizational relationship between programs for this type of relationship. In reality, there is no partnership established. The library literacy program works independently or in parallel to other literacy programs in the community. In such a case, learners choose the services that they desire and may enter or leave multiple delivery systems. An adult ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) student, for example, may be taking classes at the local state-sponsored ABE (Adult Basic Education) program and also working with a tutor at the library. In all respects, there is much duplication of effort and resource allocation for this type. Library literacy programs can be more effective if they formalize their relationships.

Type 2: Referral

Organizations can establish a formal working agreement for student referrals. Such student referrals between the library literacy program and another community program are made during the learner intake process. A local Adult Basic Education program, for example, may agree that learners at a beginning level are to be served by the library program, which offers one-to-one tutoring. Learners may then "graduate" from the volunteer-based library program to the ABE classroom.

Type 3: Coordination

Partnerships of this type offer strong linkages and support between library literacy programs and other community literacy programs. In this type, the organizations establish a formal agreement for referrals and assignments of learners, paid and volunteer instructors, and staff. For example, the library program may train volunteers for both the library program and the local ABE program. The local program may place paid instructors in the library literacy program. The volunteers are supported by both the library and ABE program. Learners may receive services from both programs, and this coordination is documented and well-planned.

Type 4: Sponsorship

Sponsorship may or may not offer a partnership or linkages and support with other agencies and organizations. In this type, the library sponsors the literacy program. An advisory board may oversee the literacy volunteer program. The library staff is responsible for all intake and support of volunteers and learners. As is often the case, libraries do sponsor their own programs and thus offer the opportunity to form partnerships with other providers. Partnerships can also be made with other, non-literacy providers in the community. This includes social services of all types and job training. These partnerships can result in Type 2 Referrals for services that the library cannot or need not provide. Such referral agreements can be made in both directions. For example, a community health provider could refer someone to the library program for help in reading and understanding information on an illness or condition such as diabetes. A community volunteer action center can refer volunteers to the library program.

Type 5: Coalition

The library staff may also form partnerships with other literacy programs through a coalition. Although coalitions often do not offer direct services, they can provide assistance such as networking opportunities, information sharing, and training. Coalitions may also help sort out referral systems within a community that has multiple service providers. Coalition building may also lead to increased coordination among the literacy providers. Membership in a coalition sometimes results in increased visibility in the community among potential volunteers and learners.

Management Responsibilities of Students and Volunteers

Management responsibilities of students and volunteers depend on the type of linkages and support systems established through partnerships with other agencies and organizations. Well-managed literacy volunteer programs balance both the intake and support of learners and volunteers (see *Maintaining the Balance: A Guide to 50/50 Management*). That is, the effort to bring students and tutors into the program (intake) is essential. Just as important are the activities needed to keep those students and tutors actively involved (support). The following intake and support activities are shared with a library program's partners:

Intake for Tutors	Intake for Students
- Recruitment - Orientation - Training - Assessment - Matching	- Recruitment - Orientation - Assessment - Matching

Support Activities for Tutors and Students
- Tutor/Student follow-up   - In-service training   - Recognition activities   - Newsletter   - Support groups   - Resource materials and libraries   - Ongoing assessment   - Re-matching

Management Responsibilities by Type of Partnership

The following table illustrates how management responsibilities may be shared to facilitate linkages and support the partnership.

	Parallel	Referral	Coordination	Sponsorship	Coalition
Intake	Library	Library/Partner	Library/Partner	Library/Partner	Library
Support	Library	Library/Partner	Library/Partner	Library/Partner	Library

Creating Successful Literacy Partnerships Part II

Other Sources of Community Partnerships

In addition to forming partnerships with other literacy providers to strengthen the intake and support of tutors and learners, libraries may form partnerships with organizations that do not provide direct literacy services. For example, social services and workforce training programs may refer students to the library literacy program, and vice versa. Civic clubs and organizations may want to "adopt" the library literacy program for a year or more to raise awareness, generate needed funds, or otherwise assist with support functions and special events. These partnerships should also be formalized in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and approved by the program's advisory board, and when applicable, with the library board as well.

How to Formalize Working Agreements with Partners

Well-managed literacy volunteer programs document working agreements between partners through a Memorandum of Agreement. These MOAs should be reviewed on an annual basis by both partners and revised as needs change over time. The following template can be adapted to meet your needs.

Memorandum of Agreement

[Identify partners, the time period of the partnership, and a general statement of the purpose of the partnership]

The [library literacy program] agrees to:
- [List the specific deliverables that the library will provide in this agreement]

The [community agency or organization] agrees to:
- [List the specific deliverables that the partner will provide in this agreement]

[Statements that this agreement can be renegotiated or ended by either partner at any time at the request of either partner and that the MOA will be reviewed annually]

[signature]	[signature]
[name]	[name]
[title]	[title]
[agency or organization]	[agency or organization]
[date]	[date]

Getting Started

Successful partnerships require careful planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The following steps outline a methodology for getting started in this process. Library program staff and advisory group representatives should do the following.

1	**Assess program needs**	• Review goals and objectives for the program • Gather information and data on program outcomes • Identify opportunities to improve the intake and support of tutors and students, which impact program outcomes
2	**Determine program readiness**	• Review job descriptions for staff responsible for intake and support functions • Identify program capacity to manage increased intake and support services resulting from a potential partnership
3	**Plan with potential partner**	• Discuss mutual needs and benefits with a potential partner • Communicate and gain approval for partnership from an advisory board
4	**Write MOA**	• Specify individual responsibilities • Document in a signed agreement • Share with staff
5	**Monitor impact**	• Document impact of partnership on program outcomes throughout the year • Revise agreement as necessary
6	**Evaluate partnership**	• Determine value annually • Revise and continue partnership as appropriate

The following groups will support your efforts. Your program should become a member of ProLiteracy America (www.proliteracy.org), Literacy Florida! (www.literacyflorida.org), and Florida Literacy Coalition (www.floridaliteracy.org). The State of Florida also provides training, technical assistance, and grants for library sponsored programs.

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You may also visit http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/Literacy/BLD_literacy_index.html.

References

DuPrey, Anne. *Maintaining the Balance: A Guide to 50/50 Management*. Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., New Readers Press, 2002.