Tutor "Trickle-Down": Communicating With Literacy Tutors

The best program strategies in the world can go to waste if they're not effectively communicated to volunteer tutors—the backbone of most library literacy programs. Use these 12 steps as a guide to develop your own communication plan for literacy volunteers.

LITERACY IN LIBRARIES Across America

Library literacy programs are evolving, ever-changing projects. As they expand and grow, libraries develop and refine project strategies to pilot new materials, recruit new participants and partners, but then what?

Volunteer tutors are the primary deliverers of instruction in most library literacy programs. Getting the word to the tutors and having them understand—and buy into—new directions can be a major challenge. It's the key to successful implementation.

The approach developed by Queens Borough Library emphasizes using the ingredients of successful literacy training in communicating with tutors and other program staff and volunteers—accommodates individual learning styles and offers multi-dimensional and multi-sensory approaches to learning.

12 STEPS
● Develop a year-long communications and training plan for tutors that includes workshops on new directions throughout the year and special sessions at annual tutor conferences. Invite tutors to attend, provide incentives and follow-up for participants.

● Work with veteran tutors to pilot new materials and curricula at sites, as well as at centralized training programs. Utilize both formal and informal leaders in the tutor community to communicate project goals and strategies.

● If you don't already have a newsletter (or section of your library newsletter) for tutors, start one. Include articles by tutors and staff, feedback on new materials, calendar of training and other events, etc.

● Revise your library's Tutor Manual to reflect new strategies, tips and techniques, and expectations on a continuous basis.

● Develop new segments for your preservice tutor training workshop that include any new materials, strategies, themes, etc. Introduce new directions in the workshop overview.

● If possible, produce a training video that demonstrates recommended techniques to use when live demonstrations may not be possible.

● Produce easy-to-follow tutor guides that address such topics as integrating thematic instruction with teaching to individual learning styles, using the Web with students, and teaching reading strategies.

● Create "Master Tutor" positions to teach demonstration literacy groups at sites as a model learning experience, introducing new and current tutors to new strategies.

● Develop and maintain tutor resource boxes at each site with teaching materials and create library shelving with relevant reading materials.

● Shelve student reading materials for easy access. Materials may need to be reshelved as new themes and concepts are introduced.

● Integrate use of technology through computer training sessions for tutors in small groups and individually at sites. Hold these sessions regularly and allow tutors to attend as many times as needed to become comfortable with software and Web resources.

● Distribute feedback sheets and questionnaires related to implementation of new directions to all tutors and actively solicit their input and reactions. Make it clear that their reactions are valuable and will be used in continuous improvement and modification.

WORDS OF ADVICE
● Make it easy to understand.
● Make it easily accessible.
● Make it optional for veteran tutors, but part of training for new tutors.
● Use multiple approaches.
● Give choices.
● Give it time.

For more information, contact:
ADULT LEARNING CENTERS
Joan Glasner
Queens Borough Public Library
89-11 Merrick Blvd.
Jamaica, NY 11432
718-658-7125
joang@queens.lib.ny.us