Low-cost strategies to recruit and retain volunteers

As literacy providers struggle to make ends meet during hard fiscal times, the staff at the Illinois State Library’s Literacy Office has compiled a list of low-cost volunteer recruitment and retention strategies that programs can implement.

- Offer good professional development opportunities to volunteers.
- Use existing volunteers to recruit new volunteers. Organize an open house or social event where you challenge your existing volunteers to bring at least one friend.
- Reach out to local civic groups. Civic groups normally meet once a month and are always looking for guest speakers and programs for their meetings. These groups are already civic minded and dedicated to volunteering. You now have a captive audience of individuals to promote your program to and recruit without spending program money to do it.
- Provide other avenues of volunteering for your program other than tutoring. Some individuals may not be comfortable tutoring at first but willing to donate time to a program. Allow volunteers to do other duties within your organization, which may build up to tutoring or provide them with a gratifying experience.
- Ask a person to volunteer. Either have the volunteer coordinator personally ask or have your current tutors ask a friend or colleague to serve as an adult volunteer tutor. Statistics reveal that when personally asked nearly 85 percent of potential volunteers will say yes.
- Use social media. Advertise volunteer opportunities on all social channels i.e., Facebook, Twitter. Ask followers to share your posts and re-tweet.
- Make your Web presence exciting. A picture is worth a thousand words, right? Share pictures of volunteers and adult learners working together, encourage tutors and learners to post their own photos, post stories of student success and create an online registration page to encourage age volunteers to register for your next tutor training.
- Plan presentations that put a personal “face” on your program. Have a learner from your program accompany you to a presentation.
- Recruit and motivate retired individuals. They make for very reliable tutors due to fewer demands on their time. Market the experience as an opportunity to:
  - Use their skills and share their experiences, interests and knowledge.
  - Learn new skills.
  - Make new friends.
- Involve volunteers in planning. Give volunteers a voice in the organization; it will create a sense of ownership.

Please visit the following websites to learn additional volunteer recruitment and retention tips:


http://strengtheningnonprofits.org/resources/e-learning/online/recruitingvolunteers/Print.aspx


Fiscal year 2015 final reports submitted by programs through the State Library Literacy Office revealed the following data. Success stories from each program follow.

Adult Volunteer Literacy

- 18,125 adult learners served.
- Average age of adult learner: 39.
- 40 percent of adult learners were studying English as a Second Language (ESL).
- 7,709 volunteers served adult learners.
- Average age of volunteer tutors: 58.
- Volunteer tutors provided 30,463 hours of tutoring instruction, which equates to $71,952 of service per the Independent Sector.

More literacy event information is available at www.coasaconf.org/2016/ (3rd Calendar of Literacy Events).

Illinois Literacy is a publication of the Secretary of State, Illinois State Library Literacy Office.

Jesse White, Secretary of State and State Librarian

Anne Craig, Director, Illinois State Library

Kathryn Dauksza, Program Manager, Literacy Office

To subscribe to Illinois Literacy, call 217-785-6921 or 800-665-5576 (Illinois only), #3. Produced by the Communications Department.
**FY 2015 Literacy Program statistics and success stories**

**Workplace Skills Enhancement**
- 404 employees received instruction.
- 44 percent of employees instructed were female.
- Average age of employee: 42.
- 99 percent of employees studied ESL.
- 1,342 hours of instruction were completed.

**Success Story:**
**Engineered Glass Products, Chicago; Educational Partner: University of Illinois-Business and Industry Services, Naperville**

Engineered Glass Products (EGP) company objective is to offer training and enhancement services in order to increase communication skills. The company is a multi-year recipient of a Workplace Skills Enhancement Grant and manufactures high performance, heat-reflective glass coating products for use in appliances, food service, hotels, office furniture and transportation industries. The company’s customers include major manufacturers such as General Electric, Whirlpool and Frigidaire. Partnering with the University of Illinois — Business and Industry Services (UI-BIS), the company provides instructional opportunities to improve workers’ language skills for advancement into more responsible positions. Company executives have noted that by partnering with UI-BIS, they are able to provide more in-depth instruction than would normally be available to the workers.

The training has allowed EGP to hire employees from varied backgrounds. The company is committed to giving back to the community and offering classes that improve employees’ basic skills in order to lift the community as a whole. The training has also allowed EGP to improve communications with employees and promote them into positions of greater responsibility, which in turn, has allowed employees to provide more for their families.

**Correctional Facilities**
Offering literacy tutoring in correctional facilities opens the door to many educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals. For some, it offers an opportunity to provide training to their fellow inmates. To join in the program, participants must score below the ninth-grade level in reading, writing and math, or speak English below the SFL 7 level.

- Six literacy programs provided adult basic education or English as a Second Language instruction in local correctional facilities; seven programs provided literacy instruction at state facilities; and one program worked with one federal facility.
- 1,086 adult learners qualified as students.
- 246 inmates whose skills exceeded high school level became peer tutors.
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Public libraries throughout Illinois played a major role in educating adult learners. Literacy programs rely on libraries for the full array of library services, and many libraries are providing services to more than one literacy program. In fiscal year 2015, libraries and literacy programs worked together to achieve the following results:

- 85 adult literacy programs assisted 3,688 adult learners in obtaining library cards.
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A comprehensive report on the literacy grant program and support services provided by the Illinois State Library Literacy Office can be found online at http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/literacy/pdfs/fy15-literacy-state-summary.pdf.

**Incorporating AmeriCorps into your literacy program**
First developed in 2003, the Volunteer Outreach for Community Action in Literacy (VOCAL) program of the Literacy Volunteers of Illinois (LVI) assists adult literacy programs in providing increased service to adults and out-of-school learners in their communities. VOCAL achieves this through a three-pronged approach that consists of: one-to-one and small group tutoring of low-literate adult learners by AmeriCorps members, recruitment of volunteers to serve as tutors; and a member training and development program that instills in participants a lifelong ethic of service. This program provides AmeriCorps members with the training and experience they would need should they pursue positions in the public sector, specifically in adult education.

Since its inception, 42 agencies throughout Illinois have hosted 390 members, who have filled a mix of full and part-time positions. Host sites vary in range from community and faith-based agencies in the Chicago area to community colleges and Illinois Youth Centers (ICY) in northern, central and southern Illinois. In the 12 years of the program, AmeriCorps members at these sites along with the 5,780 tutors served 20,170 low-literate adults and incarcerated youth. Fourteen of the host sites hired the members who served with them.

Beyond tutoring and recruiting volunteers, VOCAL AmeriCorps members continue to provide invaluable assistance with tutor retention activities, including tutor training, tutor and student recruitment events, in-kind donations from local businesses, grant writing, data collection, newsletters and public information materials. The members also assist with curriculum development, student intake and assessment, tutor and student matching, computer and other classroom instruction, GED testing and conversation skills.

LVI noted in its latest successful application, “As a coordinating organization for volunteer literacy programs, one of the greatest resources that LVI has provided to community and faith-based organizations is the opportunity to tap into federal resources, such as AmeriCorps, that are otherwise beyond their reach. Our ability to tap into this resource has strengthened the adult literacy network in Illinois which in turn is strengthening our communities. While the programs that are part of the VOCAL program would be able to provide services without AmeriCorps members, they would not be able to provide the same level or depth of service as they have with members, or broaden their service to include employment training and assistance as they have recently begun to do through AmeriCorps members.”

For the 2015-2017 grant cycle, the VOCAL program focuses on two CNCS focus areas — Economic Development and Education. In Economic Development, it is anticipated that annually, 1,400 low-wage, economically disadvantaged adults will receive one-to-one, small group or classroom instruction in basic literacy skills, ESL or GED preparation, with 640 increasing their literacy abilities by at least one level, 250 receiving job search assistance and 125 securing employment. In Education, it is anticipated that annually 300 incarcerated youths will receive individualized tutorial instruction with 180 of them increasing their reading and math abilities by at least one grade. Additionally, VOCAL members will assist their host sites in recruiting 500+ volunteers each year and extend services to another 200 individuals through special service day activities.

More information on the VOCAL program, including how to become a member or host site, can be found on the Literacy Volunteers of Illinois website at lvilinc.org.

**Literacy groups can provide support and professional development**

Literacy practitioners around the state meet on a regular basis to collaborate and discuss relevant issues. If you are not currently a member of one of these groups, consider joining them for a meeting to determine how you can work together to strengthen and promote literacy in your area.

**Chicago:**
- Chicago Citywide Coalition — contact Becky Raymond, 312-690-4253.
- Hispanic Coalition — contact Olivia Flores-Godinez, 773-772-0836.

**Downstate:**
- Literacy Council of Southern Illinois — contact Brenda Boggs, 618-222-5462.
- Metro East Literacy Council — contact Brenda Boggs, 618-222-5462.

**Southwest:**
- Contact the individuals above for meeting locations, dates and times of their next meeting.

**VOCAL participants attend a volunteer recruitment fair in Chicago.**

**The family Gamma takes part in a PACT activity.**
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Workplace Skills Enhancement

- 404 employees received instruction.
- 44 percent of employees instructed were female.
- Average age of employee: 42.
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Engineered Glass Products (EAP) company objective is to offer training and development experiences in order to increase communication skills. The company is a multi-year recipient of a Workplace Skills Enhancement Grant and manufactures high performance, heat-reflective glass coating products for use in appliances, food service, hotels, office furniture and transportation industries. The company’s customers include major manufacturers such as General Electric, Whirlpool and Frigidaire. Partnering with the University of Illinois — Business and Industry Services (UI-BIS), the company provides instructional opportunities to improve workers’ language skills for advancement into more responsible positions. Company executives have noted that by partnering with UI-BIS, they are able to provide more in-depth instruction than would normally be available to the workers.

The training has allowed EAP to hire employees from varied backgrounds. The company is committed to giving back to the community and offering classes that improve employees’ basic skills in order to lift the community as a whole. The training has also allowed EAP to improve communication with employees and promote them into positions of greater responsibility, which in turn, has allowed employees to provide more for their families.

Correctional Facilities

Offering literacy tutoring in correctional facilities opens the door to many educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals. For some, it offers an opportunity to provide training to their fellow inmates. To join in the program, participants must score below the ninth-grade level in reading, writing and math, or speak English below the SFL 7 level.

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FY 2015 Literacy Program statistics and success stories

Summer to further improve her language skills. After she enrolled all of her children for services, she began attending weekly parenting classes and Parent and Child Together (PACT) time. She has used the program as a resource and support system to provide her children with what they need. She is an active participant in classes — always sharing her opinion, asking for more information or encouraging others to participate. She has increased confidence and knowledge of her and her children’s academic abilities. She also has identified areas that she, her family and her children can improve on such as actively working toward eating healthier and being more responsible with homework.

She has played a major role in helping mothers involved in the program create a greater sense of community this year. In previous years, the children in the School Age Program have always had a sense of community, but this year the mothers have created their own strong bonds that cross language and racial/ethnic barriers. She continues to contribute to the entire program, volunteering to provide support in any way that she can.

The children in the family have blossomed this year as well. All of the children have discovered an enhanced love of books, improved their organization or work ethic concerning school work, and eagerly interact with their mother during PACT activities and at the library.

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Chicago

- Chicago Citywide Coalition — contact Becky Raymond, 773-630-4233.
- Northside Coalition — contact Melanie Wagner, 773-728-7969, ext. 30.
- Southwest Coalition — contact Chasama Travis, 773-857-1582.

Westside Coalition — contact Kathy Allison, 773-281-3309.

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This issue of Illinois Literacy highlights the success stories of literacy programs from around the state in fiscal year 2015. These programs have a direct impact on the lives of so many, and I am thankful for the work they do to serve adult learners and their families here in Illinois. The backbone of many of these programs is the volunteer tutors who provide countless hours of instruction. You will read about an agency that assists programs around the state to recruit and train volunteers for various literacy projects. As I’ve always stated, there is no greater calling than helping others better themselves.

It is important that literacy practitioners work together by sharing ideas while supporting each other in common endeavors. Throughout the state, there are groups and coalitions that meet to discuss these issues and advocate for adult literacy. I encourage you to get involved and take advantage of this resource. Best wishes for continued success in 2016.

Jesse White
Secretary of State & State Librarian

Penny Severns Family Literacy

- 1,348 adult learners served.
- 88 percent were female adults.
- 73 percent were adult learners studying ESL.
- Average age of adult learner: 33.
- 58 percent adult learners obtained a library card.
- 1,952 children served.
- Average age of children served: 5.

Success Story: South-East Asia Center, Chicago

An Assyrian mother with four young children, who enrolled in the School Age Family Literacy Program, has been positively impacted and has had a positive impact on the program herself. She first worked as a hairdres- s, and now she works as a part-time aide at her chil- dren’s school. She started taking English classes in the

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