WWLP

What Works Literacy Partnership

Data collection and analysis is essential to program improvement

What Works Literacy Partnership

Resource Guide

Traditionally, the literacy field has relied heavily on anecdotal information as a means of tracing student progress. Literacy Partners Inc. of New York City, recognizing both this reality and the need to formulate a measurement system that would provide reliable data, organized and led the What Works Literacy Partnership project, which was comprised of 12 eminent literacy organizations located throughout the United States. This report is the summary of the work completed by the participants to help themselves and other similar organizations build capacity in their programs and share best practices across the field.

The participating agencies and all others who will refer to this guide, are deeply indebted to the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds for making the What Works Literacy Partnership project possible.

Funding for WWLP and this publication was provided by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. The mission of the Funds is to enrich community life through its support of education, arts, and culture. Special thanks goes to Sheila Murphy, Senior Program Officer, for her dedication to this project and her ongoing support of adult literacy.

What Works Literacy Partnership

We foremost wish to thank the members of WWLP. Individual programs that comprise the Partnership are **Albany Park Community Center** (Chicago, Illinois), **Arlington Education and Employment Program** (Arlington, Virginia), **Center for Literacy** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), **Durham County Literacy Council** (Durham, North Carolina), **Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council** (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), **Jackson Mann Community Center** (Allston, Massachusetts), **Literacy Partners Inc.** (New York, New York), **LVA-Chippewa Valley** (Eau Claire, Wisconsin), **Pima College Adult Education** (Tucson, Arizona), **Southern State Community College ABLE Program** (Hillsboro, Ohio), **Vermont Adult Learning** (East Montpelier, Vermont)and **Willard Adult Learning Center** (Missoula, Montana).

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"...WWLP has been a wonderful experience. The process involved a massive amount of work! We learned; we grew professionally and personally; our programs improved; and we developed friendships to last a lifetime with people that we most likely would never have met without WWLP..."

About the partnership

What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), funded by Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and directed by Literacy Partners Inc. in New York City, is a collaborative effort of 12 leading adult literacy and ESOL education agencies from across the United States.

Created in 1996, WWLP provides a learning forum for practioners to exchange information, develop tools for enhanced practices and share lessons learned with the larger field.

A panel of experts and leaders in adult literacy selected each of the 12 organizations from a group of 70 for its outstanding work and demonstrated excellence. The selection criteria included:

- Organizational philosophy and approach
- Learner retention
- Quality of instruction, learner assessment, and evaluation
- Evidence of learner participation
- Technology capacity
- Overall program quality

This group of 12 programs was representative of the wide diversity of organizations in the adult education field. They differ in size of student population, instructional delivery methods, location and size of budget. All receive some federal, state, and/or local funding. Some receive a combination of public and private support.

Collectively, the partnership serves more than 25,000 learners each year. The focus of WWLP was program assessment. Through semi-annual gatherings, technical assistance and carefully implemented strategies, each program significantly enhanced its capacity to design program assessments, measure their learners' progress, collect and analyze data and make informed program improvements.

The formation and journey of the WWLP came at a unique moment—across many fields of practice, there were significant pressures to improve accountability and to demonstrate results. During this period the National Reporting System was created and throughout the country programs that receive public funding are struggling to meet its data collection requirements. Members of the WWLP report that their participation in this initiative has given them the tools, knowledge and skills to meet this challenge.

Throughout the six years of the partnership, each partner has received annual stipends to support data collection and analysis, technology training, funds to purchase hardware and software, and ongoing expert technical advise. During this time they chose to standardize and improve their data collection and assessment practices, obtain staff buy-in for these changes, and, in turn, use this information to make informed decisions to improve their program.

We hope you enjoy and use this Resource Guide.

". . .My colleagues in WWLP and I have been able to take this newly acquired learning and experience, bring it home to our local programs, share and implement much of it, and therefore keep our programs on the cutting edge of change and development . . ."

Introduction

Embarking on the journey to program improvement

The *What Works Literacy Partnership* ("WWLP") is pleased to present this Resource Guide which chronicles the progress and findings made by 12 partner agencies from across the country who set out on a six-year journey to learn what assessment means and how to do it best. The guide contains practical tips and advice, but we all learn there is no "silver bullet." This six year project was an arduous process but the good that has come out of it will, we expect, affect many more literacy students beyond the 25,000 served by the 12 partners.

Professionals in the adult literacy field understand that meaningful assessment takes time, dedication, and patience. Yet, as the 12 partners discovered, good data collection and proper analysis have the potential and power to transform this important work. This Guide tells you how.

The WWLP accomplishments represent a collaborative exploration coupled with a willingness among the 12 partner agencies to reflect honestly on what does and does not work. WWLP established working relationships among a diverse group of literacy programs, piloted and refined assessment tools, held in-depth discussions on the myriad issues surrounding assessment and evaluation and—perhaps most importantly—learned "by doing."

The strength of the partnership lies in the trust that developed amongst the twelve organizations, the animated debates that occurred as policy and practice changed during WWLP's life span, and the learning that came about as the agencies took risks in order to enhance their programs and thus student success.

In this publication, the partners share their experiences and offer guidance on what it takes to improve and strengthen literacy programs.

How to use these materials

It was our intention to create a Resource Guide that shares the wisdom of peers and colleagues in a format that promotes additional collaboration.

During the past six years we have had many challenges and successes; we are sharing the best of them in this peer-to-peer Resource Guide.

Throughout the process, we engaged experts in the field of adult literacy and program analysis. They assisted us with improving procedures and interpreting our data. We learned a great deal from each other. Now we are pleased to pass this assistance on to you.

There are four sections in this Resource Guide that you will find useful as you move forward in program improvement:

- **Section 3** **Data tips and advice**
- **Section 4** **Case studies**
- **Section 5** **Self assessment of resources and skills**
- **Section 6** **Annual cycle of program review at a glance**

Each section of this Guide stands on its own and can be removed from the binder, duplicated, and shared with staff and colleagues in any manner you find appropriate. However, managers will find it useful to read and utilize the Guide in its entirety.

Where do I begin?

Start by taking the Self-assessment of resources and skills in Section 5.
Part I of this survey will give you a list of your resources and an idea of the staff time you currently devote to data collection and analysis.

Part II outlines specific technical skills and asks you to rate your staff abilities in each category. You are then challenged to prioritize the gaining of a new skill within the next 24 months. This exercise in setting priorities will assist you when you engage in planning for staff development or in writing or amending a technology plan.

Where do I look for helpful tips and advice?

Consult the **Data tips and advice in Section 3.** In this section of the Guide, you will find helpful advice on each step of the data collection and reporting process. In addition, this section contains recommendations on how to evaluate hardware and software purchases, develop a technology plan and gain staff buy-in. Each Data Tip and Advice is in its own tab for easy use and distribution.

Following the Advice in each section, a corresponding one-page "Checklist" will assist you to improve your program and track your progress. Each Checklist can be duplicated and shared with appropriate staff.

Each Advice section contains a cross reference to one or more case studies focusing upon actual WWLP partner experiences. At the end of each section, Advice is cross-referenced to one or more "real life" case studies.

Where can I find stories of success from WWLP partners?

Twelve **case studies in Section 4** are written in the words of the WWLP partners. They represent actual situations and the lessons learned by each partner as they embarked on efforts to improve their own program.

In the case studies, WWLP partners identify their particular challenges. Each describes their organizational history, approach and solution to their particular challenge. An evaluation of the implemented solution is offered, plus some "words of wisdom" from the experience. Should you want to speak to a program officer about his or her specific case study, contact information is included at the end of each study.

Each case study raises a number of important issues common to all. In the beginning of Section 4, a grid provides a cross-reference of each case study by topic.

These actual stories from the field are intended to provide you with insights and inspiration to share with your staff as you proceed.

Where do I find advice on implementing a planning cycle?

Section 6 includes the **"Annual cycle of program review at a glance."** This section provides a six-step review cycle that will assist you in creating and strengthening your own cycle of program review and evaluation.

How can I get more information?

Contact Literacy Partners Inc. in New York City (212.725.9200) or visit our website at www.literacypartners.org

"... We are in an excellent position to pass on the lessons learned, the outcome benefits, and the "what works" of WWLP to our colleagues state and nation wide ..."

Data tips and advice

A primer for improving your program with better data collection and analysis

Data tips and advice

A. Setting up a successful and effective data collection and reporting system

Tips to remember:

- An effective data collection and reporting system requires appropriate human and technological resources. Staff who participate in the data collection and reporting will have specifically defined tasks and responsibilities so that they understand how to input the information. In addition, staff will need to understand how to work with the technologies that compose the system, including paper or electronic data entry forms, data files, and database management software.

- A well-designed and effectively utilized data collection system depends on a well-trained staff. A data collection and reporting system is usually a repository of information for many programs and areas, therefore the collection and update of this information system frequently involves an entire organization. This makes everyone a stakeholder—including teachers, students, tutors, administrators, and support staff.

- A data collection and reporting system is not a static repository for knowledge, but must continually be updated in order to support adequate analysis and reporting. Periodic reviews and adjustments are necessary to maintain a data collection system to accommodate new federal regulations, new program initiatives, and reporting to funding organizations.

- Planning for and maintaining a data collection system that produces quality, error-free data is time-consuming. Make sure to provide time for periodic staff training, and appropriate evaluation of the entire system.

- An effective data collection and reporting system helps managers review their program performance. This knowledge enables them to make informed decisions concerning changes in program or staffing arrangements.

- Effective data collection and reporting systems provide valuable information about internal operations. A review of the data will prompt more questions and analysis.

- Data collection becomes relevant and more valuable to your organization if you ask and answer your own program performance questions with your own data.

- Occasionally, staff may perceive that the data collection and reporting system is in conflict with program practice because it provides a record of program performance information. Assist staff to see that the information supports operations, and provides a window to illuminate the organization's challenges and successes.

- Hardware, software, staff expertise and training must remain current if a system is to achieve its full potential. A technology plan supports every good data collection and reporting system.

A. A checklist for setting up a successful and effective data collection and reporting system

✔ **Develop a clear, written rationale for data collection** and use it to promote its importance and build consensus in the organization. Remember to involve staff from all areas of the organization in all phases of planning and implementation.

✔ **Be prepared to answer the following questions** for each component of the organization:

- How will the data be used?
- What changes in the collection or reporting of the data should be implemented?

✔ **Consider the data needs of each area in your organization** (e.g. budgeting, planning, grant writing, program, staff development and training). Outline your total need for information. Begin collecting critical program information and add other sections of information as you become accomplished and as time and resources permit.

✔ **Clearly define and explain the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved** in the collection and reporting of data, including teachers, tutors, volunteers, advisory board, support staff, administrators, counselors, students, and data entry personnel.

✔ **Develop a technology plan** that identifies the financial resources necessary for staff training and the purchase of appropriate hardware and software. Make sure to provide for continual staff training and skill enhancements. Expect to update your technology plans continuously.

B. Managing a data collection and reporting system

Tips to remember:

● One program administrator or manager should be appointed to oversee the data collection and reporting system. This manager monitors the collection process, streamlining and changing it as needed to ensure data integrity and quality, and increase the efficiency of the system on an ongoing basis.

● System security must be established and maintained in order to protect the confidentiality of data files. The system administrator or manager must decide who will enter, edit, view, analyze and report on the data.

● The data collection system should be supported by clearly defined tasks and procedures that are performed on a routine basis in the daily or weekly operations of the organization.

● Include the roles and responsibilities for data collection and reporting in job descriptions for all members of the organization, including volunteers. Each staff member and volunteer should understand his or her role in the system.

● A data collection system should have built-in redundancy, not only in a file backup system for the database, but also in individual staff skills. Make sure to back-up your data! Expect periodic staff turnover, and train more than one member of your staff in critical functions.

● Ongoing staff development is essential to the success of your system. This includes instruction of basic computing skills as well as the use and importance of data analysis to support everyday decision-making.

● Orient all new staff and volunteers to the existence, function, and importance of your data collection and reporting system

● New federal guidelines and requirements may require a review and adjustment in data collection and reporting. It is important to plan for these changes in advance, and to inform staff in a timely manner so they have time to prepare

● Plan regularly scheduled or periodic meetings to update staff on changes and/or additions to the system and procedures.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: A

B. A checklist for managing a data collection and reporting system

✔ **Develop or improve current data-collection forms** to assure that they are clear and meet your data-collection requirements and those of your funding sources.

✔ **Clearly define and provide all staff withdata collection procedures** in written program policies.

✔ **Set up appropriate user permission rights** to control access to the system.

✔ **Ensure that each data collection and reporting task has a "back-up" person** trained to step in as needed.

✔ **Reduce backlog in data entry** by setting realistic and useful deadlines for information submission and entry.

✔ **Develop a standard set of reports** for review by administrators and teachers. (Not only are these reviews useful for program performance reasons, but also for catching potential errors in your data.)

✔ **Establish quality control methods** to verify the accuracy of your data. Check input forms for thoroughness. Review reports and test their validity against what you know about your programs operations.

✔ **Pinpoint places in your procedures and data flow where errors can occur,** such as forms completed by a new staff member.

✔ **Plan ahead.** A data collection and reporting system requires time and commitment from all staff and volunteers.

C. Developing good data collection procedures

Tips to remember:

Data collection procedures

● Consult with staff and determine what data is required for analysis and reporting.

● Define terms for data collection, the appropriate collection process, and the forms and procedures to be used by staff.

● Continually review the forms used in data collection and reporting. Align these forms to your information needs so that you do not spend unnecessary time later on. Try to adequately assess your information needs in the beginning to prevent continual updating of the data collection form.

● To reduce time in data entry, have the order of the information listed on the collection forms match the order of the input fields on the computer screen.

● The timeliness and deadlines for the collection and input of data is directly related to your analysis and reporting needs. If you want to review your data monthly, make sure that your data collection and entry process has a timeline for the submission and entry of data to accommodate this need.

● Establish deadlines for data entry completion either by date or class completion. Make sure these deadlines take into consideration the end of employment dates for part-time or seasonal staff so that the required data can be checked for accuracy prior to their departure. (For example, all data from tutors, teachers, and students who have a summer break should be collected well in advance of that date.)

● Establish procedures for periodic reviews to check the completeness and accuracy of all incoming data forms. This helps to eliminate partial files and missed data fields. Monthly or quarterly review is recommended. Remember, data must be complete and accurate to be useful to the organization.

● Periodically review all forms to assess their usefulness and reduce unnecessary redundancy of collection of the same information across forms and departments. Update forms periodically as reporting needs change.

Staffing the data collection and reporting system

● Clearly define roles and responsibilities for each person at each step in the data process.

● Data-entry staff should have access to the staff that filled out the data forms for follow-up clarification and questions.

● Data-entry staff should have the contextual knowledge of the program, its operations and its requirements. This understanding will improve communication and understanding among staff members, reduce errors in the data input, and create a sense of ownership of the process.

● Data-entry staff should be trained on how to use the software.

● There should be more than one data-entry expert on staff in the event of staff turnover.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: A, F, H, J

C. A checklist for developing good data collection procedures

✔ **Answer these initial questions as an organization:**

- Why are we collecting data? (i.e. program improvement goals, report to funding organizations.)
- Who are we collecting data for?
- What data do they want?
- What data do we want?
- What reports would we want to see?
- What reports are required by others?
- What confidentiality issues must be addressed?

✔ **Create list of specific data to be collected.**

✔ **Clearly define each of the data items.**
Include acceptable entries for as many items as possible. Eliminate gray areas in any definition of your terms.

✔ **Be prepared to answer these questions:**

- Who is collecting data?
- Who is authorized to enter data?
- Will there be one person entering or will there be multiple data entry people?
- Who is checking for accuracy and completeness?

✔ **Create forms that:**

- include all required data.
- resemble each input screen in the database.
- are clear, clean, and simple.
- match each stage of student activity (e.g. enrolling, testing, goal setting, exiting.)

✔ **Establish procedures:**

- for the flow of data from its recording onto a form to its entry into the database.
- for intake and orientation that include the data collection requirements.
- for checking data forms for completeness, and data entry for accuracy. (Remember to schedule this to allow enough time so that reports to funding institutions can be completed.)

✔ **Set deadlines for each step in the process.**

✔ **Staff training should include:**

- an explanation in the use of data forms.
- the importance of adhering to deadlines.
- the necessity for completeness of forms.
- the importance of accuracy.
- information on how to involve students in the use of data and help them see its value.
- a referral of additional resources, including people and documents.
- the chain of command on data issues.
- how to use software.
- a discussion of typical problems (e.g. the need for consistency in entry of students' names.)

D. Analyzing and reporting on data

Tips to remember:

- The key to making your data become "knowledge" is to design useful, informative reports based upon sound analysis.

- Most software packages for data come equipped to perform basic mathematical functions, such as addition, subtraction, and the calculation of averages and percentages. These calculations can provide you with a lot of information regarding your average length-of-stay by program, the increase and decrease of students by program, percentage of students by type, the percentage of students that take a pre-and post-test and the like. Become familiar with these features so that you can use your software to the fullest.

- Some answers to your program performance questions can be answered with data from only one fiscal year. However, you may need to review trends in your data over more than one year. This is an important feature to look for in your software—the ability to store and access data that spans multiple years.

- Look into obtaining training on importing and exporting data between various software packages. The ability to transfer important data can boost your ability to analyze information, even if your software doesn't contain that feature. Community colleges and continuing education programs provide excellent training in Microsoft Excel and other spreadsheet software.

- Good reports provide answers to the questions they were designed to answer. Investing time in report structuring upfront will save time and paper.

- Design reports in a format that will display the required data. Make sure analysis and reports answer your own questions and those of your funding sources.

- Consider designing a single report that can simultaneously serve multiple audiences, such as funding institutions and program administrators.

- One report can answer several questions and multiple components of data can be displayed in one report. For example, to follow trends in information you can include multiple years in one report.

- Always design reports with the appropriate audience in mind. You may need to present data in a different format to meet the needs of a specific audience. The presentation of the data directly affects its impact on an audience. Strive for the most effective presentation of data.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: A, D, H, I, L

D. A checklist for analyzing and reporting on data

What do you want to know?

✔ Do you have the needed data/information in your database?

✔ Does a previous report or analysis provide the answers you are seeking? If not, you may need to do an"ad hoc" analysis and/or create a report.

Do the analysis.

- What span of time will the analysis or report cover? (e.g. one month, one year, several years?)
- Determine which data elements you need to include in your analysis and what calculations may be required.

✔ Perform your calculations or analysis and review your results.

✔ Do your results support your instincts about your program performance? If so, proceed to the next step. If not, review the data and analysis to ensure its accuracy and double-check your calculations.

✔ Once satisfied with the accuracy of your calculations and results, determine how best to depict this information for others.

Depict the information for others.

✔ Is this information for internal use or external use and distribution?

✔ How frequently is the information needed? (annually? quarterly?)

✔ Is this information best displayed in a chart, table, or graph?

✔ Create a test format and discuss it with other staff to see if the display of information is useful and the content relevant for their purposes.

✔ If you wish to track data across time or provide it regularly to funding sources, you may want to create a standard report to view the information at intervals throughout the year.

✔ Produce the report at the requested intervals and distribute.

E. Capturing learner achievement through setting goals

Tips to remember:

● In order to measure student progress, it is important that our learners establish goals that can be measured and attained.

● Assist students in setting their own goals. The process should result in a realistic study plan that identifies short and long-term goals. Help students identify their strengths and weaknesses with standard assessment instruments.

● Set **SMART** goals:

Specific (everyone understands it).
Measurable (progress can be measured).
Achievable (based on student's skills level).
Relevant (meaningful for students and his/her needs).
Time-framed (set achievement dates).

● Regularly assess student progress toward stated goals. If progress on goals is not being made, it is time to revisit the goals and readjust the plan.

● Goals analysis is most useful when it describes what someone will do. It is much less useful when describing traits or feelings to be exhibited.

● The focus of the required National Reporting System ("NRS") objectives can set the stage for beginning the goal-setting process. A student's personal goals can be included along with required NRS goals. The two can often be integrated seamlessly.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: B, C, G, L

E. A checklist for capturing learner achievement through setting goals

✔ **Learn as much as possible about each student's ability and potential during intake.** Ask what brought them to your program, and what they want to do *beyond* the GED if that is their primary goal. Questions and discussions can assist a student in identifying their true goals, which are often very different from the goals they express at the beginning of the intake interview. Students need to have realistic expectations of themselves, their capabilities, the program, and the time it may take to accomplish their goal(s).

✔ **Describe success with the goals in performance terms.** Describe specifically what the student will have to say or do to show the goal is achieved.

✔ **Eliminate "fuzzy" terms.** Revise the list until it consists of easy-to-interpret performance terms that represent the student's goal. After reviewing this list it should be easy to determine if a student has accomplished a goal.

✔ **Gain student buy-in once a learning plan is formulated.** Students should commit to checking their own progress. Consider a "contract" type of agreement and a mix of formal and informal measures of progress along the way. It is paramount that students have a personal stake in their education.

✔ **Consistently check the progress chart.** Assess progress on a regular basis.

✔ **Consider using student advocates.** Students who have benefited from the process of goal setting often make the best advocates. Remember that they can also be the best peer trainers for newly arrived classmates.

✔ **Revisit goals periodically.** When it is discovered that a student is not progressing toward a goal, the goal needs to be revisited. Help the student figure out what the problem is and what needs to be done to get back on track or how the goal will be revised.

✔ **Recognize that non-academic issues often affect the educational process.** The process of formulating solutions to personal or academic problems, in turn, teaches reflection, analysis, problem-solving, and flexibility skills.

F. Using data for program improvement

Tips to remember:

- Data helps to describe your programs as well as your student population characteristics and achievements consistently over time. Consider data as a valuable asset that can assist you and your students to learn about "what works" in your organization.

- Knowing what questions are not answered with the collected data is also useful. An unanswerable question can indicate places where new data or additional analysis is needed.

- Not every question about your program can be calculated or answered with data. Your goal is to capture an optimum amount of data to answer a high percentage of your questions.

- Sound analysis and interpretation of data is crucial to understanding your program's performance and in turn, guides you in improving instruction and effectively showing results of program services.

- The importance of the quality and consistency of data will become apparent as you look for data to answer the questions you pose. Be careful to maintain and apply data element definitions consistently throughout the years to ensure your ability to compare "like elements".

- Ongoing review and discussion of the data and reports will give you insights into your program's performance. Data can be used as a basis for making decisions about the effectiveness of a program, class, or service. Data can reflect the outcomes of established procedures or operations.

- Regularly scheduled staff time to discuss information is helpful and essential for program planning and improvement based on data. Taking the time to discuss your data analysis and reports will increase staff knowledge and help build stronger communication among the staff.

- Look for ways to support staff in their attempts to integrate using data and reports in their daily work lives.

- Consider soliciting advice on improvements from outside experts. Ask staff at a local university or other appropiate organizations about employing students well trained in data analysis to assist you in your efforts. Consider the improvements you need to make in your data analysis skills and include provisions in the professional development plan for your organization to upgrade your skills.

To view an Annual Cycle of Program Review at a Glance, see Section 6.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: A, B, D, E, H, I, K, L

F. A checklist for using data for program improvement

✔ Describe in detail the problem, situation, or issue you would like to examine.

✔ Form specific questions that can be answered by your data.

✔ Select the data you need to examine.

✔ Perform the analysis (calculations of sums, averages, percentages, etc).

✔ List your findings based upon this analysis.

✔ Discuss these findings and draw conclusions based upon them.

✔ Based on your conclusions, define any changes required of your programs and operations.

✔ Set a deadline for implementing these changes.

✔ Identify everything you needed to implement these changes, including,

- training.
- new funds.
- re-evaluation of current schedules.
- reassignment of tasks and responsibilities.

✔ Identify staff that will be responsible for implementing these changes.

✔ Start the cycle over again with new questions aimed at improving your program.

G. Hardware and software selection

Tips to remember:

- There is no single set of steps that can work for every program's software selection process. NRS requirements and accountability have created an increase in development of data collection systems for adult and literacy education.

- Your research prior to software selection could include: Investigating what your state administration is recommending for data tracking. Is there a state plan? What software are they planning to require? What software do they recommend? Can they refer you to programs that have tried the software you are considering?

- Do you have a national affiliation? What software recommendations can you get from the members?

- Check with your funding sources to see what software other literacy programs may be using to report to them.

- Look for "experts" that have characteristics in common with your program for recommendations. What software do other providers with similar data needs use? Speak directly to current users of any system you are considering.

- Avoid being the first program to use a new system unless you have the time and resources for the trial and error of the first year debugging.

- Make certain that your software package can handle multiple years of data and then access these years to design reports.

- If possible, select software before making hardware decisions. Software and user-defined needs should drive the hardware selection process. Be aware of the operating system requirements of the software (e.g. processor speed, RAM and data storage capacity of the hard drive.)

- Beware of so-called "bargains" on the purchase of slightly old software packages. Make sure hardware is compatible with the software requirements.

- Select the fastest, most capable hardware that is within your budget and can meet the storage, analysis and reporting needs of the organization.

- Hardware and software decisions for data collection are an integral part of the technology plan and should not be made in isolation from the overall technology needs of the organization.

(cont'd)

G. Hardware and software selection (cont'd)

- Ask these questions before purchasing any hardware.

— Is the computer capable of being upgraded for more RAM, hard drives, and other peripherals, or of being network compatible?

— What is the warranty?

— Where can service be obtained for this hardware?

— What is the reliability rating on this brand?

— Can this machine meet our current and future storage and analysis needs? (Remember to define "future storage" as you answer this question.)

— Beware of "super salespeople." A technical expert with no "commission" interest is a valuable asset in this process. Impressive product demonstrations don't always present all the details required for the selection of hardware or software. Do the homework required for making this decision. Remember that bad decisions will cost time, money, and staff goodwill in the long run.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: A, I, K

G. A checklist for hardware and software selection

✔ Incorporate data collection technology needs into the organization's technology plan.

✔ Determine data requirements for current year and any foreseen future needs or requirements.

✔ Survey and evaluate available software.

✔ Select software that will optimize/meet the data requirements for the entire organization.

✔ Select hardware based upon the software selected and the overall technology needs of your organization.

✔ Take time to evaluate how current organizational procedures need to be revised to accommodate the new software or hardware.

✔ Take time to train staff and volunteers on new procedures and software.

H. Developing a technology plan

Tips to remember:

- A technology plan provides a roadmap to the future that guides the effective expenditures of limited resources.

- A technology plan includes all the technology needs of the organization, of which data collection is just one.

- The most effective technology plan is broad and realistic in scope and driven by the educational goals and objectives of the organization, not the most recent technology developments. After a plan is initially developed, it remains a work in progress that is always modifiable.

- The process must be owned by the whole organization and support the mission and philosophy of the organization. Remember planning takes time.

Web resources:

The following web sites can assist organizations with the technology planning process:

The National Center for Technology Planning (NCTP). Everything you need to prepare an educational organization technology plan is online at this site. **http://www.nctp.com**

North Central Regional Educational, Learning Through Technology:
A Planning and Implementation Guide
http://www.ncrel.org/tandl/homepg.htm

NWREL's Northwest Educational Technology Consortium, Technology Plans: Resources Online
http://www.netc.org/ tech_plans/index.html

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Plugging In, Choosing and Using Educational Technology
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/edtalk/toc.htm

The National Center for Technology Planning (NCTP). Technology Planning: Recipe for Success
http://www.nctp.com/tp.recipe.html

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: A, K

H. A checklist for technology planning

✔ **Plan to plan:** Pre-planning minimizes setbacks and surprises. Involve representatives from the whole organization. Identify a "lead person," a "change agent," and the "writer." Set a timeline for development of the plan.

✔ **Determine goals of the planning process:** Define benefits to the staff, students and all stakeholders. Plan for current and the future needs.

✔ **Develop a preliminary vision:** Brainstorm creative as well as realistic ways technology can be utilized. Include technology's role in instruction, administration, classes, and internal and external communication.

✔ **Inventory available resources:** Technology includes computers, printers, TVs, VCRs, audio recorders, scanners, CD players, and the expertise of staff and volunteers. Identify what resources, who has access and when. Identify strengths and weaknesses of current use.

✔ **Explore uses for technology.** Not all technology is appropriate for all students or staff. Investigate how other similar organizations use technology. Develop solutions that meet your organizations needs.

✔ **Identify technology solutions.** Evaluate ideas; and determine which solutions should be included in the actual plan. Solutions that integrate into regular activities are most effective.

✔ **Consider available options based on financial resources.** Hardware should support software needs. Make decisions for allocating technology resources. Explore the reallocation of current funds as well as new sources of funds and grants.

✔ **Determine staff training needs.** Staff training is vital to the success of a technology plan. Keep in mind that staff have a variety of learning styles and learning curves just as all adult students. Plan to accommodate that variety.

✔ **Develop a timeline:** Three to five years is recommended. Set dates for long-term and short-term steps. Include time to reassess needs and evaluate plan.

✔ **Implementation:** A "lead person" should monitor progress and schedule regular meetings. Evaluation of process should be continuous.

I. Gaining staff buy-in

Tips to remember:

● Staff support is essential in effective data collection. Effective data collection and reporting is essential to improve program. Program improvement is essential to sustained funding.

● Accurate and relevant information provides solid feedback to students, instructors, program administrators, and funding institutions.

● Remind all stakeholders that quality data collection affects the existence of the organization. Share the big picture. Outside influences such as the NRS and the United Way may require information from your organization. Your staff may need to help integrate requirements from outside sources into all aspects of your operation and processes.

● Encourage dialogue. Solicit feedback and interaction in an open atmosphere.

● Utilize networking opportunities with other organizations that have made positive gains in the areas of assessment, evaluation and data collection.

● It is important to be aware of factors that contribute to staff resistance to data collection.

● Some may perceive that "change" has the potential to make them "look bad".

● Instructors who have successfully relied on their own methods to determine what their students need and to measure progress may not see the value of change.

● Some may fear that data will indicate areas of weakness in instruction, since numbers do not measure subjective improvements.

● Some may believe that data entry is merely something to satisfy funding institutions.

● Some may fear that increased regulation might threaten the autonomy of the organization.

● Some have a fear of change in general.

● Some may believe that the additional requirements of improved data collection are rarely beneficial or a waste of time.

● Identify the staff member most resistant to change and involve that person at the ground level. Nurture that individual to encourage their growth and buy-in to change.

Note: For examples from WWLP partners, consult case studies: B, G, K, L

I. A checklist for gaining staff buy-in

✔ **Plan carefully at the administrative level.**

✔ **Develop vision.** Determine where you are now. Outline the needs. Plan where you want to go. Be prepared. Be ready to show how effective assessment, evaluation and data will benefit the students, teachers, volunteers, and clerical/support staff as well as the entire organization. Clear explanations build trust and engage constituencies.

✔ **Educate all stakeholders.** They need to know how the data will be used, why it will benefit the program and why it will benefit each of them.

✔ **Engage the stakeholders in the process** of developing and standardizing the processes for assessments, evaluation and data collection. Involve them in all aspects of decision-making.

✔ **Recognize and reward staff efforts that** support movement in the right direction. Pair peers to assist each other if one or more is struggling with the change.

✔ **Always. . .**

- be patient.
- think of this process as a continual journey.
- expect setbacks.
- find fun ways to both use data and learn from your data.
- recognize and publicly acknowledge your staff and organization's success.
- take time to encourage excellent communication venues among all staff and stakeholders.

Case studies from 12 WWLP partners

Case Study: A
Effective Practices in Program Evaluation
A case study from the Albany Park Community Center

Case Study: B
A writing rubric to assess ESOL student performance
A case study from the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP)

Case Study: C
Securing student and staff buy-in
A case study from the Center for Literacy

Case Study: D
Opening Pandora's Box: Improving test results through program redesign
A case study from the Durham County Literacy Council

Case Study: E
Assessing student progress
A case study from the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council

Case Study: F
Standardizing data collection
A case study from the Jackson Mann Community Center

Case Study: G
Creating a tool and a process to measure writing skills
A case study from Literacy Partners Inc.

Case Study: H
Improving data collection
A case study from Literacy Volunteers of America, Chippewa Valley

Case Study: I
Tracking student progress
A case study from Pima College Adult Education

Case Study: J
Building an intake/orientation team
A case study from the Adult Basic and Literacy Education, Southern State Community College, Adult Opportunity Center

Case Study: K
Ingredients to build support for decision-making and program improvement in assessment
A case study from Vermont Adult Learning

Case Study: L
Off to a good start: Using orientation and goal setting to improve retention
A case study of the Willard Adult Learning Center

The WWLP partner organization case studies by topic area

WWLP partner organization

Index Letter	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
	Albany Park	Arlington REEP	Center for Literacy	DCLC Durham	GPLC Pittsburgh	Jackson Mann CC	Literacy Partners	LVA-Chippewa	Pima College	Southern State CC ABLE	Vermont Adult Learning	Willard Adult Learning
Topic Area												
Assessment in Volunteer Programs				●			●					
Assessment Planning	●	●	●				●	●		●	●	●
Data Quality	●	●						●	●	●		
Data Systems	●									●	●	●
Instruction				●			●					
Involving Students in Assessment									●			
Local Data Collection	●					●			●	●	●	
Multi-Site Solutions				●						●	●	
Obtaining Staff Buy-In	●	●	●			●	●	●		●	●	
Performance Based-Assessment		●	●				●					
Professional Development		●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	
Rural Solutions										●	●	
Standardized Testing					●				●	●	●	
Standardizing Assessment Practices		●						●	●	●	●	●
Student Intake						●				●		●
Using Data for Program Improvement & Decision Making	●	●		●	●			●	●		●	●

Case Study A
Albany Park Community Center

Effective practices in program evaluation

"No plan is perfect from the start; it gets perfected along the way."

The challenge

Our challenge was to consolidate the multiple data reporting forms required by various funders into a comprehensive database system to address the needs of the funders as well as those of our local program. By doing this, we were able to develop a more effective and user-friendly evaluation system for the program that also would meet the requirements of funders.

Who we are

The Albany Park Community Center in Chicago is a nonprofit, community-based organization that provides a range of social services to residents of a multicultural, working-poor neighborhood. Our literacy programs serve over 1,000 adult learners and their families. The programs are staffed by a mix of paid teachers and volunteers. These instructional programs, funded by several sources, include adult education classes, adult literacy tutoring, family literacy, citizenship instruction, and workforce development services.

The program takes a client needs-driven approach, which yields two results, (a) uninterrupted service flow and (b) enrollments in multiple subprograms and various delivery modes. For example, more than 30 percent of the adult education learners enrolled in our Family Literacy program have children in on-site early childhood education. Job seekers in need of basic skills or job readiness training are enrolled in adult education as well as workforce development services. Learners also may study more hours on their own via computer-assisted instruction.

Our story

Before adopting a broader, more systematic approach, our database management had been problematic. Each funder has its own purposes, which are narrower than the holistic world of the local program. Because of external factors, salient data could not be efficiently combined, compiled, or compared. For example, program administrators could not readily correlate test gains with family literacy outcomes. One underlying problem was that funders' databases operate on different platforms (e.g., 4D, FoxPro, dBase IV, etc.) making it difficult to import and export key data. These databases seemed to conspire against our evaluation efforts.

These frustrations were compounded by the fact that some data had never been entered into *any* computer database. Information we collected on learners' native languages and countries, their educational goals, and their satisfaction with the program were not computerized because no funder had asked for this data. As a result, many rich facts remained uncompiled, unanalyzed, and unavailable for use in program improvement.

What works

Through participation in the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), the Albany Park Community Center obtained tools for approaching program evaluation systematically. We began to understand the need to develop a plan, identify individuals with expertise, and develop a database that worked.

The first step was to develop a plan with all staff members. Using the Program Evaluation Plan grid (see attached page 39), we forged a unified plan that laid out collection and data entry of all demographic and individual information; areas to assess (English literacy skills, ABE reading skills, learner goal attainment, learner satisfaction, learner persistence); instruments to use (standardized tests of literacy and English communication skills); Study Plan and Progress Check (a locally developed form to capture learners' goals); WWLP-developed Learner Satisfaction Survey; WWLP-developed Literacy Behaviors and Life Impact Survey—used only in past years; types of data to gather (personal information, including previous schooling, income, family size, employment status; pre- and post-tests; learners' goals; learners' self-assessment of progress made and satisfaction with the program); and dates and personnel for administering the assessments (staff responsible, schedule of dates, procedures for administering Study Plans, and other instruments).

Next, program administrators declared a "time out" and redoubled planning efforts. An inventory of staffing expertise and the talent available in and outside the program was identified. This included:

- Planners: program administrators, teachers, student leaders, senior management (beyond the literacy programs).
- Database design: a database specialist consultant.
- Data entry: support staff, student volunteers.
- Statistical compilation and analysis: program administrators, outside evaluators.
- Interpretation and application of the results: teachers, other staff, student leaders, top management.

Funding resources were also identified. Additional fiscal resources are still needed. Specific working agreements with consultants had to be crafted. Through a series of meetings over a 12-month time period, the program's administrative team devised a work plan that included the following steps:

1. Seek input from staff and students for the purposes and uses of evaluation.

2. Catch up on the data entry backlog—enter data that is not yet in any other database. Create a simple spreadsheet or database to capture the information. Hire or assign staff to do data entry. Analyze at least the immediate past year's data and compile reports.

3. Train the administrator in database use and design using MS Access. Go beyond basic computer literacy to understanding the principles underlying a relational database and how it can be constructed. Become equipped to oversee the next steps.

4. Get help with the design of a comprehensive database that is "tolerant" to data import and export with some of the funders' reporting systems. Build in tables to accommodate key program data, with minimal data entry overlap. Develop relationships among the tables. Program a set of useful queries.

5. Train support staff and program coordinators in use of the database—data entry, forms, and queries.

6. Implement the new database. Collect data about learners and the program.

7. Involve teachers, student leaders, and managers in interpreting the results.

For reasons of perceived efficiency, our program prefers to work with data that has been computerized. This delayed some evaluation work in the past, as more data was collected than was entered into any computerized database.

In our "real world," the above plan evolved over a period of time. Coordinators experimented with different databases to capture their subprograms' data before a singular comprehensive database could be designed and implemented.

Lessons learned

All staff members must participate in the development of an evaluation plan for a literacy program to bring about systematic change. Developing the plan takes staff time and needs to be carefully crafted through a series of meetings. No plan is perfect from the start; it gets perfected along the way. Consequently, program administrators should proceed deliberately but flexibly as they implement any evaluation plan.

When a program is funded by more than one source and those funders require different databases for reporting, it is nearly impossible to eliminate all duplicate data entry. Funders may change what data they require. We are resolved to reduce duplication of effort as much as possible. It is critical to establish and hold fast to overall program evaluation goals; for example, knowing what learners we serve best with which programs. It is important to keep the program regularly focused on evaluation. This requires discipline.

Programs should develop and use the most comprehensive and adaptable relational database system possible. Either program staff or consultants can be in charge of this development.

It takes more than a year to develop the awareness, skills, and tools to consolidate program evaluation work into a comprehensive plan. Key factors include professional development of program leaders and funds to secure outside experts to assist with the most technical tasks.

A word to the wise

In any dynamic environment where evaluation of adult literacy education is a clear goal, a comprehensive evaluation system must be created for the program. This system should be planned to address and respond to "real-world" demands, such as funders' reporting requirements, as well as program needs. Local programs bent on high quality evaluation need to muster all available resources for this type of system.

Ideally, policymakers whose programs and target populations overlap, such as welfare-to-work, adult education, and family literacy, should collaborate to lessen the data-reporting burden on local service providers. Funders should go beyond an awareness of each other and their shared spheres of services to co-design databases and use "open-frame" data systems. Such cooperation would facilitate better, more comprehensive evaluation at all levels.

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WWLP program evaluation plan
2001-2002

Agency: *Albany Park Community Center*
Programs Evaluated: *Adult Lit. Tutoring, Adult Ed., & Family Literacy*

Variable (Indicator of Program Impact)	Sample or Source of Data	Assessment Instrument or Data Collection Method	Comparison (Basis for Measuring Growth)	Data Collection Timeline	Person(s) Responsible
1a. Reading test scores	Students in 3 ABE/GED classes (daytime & evening) (n=75) *	TABE, Level L, M, D, or A	Pre-/post-tests with alternate forms	Pre-: At enrollment Post-: After 4 months *N.B. more than 1 post-test if more than 100 hours are attained*	Coordinators & teachers
1b. ESL communication skills: Test scores	Students in 16 ESL classes and in ESL tutoring *(n=525)	BEST/Literacy, or CELSA	Pre-/post-tests with alternate forms	Pre-/post-: Same as above	Coordinators, teachers, tutor advisor
2a. Attainment of goals: General goals	All students above	Study plan & progress check (local)	Scaled report of progress made on goals set earlier	Pre-: Upon enrollment post: 12/01, 5/02	Coordinators, teachers, tutor advisor, data specialist, data analyst (consultant)
2b. Attainment of goals:	Family literacy goals: Family literacy students (n = 80)	Fam.Lit. goals and progress - skills checklist	Scaled report of progress made on goals set earlier	Pre-: 01/02 Post-: 05/02	Fam. Lit. Coordinator, assisted by day-time adult ed teachers, data specialist, data analyst (consultant)
3. Learner satisfaction with program	All classroom and tutored students (n=600)	WWLP Learner Satisfaction Survey	Multiple choice/scaled retrospective survey	June 2000	All teachers, tutors, AmeriCorps members, data specialist, data analyst (consultant)
4. Population served: Recruitment of target popula-tion attained	Enrollment records (electronic)	Analysis of records	Targets projected to funders in grant contracts (ex. 80 families in Family Literacy program)	Data entry: Ongoing Review: mid-year (1/00) and year-end (6/00)	Director, data specialist, data analyst (consultant)

WWLP program evaluation plan
2001-2002

Agency: *Albany Park Community Center*
Programs Evaluated: *Adult Lit. Tutoring, Adult Ed., & Family Literacy*

Variable (Indicator of Program Impact)	Sample or Source of Data	Assessment Instrument or Data Collection Method	Comparison (Basis for Measuring Growth)	Data Collection Timeline	Person(s) Responsible
5a. Population served: Percentage of total eligible population served	Enrollment records (electronic)	Analysis of records	Target: 7% of 17,000 in local area eligible for literacy or adult education	Data entry: Ongoing Review: 9/01 Universe from U.S. Census data	Director
5b. Population served: Demographics of population served	Enrollment records (electronic)	Analysis of records	N.A.	Data entry: Ongoing Review: 8/00	Director; data analyst (consultant)
6a. Retention: Hours	Attendance records	Analysis of records	Target: 50% of number enrolled persist 60 hours	Data entry: Ongoing Review: 01/02, 07/02	Director; data analyst (consultant)
6b. Retention: Number/ characteristics of students who persist until they meet their goals	Attendance records	Analysis of records	Target: 80% of retained make progress towards goals	Data entry: Ongoing Review: 01/02, 07/02	Director; data analyst (consultant)
7. Program efforts that are deployed to support student learning and participation	Supportive services records (transportation assistance; child care; citizenship case assistance) Computer lab service records	Analysis of records	Relative retention and goal attainment for pair samples of those receiving and those not receiving supportive services	Data entry: Ongoing Review: 06/02	Director; data analyst (consultant)

**An estimated 600 students will participate in the core elements of the evaluation at pre- and post- dates. Students who will not participate are tutored students who are pretested with SORT word-reading test.*

Case Study B
Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP)

A writing rubric to assess ESOL student performance

"Developing and using a performance-based assessment requires tremendous time and financial commitment as well as access to the expertise of researchers."

The challenge

Performance-based assessments are popular because they are often program-based and learner-centered; however, funders tend to question their credibility. We challenged ourselves to address this issue by finding a way to satisfy technical quality issues, such as validity and reliability, while also keeping in mind how assessment influences learning. We believe that this approach would facilitate reporting student achievement both fairly and credibly .

Who we are

The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) is an adult English as a Second Language (ESOL) program administered through the Arlington Public Schools in Arlington, Virginia. Because of its close proximity to our nation's capitol, the area draws large numbers of immigrants attracted by job opportunities in the service industry and a large number of national and international organizations. Nine levels of ESOL instruction are offered, including workplace literacy and computer-assisted instruction. There are some 6,000 enrollment slots at eight to ten locations throughout Arlington County. There are 55 trained and experienced ESOL teachers, who are supported by five coordinators. In addition, more than 100 volunteers support instruction.

Our story

In 1995, REEP staff developed a writing rubric. A rubric is a scoring device that specifies performance expectations and the various levels at which learners can perform a particular skill. By articulating what our adult ESOL learners could do at various proficiency levels, we hoped to fine-tune placement of learners into appropriate class levels and monitor their progress. Our rubric was developed by collecting writing samples from each class level and analyzing them. We found that although we had nine instructional levels, our students' writing fell into six distinct writing performance levels. The differences in these levels could be articulated using five characteristics (learning targets) of our learners' writing: content and vocabulary, organization and development, structure, mechanics, and voice (see REEP Writing Rubric, page 48).

As part of our work with the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), we designed and implemented a study to determine the effectiveness of using the REEP Writing Rubric to measure progress. With support from WWLP, we developed pre- and post-test writing tasks to assess writing gains.

Developing writing tasks that could be used for program-wide testing of beginning through advanced level students was challenging. To be fair, the tasks needed to generate a wide variety of responses and enable students at different levels to demonstrate their abilities and life experiences. We decided that the performance task of writing a letter of advice, based on their own experiences would meet the above criteria and be consistent with skills that students were practicing in class. Moreover, we structured the testing process to mirror instructional practice by engaging students in warm-up activities prior to the actual writing test.

What works

Reliability of test data is extremely important in the context of program-wide assessment, especially when the assessments are reported to funders. To maximize the reliability of our results, WWLP researchers provided extensive guidance on field-testing, test administration procedures, scoring, performance task development, and rater training. As a result, we began to implement the following:

Field-testing

Before administering pre- and post- writing tests to hundreds of students, we asked the following questions:

- Can we expect measurable progress within the specified test interval, that is, 120-180 hours of instruction?
- Can beginning through advanced level students demonstrate their writing skills in response to our writing tasks?
- Are the pre- and post-test tasks equivalent? That is, do they represent the same level of difficulty?

To answer questions 1 and 2, a small group of experienced teachers administered the pre-test to five students from each class level at the beginning of an instructional cycle. At the end of the cycle, the teachers administered the post-test to the same group. Students were asked for feedback and they said they felt that they were able to demonstrate their writing skills with these tests. Teachers also thought that the tests demonstrated the students' writing abilities. Experienced readers scored the tests, and a WWLP researcher analyzed the results. The analysis showed that significant gains could be measured, and that reliable results could be achieved using the scoring procedures we had implemented. We were ready for large-scale testing.

To answer question 3, the same group of students representing all class levels was given the pre-test followed by the post-test within a three-day period. A WWLP researcher analyzed the results and found no difference between students' pre- and post-test scores, which demonstrated that the two tasks represented the same level of difficulty. One of the key elements in achieving equivalence was the use of the letter genre and parallel warm-up activities for both the pre- and post-tests.

Test administration

Prior to each test administration, testers were trained to administer the test. For example, testers were trained regarding time limits, the inability of using dictionaries, and how to conduct warm-up activities for a particular writing task. This ensured that all students completed the pre-writing activities and the test in a uniform way.

Scoring procedures

Each of the five writing characteristics receives a score between 0 and 6, with 6 being the highest. The total score is determined by adding each characteristic score and dividing by 5. A sample scoring grid follows.

	Content & Vocabulary	Organization & Development	Structure	Mechanics	Voice	Total (sub-sections)5)
Pretest Score	3	4	3	4	3	3.4(17/5)
Post-Test Score	4	4	4	4	3	3.8 (19/5)

Building scoring consensus

REEP staff were trained to use the writing rubric to score the two (pre- and post-) performance tasks. Readers scored a range of essays. Scores for each writing characteristic were charted out as shown above, and the scoring rationale was discussed. This enabled the trainers to see how consistently the rubric was being interpreted, pinpoint areas of discrepancy, and build scoring consensus.

A shortened version of this process was repeated prior to each scoring session to ensure consistency in rubric interpretation and scoring. Consistency among the readers was tracked to determine how many tests needed a third reader.

Each test was scored by two readers, and a third reader was used if the total score was more than one point different. The second reader did not know how the first reader had scored the test. In this way, the first reader's score did not influence the second reader. Similarly, students' class levels were not indicated on the test paper.

Scoring of the tests occurred in group sessions no longer than two hours each. This seemed to be the point at which readers began to "burn out".

The training and scoring procedures described above resulted in an inter-rater reliability of 98 per cent. Only 2 per cent of the tests needed a third reader.

Lessons learned

REEP teachers were involved in every step: developing writing tasks and warm-up activities, administering tests, developing scoring procedures, scoring tests, and analyzing data. Through this involvement, teachers developed a deeper appreciation of testing. They used their students' test results to modify their instruction so that they could better meet the needs of their students. Scoring tests written by beginning to advanced level students gave them a broader picture of writing levels within the program and resulted in formed decisions about subsequent class placements.

Teachers shared the writing rubric with their students, giving them a better sense of how they were being evaluated. Students at all levels started paying more attention to their writing as a result of the more formalized writing test. Many began to embrace writing instruction in the classroom. Learning English now meant more than learning to "speak" English.

We have all gained a greater understanding of the testing process and its need to be both fair and credible to all stakeholders. By participating in the test development process, teachers have developed skills and knowledge that will enable them to develop performance-based classroom assessments which meet this criteria as well. These skills enable us to feel more confident about accepting and reporting gains derived by performance-based assessments.

A word to the wise

Developing and using a performance-based assessment requires tremendous time and financial commitment as well as access to the expertise of researchers. This commitment must be weighed against the outcomes. In our case, the results for the program were significant and extremely positive.

We had hoped to demonstrate that a performance-based assessment could be a potentially superior instrument for measuring learner gains and thereby gain credibility with funders. Indeed, our work with WWLP gave us access to researchers who both guided us through the testing process and provided feedback on quality issues. At this writing, we are pleased to report that our WWLP researcher has concluded that "the REEP Writing Rubric is a carefully designed and validated instrument with sufficiently high reliability." Additionally, a cooperative study was conducted between Comprehensive Adult Student Assesment System (CASAS) and REEP in order to establish validity evidence relating to each of the agencies assessments of writing. A CASAS report of this study concludes that there is strong evidence for the validity of both the CASAS and REEP writing assessment rubrics for use with ESOL students. In fact, based on observedcorrelations the two rubrics and prompts are interchangeable.*

*Source: Comparing the CASAS Functional Writing Assessment Picture Task Rubric with the REEP writing Rubric, CASAS, April 8, 2002

We were fortunate in having access to the WWLP project and the professional support it provided. Practitioners need opportunities like this if performance-based assessments are to become accepted measurement instruments.

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REEP Writing Rubric

R	Content/Vocabulary	Organization & Development	Structure	Mechanics	Voice
0	• no writing • no comprehensible information				
1	• little comprehensible information • may not address question • limited word choice, repetitious	• weak, incoherent	• frequent grammatical errors • mostly fragments • 2-3 phrases/simple patterned sentences	• lack of mechanics • handwriting and/or spelling obscure meaning	• not evident
2	• addresses part of the task (some, but little, substance) or copies from the model • irrelevant information • frequent vocabulary errors of function, choice, & usage with meaning obscured	• thought pattern can be difficult to follow, ideas not connected, not logical	• serious and frequent grammatical errors. • meaning obscured • sentence structure repetitive *(or copies from model)*	• frequent errors • inconsistent use of punctuation. • spelling may distract from meaning. • invented spelling	• not evident
3	• addresses at least part of the task with some substance • limited vocabulary choice • occasional vocabulary errors but meaning not obscured	• limited in appropriate details– insufficient amount of detail or irrelevant information • trouble sequencing • may indicate paragraphing	• restricted to basic structural patterns *(simple present, subject-verb)*, has some errors • correct usage of adverbials (*because clause*) and conjunctions *(and/or/but)* • goes outside of model	• some punctuation and capitalization though frequent errors • occasional spelling errors that distract from meaning	• emerging voice • some engagement • some personalization
4	• addresses the task at some length • begins to vary vocabulary choice • occasional vocabulary errors but meaning not obscured	• uses details for support or illustration(reasons, contrasts), but development of ideas is inconsistent. Some ideas may be well developed while others are weak. • indicates paragraphs	• has some control of basic structures *(simple present/simple past)* • attempts compound sentences (e.g.. with and, or, but, so) • some complex sentences (e.g. using *when, after, before, while, because, if*) • errors occasionally distract from meaning	• uses periods and capitals with some errors • may use commas with compound and complex sentences • mostly conventional spelling	• shows some sense of purpose • some engagement • more personalized, may provide opinions and explanations
5	• effectively addresses the task • extensive amount of information • varied vocabulary choice and usage although may have some errors	• can write a paragraph with main idea and supporting details • attempts more than one paragraph and may exhibit rudimentary essay structure *(into, body, conclusion)*	• attempts a variety of structural patterns • some errors • uses correct verb tenses • makes errors in complex structures *(passive, conditional, present perfect)*	• uses periods, commas, and capitals • most spelling conventions	• authoritative, persuasive, interesting • emerging personal style
6	• effectively addresses the task • substantive amount of information • varied and effective vocabulary choice and usage	• multi-paragraph piece with clear introduction, development of ideas, and conclusions • ideas are connected *(sequentially & logically)* • appropriate supporting details.	• syntactic variety • well-formed sentences • few or no grammatical errors*(verb tense markers, comparative and/or superlative)*	• appropriate mechanical and spelling conventions	• authoritative • strongly reflects the writer's intellectual involvement • personal style is evident

Case Study C
The Center for Literacy (CFL)

Securing student and staff buy-in

"The myth that learners do not want to be tested was dispelled with the new assessment process."

The challenge

The Center for Literacy (CFL) has always operated in a learner-centered environment, using authentic assessment as a basis for understanding student needs and setting goals. Historically, teachers have not valued standardized assessment results and have seen them as contrary to the agency's mission. Both teachers and learners viewed assessment as an extraneous process that had little to do with them. Many instructors found any type of formal assessment intrusive and totally separate from instruction. Our challenge was to gain learner and staff buy-in to make assessment meaningful and integral to our program.

Who we are

Founded in 1968, CFL is the nation's oldest and largest community-based, nonprofit adult literacy organization. We provide reading, writing, math, and English language instruction to more than 3,000 adults at 100 sites throughout Philadelphia. CFL offers community classes taught by professional instructors and one-on-one and small-group tutoring sessions facilitated by trained tutors. We also have specialized classes in mental health, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, welfare-to-work programs, family literacy, workplace literacy, and an alternative diploma program.

With the support of over 400 volunteer tutors and over 40 dedicated staff members, students are able to achieve their personal and/or job-related goals.

CFL has a patchwork quilt of funding including primary government contracts with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation. Other key funders include the Philadelphia School District, corporations, foundations and individuals.

Our story

When the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania began to implement a standardized testing program, our staff viewed the process as intrusive and totally separate from instruction. Coordinators and teachers documented test results but did not communicate them to learners. Teachers did not have the knowledge and background to value the assessment process, and they did not understand the relationship of the score on a standardized test to the skills they were trying to teach. Reassessment of learning plans and goals was not connected to achievement in any assessment format.

Although teachers were required to administer the *Test of Adult Basic Education Test* (TABE) they were unable or unwilling to integrate the value of standardized assessment into their goal setting and instruction. Teachers had ongoing conversations with their learners about goals, needs, and interests, but no structured interview was required and no process was standardized.

Because learners were not involved in assessment, they lacked quantifiable evidence that they were making progress. Often they would feel that their goals were unattainable and left the class. Learner retention averaged 46 hours per year. Individual Educational Plans and Goals Checklists created when learners came into the program were never revisited or revised, and they were made to feel that any standardized testing that took place was intrusive and held no merit. Clearly, we could see that the negative attitudes of the teachers were being passed on to their learners. Teachers truly believed that learners did not see the value in testing on an ongoing basis.

What works

Attitudes began to change when we shifted our approach to teacher training and student orientation. This is how we did it.

1. We piloted the Equipped for the Future (EFF) standards.

Three community teachers participated in the EFF training and worked with learners to develop study plans using the EFF Standards Wheel. These teachers were required to facilitate a weekly process of reflection on skills learned, evaluation and documentation of progress. They revised and redesigned individual plans with their learners. They also worked on designing appropriate forms to reflect the data collected.

2. We redesigned our orientation process.

We replaced one-on-one interviews of new students with an orientation session, in which groups of prospective students met with coordinators and teachers *before* being assigned to classes. The orientation process involved standardized TABE reading testing in addition to the authentic assessment used by CFL to assess reading, writing, and math skills. Tests were graded on the spot, and the results shared with learners.

3. Teachers participated in more frequent, informal conversations about retention.

Questions were asked: What are you doing in your classroom? How many learners do you have? How many hours are they attending? How do you measure progress? The focus of teachers' meetings shifted to alternative assessment tools that could describe problems with retention and help learners to persist in the program. Staff development centered around developing rubrics to benchmark and measure learner progress in reading, writing, and math. Instead of teaching many different skills at a rudimentary level, teachers learned that progress could be measured by increasing the complexity of each skill taught. This worked well because we have multi-level classrooms where teachers could develop activities to focus on one task and authentic assessment tools to measure progress on multiple levels of the same skill.

4. Teachers began to consider assessment in a more holistic manner.
Standardized pre- and post-tests did not give enough information to aid in retention or curriculum development. Teachers began to see the assessment process as a "tool box" from which to choose appropriate instruments to advance their learners' progress and satisfaction.

Lessons learned

The myth that learners do not want to be tested was dispelled with the new assessment process. Teachers learned it was their prejudice that produced that misconception. Learners and teachers worked together to develop Individual Education Plans that are revisited and revised on a monthly basis.

Critical thinking skills were developed, as learners were encouraged to reflect upon their own learning process and revise their goals accordingly. Retention improved to an average of 57 hours per year as learners saw manageable, short-term goals being met. Standardized test results were discussed with each learner and were used to strengthen the curriculum.

A systemized process for collecting and documenting progress data has been created. Learners are encouraged to participate fully in creating and planning their own instructional and assessment plans. All plans are documented and progress recorded. Samples are kept in portfolios.

A word to the wise

Making assessment an integral part of the culture of the literacy agency is critical. Although not easy, such a paradigm shift leads to both teachers and students having a stronger sense of ownership in managing and measuring progress.

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Case Study D
Durham County Literacy Council (DCLC)

Opening Pandora's Box: Improving test results through program redesign

"We have learned that the information gained from assessment is better than good intentions."

The challenge

By becoming a part of the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), the Durham County Literacy Council (DCLC) discovered the connections between learner achievement, learner persistence, and program capacity. We discovered that fewer than 50 percent of our learners were receiving the quantity and intensity of instruction required to post statistically significant literacy gains. Our challenge was two-fold.

- To increase available instructional hours by 300 percent by restructuring the volunteer tutoring program.
- To establish a computer-assisted learning program as a required component of literacy instruction.

Who we are

The Durham County Literacy Council began as a volunteer-based tutoring agency in the Durham Public Library in 1985. The agency has grown to serve 600 students each year through General Educational Development (GED) training, workplace literacy programs, and English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes. We continue to offer services by training and deploying volunteer tutors. In 1996, we entered WWLP to evaluate our program and to build a background of research that could benefit the field.

DCLC is a "capacity-challenged", community-based organization (CBO) characteristic of southern literacy programs. With an annual budget of $300,000 and a paid staff of a director, office manager, two coordinators, and three half-time program associates, we support 100 volunteer tutors and three contract GED teachers who serve students one-to-one and in small groups.

Classes meet in more than 20 sites across Durham, including churches, community centers, work sites, treatment centers, public housing complexes, schools, and our own facility, a converted pediatrician's office.

Our story

In 1996, the Durham County Literacy Council, like Ancient Greece before the opening of Pandora's Box, was a tranquil province. Literacy was provided to all comers with a smile and few questions about commitment or persistence. We prided ourselves on an almost religious commitment to learner-centered curricula and volunteer training. We made learners feel valued and validated, and we promised to help them reach their goals, even if we doubted they were attainable. Every year we happily reported to our membership, Board,and funders the growing numbers of tutors trained and learners matched, along with an anecdotal list of meaningful learner gains—from getting a driver's license or a library card to the sending of a first letter to a grandchild or publishing a story in a magazine for new readers. Occasionally, we were even able to report that a learner had used literacy skills to purchase a first home, start a home business, or secure child-support payments.

Enter the era of accountability and WWLP. Like Epimetheus—the name means afterthought—who did not question the gift of Pandora as his wife, we enthusiastically accepted our Pandora and her box as an opportunity to improve student assessment and to showcase promising program practices.

All researchers share some of Pandora 's near fatal flaw of intense curiosity. Even in our pre-WWLP innocence, we had a sense that our learners were not making dramatic progress, despite their high levels of satisfaction. Tutors often voiced frustration at the slow and inconsistent pace of learning and the learners' vacillating commitment.

WWLP gave us the key to open our Pandora's box: valid student assessment instruments and a rudimentary understanding of how to use data to evaluate program practices. Like Pandora, however, we were not prepared for what we would learn. A comparison of pre-and post-test scores for two groups of 50 learners revealed the following:

- Regardless of instructional format, setting, or learner demographics, those who received at least 50 hours of instruction within a six-month period posted statistically significant learning gains as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

- Only 50 percent of the learners (25) reached this statistically significant "persistence/achievement" threshold. Most of these learners were in structured, full-service programs providing four to eight hours of literacy instruction weekly.

- Learners served through traditional one-to-one tutoring logged an average of 1.5 to 3 hours of instruction per week.

While some literacy researchers and practitioners attribute the lack of statistically significant literacy gains to insensitive assessment instruments, we came to the discomfiting conclusion that poor tests were not to blame for lack of visible progress. Instead, we identified a more formidable obstacle (one of the "plagues" of modern life): Most tutors and students were not devoting enough time to literacy teaching and learning to yield measurable progress.

Getting volunteers to substantially increase tutoring time was not a viable option for our program. Interviews with students revealed a similar time crunch.

The "typical "DCLC literacy student (non-ESOL) has a low-wage job with long hours and little flexibility. Ironically, low literacy—the reason for seeking DCLC services—emerges as the greatest barrier to consistently receiving those services. Low-literacy/ low-wage workers have even less discretionary time than the busy tutors who teach them.

What Works—program restructure

In August 2000, we launched an experimental class based on a strategic restructuring of our adult literacy services.We shifted our thinking away from one-to-one pairs, and we regarded our entire set of new students and tutors as a single class that meets Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings. A group of five tutors volunteers for a particular day of the week.

A staff person, the "lead teacher," coordinates instruction, emphasizing reading on Tuesday, writing on Wednesday, and math on Thursday. Students are grouped with tutors according to their skills and personal preferences. A total of 15 volunteer tutors are involved, five per evening. A group of 16 students completes the three sessions, receiving a total of six hours of instruction in a single week. Students remain in the same groups for reading and writing nights. They change on math night to adjust for different competencies.

This model has a number of advantages over our one-to-one model.

- Intensity of instruction for students is expanded three-fold but continues to demand only one night a week from volunteers.
- Tutor support is increased through regular contact with the lead instructor.
- Test administration, dissemination of materials, and collection of progress reports is facilitated by having tutors and students in one place at one time.

The model allows for group activities, such as guest speakers and special events, a component that was often missing for our one-to-one pairs. For example, this term students organized a voter registration drive and had the candidates make presentations. It is now possible to provide amenities, such as food, childcare, or transportation, to increase persistence and help provide for students' vital needs.

We recently added a 15-minute tutors' meeting at the beginning of each evening. This informal gathering allows volunteer tutors to bring questions and concerns to the lead instructor and gives them an opportunity to share expertise and experiences with each other.

Lessons learned

An analysis of six-month attendance data (more reliable because it is collected centrally "on the spot") reveals a significant (20-25 %) increase in tutor retention and a modest increase in learner persistence (5-10%). It is clear that while our restructuring has been an affordable way to increase service capacity, our learner persistence/achievement deficit requires other complementary strategies.

Our focus on data is also inspiring more program innovations, such as the use of technology as a required instructional component.

Volunteer tutor hours are in finite supply. We also face increasing competition for tutors from a public school system that has channeled significant resources into recruiting tutors to address its own literacy crisis. Thus, we must explore strategies that permit literacy students to learn "anytime, anywhere." We are pinning our hopes on a well-conceived, computer-assisted learning component. At the core of this strategy is a computer lab open seven days a week from 6:30 a.m.to 9:30 p.m., operated with a local charter school and the YMCA. In addition, we will establish a loaned-laptop program and will help students acquire recycled home computers.

A word to the wise

We have learned that the information gained from assessment is better than good intentions. Implementing such a program requires creativity, flexibility, and persistence. For the Durham County Literacy Council, the assessment has resulted in a thorough redesign of our program and increased success for students and volunteer tutors. But it has also raised the achievement bar, creating a yet-to-be-closed gap between resources and outcomes.

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Case Study E
Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC)

Assessing student progress

"As GPLC had a long history of ad hoc teamwork, an on-going program improvement team proved to be a very good fit for our organizational culture."

The challenge

Program-based research that is too complex in conception can lead to many false starts, and to data collection plans, procedures and instruments that are too unwieldy to sustain.

Our story

In 1996, at the inception of the What Works Literacy Partnership, Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council and other project members were asked to create research projects centered on student progress. Partners were asked to use at least two means to show student progress, one of which had to be a standardized assessment. Two staff members and WWLP liaisons designed a research project centered on getting information about both hard impacts (measurable improvement in reading, writing, and math skills) and softer impacts such as student satisfaction and "life" skills.

The TABE, ABLE, and BEST assessments were the standardized instruments chosen to measure student progress. The TABE and ABLE were already in use for much of the program; the BEST was added in response to a rapidly growing population of students who speak English as a second language. The Oregon-developed AIM, a new-to-our-program authentic, criterion-referenced assessment, was added to GPLC's array of program assessments to gauge progress in specific life skill areas.

To capture "other impacts" GPLC adopted a literacy behaviors impact survey (LBLIS) developed by WWLP in one pilot group, and, in another group, exiting students were given the WWLP Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS). The LBLIS replaced GPLC's program-developed Goals Inventory Checklist. GPLC also participated in a WWLP sponsored writing assessment project, which involved using an ETS (Education Testing Service) writing prompt and directions. Writing samples were to be evaluated in Chicago by ETS staff.

In short, GPLC began with a very complex research plan that added a number of new elements to its assessment and program evaluation processes for some students, while keeping old procedures and assessments for most students. At the time it seemed doable. However, in the five years that GPLC was involved in WWLP, the environment in which we worked changed radically.

In 1997, GPLC started to use LITPRO, a state-mandated database developed by Literacy-Pro Systems. This database was designed for "internal" use by Pennsylvania programs as well as for accountability to the state. LITPRO was complex and, in the beginning, a bit bug-ridden. However, the PDE put a lot of resources into training and by 1999, GPLC staff had mastered the intricacies of the database well enough to run a wide range of reports from demographics to retention to student progress.

In the same period, again because of a state mandate, GPLC formed a program improvement team which met monthly. As GPLC had a long history of ad hoc team work, an on-going program improvement team proved to be a very good fit for our organizational culture. In the first year of meeting, the team conducted a program self-assessment using an instrument developed through a collaboration effort by the state ABLE Bureau and local programs. This, too, was mandated.

In the months spent working through the self-assessment, the team learned the reciprocal nature of data. Ask questions and collect the data that will help to answer them. Look at data aggregated around basic quality issues and allow questions about your program to arise from the data itself. Analyze the data in the light of the question. Make program improvements suggested through the data analysis. This was a new way of thinking for GPLC staff.

In 1998, our state issued program standards in the areas of enrollment, retention, pre- and post-testing practices, and educational gains. In a sense programs were given quality definitions, and a certain amount of pressure to improve in these areas.

With the combination of a rich database, a forum to examine data for program improvement, and standards to benchmark itself by, GPLC became an agency engaged actively in continuous program improvement. In the first year the team centered its program assessment efforts around retention and student progress — as these were important to the WWLP project and could be benchmarked against well-defined state standards.

Collecting information from the small sample groups using the Student Satisfaction Survey or LBLIS or AIM or ETS Writing Rubric, however, proved extremely frustrating. Because program staff had not helped to select the instruments, because these instruments were cumbersome to use and to explain to staff, interviewers and tutors, because feed-back to the program was uncertain and slow, and because staff and volunteers were already responsible for collecting a great deal of mandatory data, these assessments rapidly became marginalized. GPLC's already overloaded data collection system was not equal to the task.

What works

The information collected from some of these assessments was useful and seemed valid even though the sample size was small. The Student Satisfaction Survey and LBLIS's showed that the students surveyed were generally happy and that behaviors in the areas in which we taught changed for the better and that in areas where we did little work (math for many of these students), there was no change. Although a number of writing samples were collected for STS, WWLP programs ultimately decided to pursue other ways to measure writing progress.

- Project staff received a few beautiful portfolios from the authentic assessment pilot. However, most tutors who were enthusiastic about the AIM as a curriculum were resistant to it as an assessment.

Collecting and mailing in the work samples that distinguish the AIM from a routine checklist proved to be too time-consuming. The portfolios that we did receive straggled in over such an extended period that it was clear that we would be unable to use them for routine assessment purposes. Surveys and questionnaires also came in slowly. All of these assessments, the LBLIS, the SSS, and the AIM, produced some interesting information, but with very small sample sizes, staff were leery of making assumptions from them about the program at large.

Lessons learned

Overall, GPLC's WWLP experience has taught us these things:

- Begin by aggregating and analyzing the data that is already available. When this is done, programs will have a better understanding of what additional data is needed.
- Oddly enough, it appears that standardized assessments, given at routine intervals to all students by trained staff and volunteers are easier to manage than are informal assessments; that doesn't mean they are better, just more doable.
- Questions that don't flow naturally from the program and are not urgent will be marginalized.

A word to the wise

GPLC was most successful in our research project where program wide systems were in place to collect data and where many program staff were involved in the planning stages.

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Case Study F
Jackson Mann Community Center

Standardizing data collection

"The creation of the Student Information Card and Student Information Questionnaire standardized our way of collecing data."

The challenge

The Jackson Mann Community Center had a disorganized and non-standard method of data collection, largely contingent on individual teacher record keeping. In addition, there was a lack of staff support in many data collection procedures.

Our story

During the first few years when the Jackson Mann Community Center sought to respond to the data collection system for the state of Massachusetts, it had no systematic way to collect, aggregate, or verify data. Much of the data was incoherent, contingent upon each individual teacher's style of collecting student information. This led to confusion for the data entry person and many inaccuracies in the data, leaving us with information that could not be used in any useful way.

The second, yet probably most daunting problem as the Jackson Mann Community Center was, and still is, garnering staff buy-in. It was hard to convince staff that data collection could actually be used to improve the program as opposed to being seen as a headache with no real benefit. We asked a number of questions, including:

- How can we make data collection more concise and simple for the teachers?
- How can we include staff in the process of creating data collection procedures so they feel more invested in the overall goal?
- How can we convince teachers of the importance of data collection?
- How will the students benefit?

What works

The first step at the Jackson Mann Community Center was to establish a standardized way of collecting data. Simply creating two forms—a **Student Information Card** and a **Student Information Questionnaire**—accomplished this goal.

- **The Student Information Card:** This card contains attendance and enrollment data for each student. On the other side of the card, there are spaces for up to four assessments to be recorded per student. This card contains all informa tion that needs to be updated monthly for the Massachusetts data collection system, and room for other contingencies such as class changes and suggested assessment test levels.

- Teachers now provide us with a **Student Information Questionnaire** which captures beginning attendance, assessment, class information and student demographic information. The data entry person must then just refer to the cards for this information. This removes the problem of confusion caused by different styles of recording attendance and assessment data. The teachers helped devise this system thus informing everyone what information is needed on a monthly basis. This has made the system of collecting data much easier.

- The information from these two cards has been centralized, which also makes it easier to access information.

We have tackled the problem of staff support in numerous ways. The first, as mentioned above, was the creation of the Student Information Card and the Student Questionnaire. This is helping staff, because of its layout, to start to recognize trends. Furthermore, it has helped some teachers understand the bigger picture and see that data collection can help our program. Most importantly, staff must be convinced that any data collection efforts are ultimately for the benefit of the students. Then it is easier to convince teachers to join in the efforts. Yet it must be reiterated how and why the students will benefit from these efforts.

Lessons learned

It has been a long and arduous process, but we believe we are on the upswing. We have begun to convince staff of data's usefulness and have even convinced them to care about the accuracy. We hope soon to provide concrete examples, using data, of how we can make program changes to promote student success, and to generally improve our program.

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Case Study G
Literacy Partners Inc.

Creating a tool and a process to measure writing skills

"It is this ability to provide meaningful feedback to students that establishes the rubric firmly with Literacy Partners' educational philosophy and helps tutors and staff guide and customize writing instruction."

The challenge

A cornerstone of Literacy Partners' educational practice is the conviction that reading and writing are inextricably connected. For this reason, Literacy Partners needed to develop a reliable measurement of writing progress, one that staff could administer and score and one that would provide a basis for the teaching of writing. We wanted this instrument to yield objective, quantifiable results that could be analyzed and compared periodically so that staff, tutors, and students could determine what activities and methodologies were working and what needed attention.

Who we are

Literacy Partners Inc., located in New York City, has provided free literacy instruction to adults since 1973. The program reaches some 1,000 students annually at levels ranging from nonreaders (0 to grade level 5.9) to pre-GED (grade levels 5.9 to 8). Approximately 650 of the students enroll in learning centers where volunteer tutors provide the instruction. These tutors receive more than 32 hours of training in literacy instruction. When they have completed this training, volunteers are assigned to small groups of students where they are closely supervised by professional staff. Tutorial groups meet in borrowed or rented space—corporate cafeterias during the evenings, a community center on weekday mornings.

In recent years, Literacy Partners has expanded its offerings to include family literacy classes for parents of Head Start children and classes in English as a Second Language (ESOL). Adult basic education (ABE) classes are provided on site for residents of drug treatment facilities as well as for clients of other neighborhood programs, such as job readiness preparation at non-residential community centers. All of these classes are taught by professional teachers. Funding is provided largely through private sources. About 15 percent of our funding comes from governmental sources.

Our story

Literacy Partners developed a holistic writing rubric to use in all basic education classes. The rubric was created over a period of two years, with the assistance— particularly during the early part of the process—of expert education and assessment consultants.

An essential step for our evaluation program and development of the writing rubric was to create a new staff position—manager of assessment. One person supervised the entire process and was responsible for all activities.

Early on, we learned it was imperative that staff take a major role in the development of the instrument. The staff knew our students, our tutors, our tutor training, and our practice. They were the experts. If the instrument was to be successfully integrated into Literacy Partners' educational practice, it had to be realistic, clear, and easy to use—and staff had to be committed to it.

Staff voiced a strong belief that a writing measurement should reflect writing as a process and that students should demonstrate mastery of several identifiable steps. It was decided that scoring should not be restricted to a series of externally defined features of grammar or spelling, but should include ways to measure and improve the written expression of ideas.

Developing the rubric

With the assistance of an educational consultant, staff developed criteria for determining each writing level by taking the following steps:

- Collecting student writing samples across all ABE tutorial programs.
- Identifying and describing what each writer was able to do within the following areas:
    - Words (spelling, vocabulary)
    - Sentences (punctuation, tense agreement, structure)
    - Content (ideas, clarity, focus, use of detail)

- Clustering student papers in which the mastery of skills (beginning, intermediate, advanced) seemed to be generally similar.

- Codifying these observations thereby—identifying strengths that each grouping of papers shared and using these as characteristics of that level. For example, a beginning writer would probably not use upper- and lower-case letters correctly. Staff identified characteristics associated with more advanced writing and translated these into definitions of levels.

After more collaborative work at weekly meetings, staff put together a final draft of the rubric, each with an "anchor" paper— a piece of student writing exemplifying a specific level. Anchor papers were referred to when scoring other papers. The rubric consists of three scoring areas (words, sentences, and content) and a total of nine levels of writing (three levels each in the beginning, intermediate, and advanced skill areas).

Test administration procedures

Now that we had an instrument, we needed to develop test administration procedures. This was done in additional staff meetings. We developed the following procedures:

- Learner instructions for the test administrators
- The writing prompt
- Timing of the test
- Rules for administration (what help, if any, administrators were permitted to give students)
- Procedures, plans for secure storage of papers, and data entry processes

The assessment manager then proceeded to do the following:

- Sort writing samples into three general status areas (beginner, intermediate, advanced).
- Assign a pair of scorers to the papers within each status area.
- Distribute collected writing samples to scorers with anchor papers.

Scorers would then:

- Read and rate each paper.
- Compare scores with staff partner (needed agreement within two points).

What works

Results of the testing are analyzed annually by a professional statistician who prepares reports with our assessment manager. The manager then distributes the results to all stakeholders.

Because a major purpose of the rubric was to assist tutors in teaching writing, use of the rubric was integrated into tutor training. Tutor trainees learned about teaching the writing process using the very same tool that is used for measuring progress.

At the same time, staff presented workshops to experienced tutors on using testing results with their students. Tutors learned how to incorporate what the measurements revealed about their students in instruction—providing mini-lessons on the use of periods, for example, or ways to provide details to flesh out a word picture of an event. Tutors were able to discuss student work with the students themselves and use the rubric results as a foundation for the discussion. The rubric provided an organized, level-specific protocol for both instruction and discussion. Writing measurement was no longer guesswork. Tutors were enthusiastic about the important new tool that grounded their practice in a set set of clearly identified, progressive goals.

As a consequence, staff was assured that tutors would agree with them on what to teach and how to teach it. With a program in which 60 to 70 percent of instruction is delivered by tutors, this is no small consequence.

This process required full-time staff and took many hours in addition to regular responsibilities.

The Literacy Partners' writing rubric has been completed at last and stands as a valuable—even unique—educational tool. Staff has used the rubric to score hundreds of student writing samples. Inter-rater reliability has reached a consistent 95+ percent. Because the rubric was designed not only to measure progress but to guide instruction, findings are discussed on a regular basis with tutors and teachers and—most importantly—with the students themselves. It is this ability to provide meaningful feedback to students that establishes the rubric firmly with Literacy Partners' educational philosophy and helps tutors and staff guide and customize writing instruction.

Lessons learned

After the piloting of the rubric was completed, we had learned some valuable lessons and added some additional requirements as described below:

- To ensure objectivity, we removed the author's name and center identification and substituted a number code. The assessment manager retained identities of all students.
- At least three staff members were assigned to regular scoring of student writing. It was important that the scorers receive training and demonstrate agreement and consistency in scoring.
- We designed and distributed a testing schedule that included dates for both writing and reading assessment tests. Students would be "pre-tested" upon completing the first 12 hours of their instruction. This required testing new students within the first four weeks of attendance.
- Staff trained the tutors at the centers to administer the tests. Tutors were not permitted to administer tests to their own groups; they swapped groups on testing nights.

Post-testing

"Post-tests" were administered 50 hours after the pre-test, or in May, whichever came first. Staff felt it was important to maintain regular center operation with a minimum of interruption. Staff tried to form groups with new students so that they would all be tested at the same time. However, because of the nature of tutorial programs, this was not always possible. It is important to try to get as many post-tests as possible during one period. *Always* inform tutors and students well in advance so they are prepared for the testing process.

A word to the wise

With expert support, the staff of a local literacy program can develop a rubric to reliably measure ABE student-writing progress. When thoughtfully designed, such a tool can be used both to inform student instruction and to demonstrate and report student growth.

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Literacy Partners Writing Assignment Scoring Rubric

Beginning Writing

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Words Shows some knowledge that words have spaces between them. Sometimes exhibits correct sound/letter awareness. Uses lines for unknown words. Writes generally from left to right. Can write some letters and/or numbers. Can group letters to form words. May substitute pictures for words. May be able to copy. Poor spelling seriously interferes with understanding the meaning.	**Words** Spells less than 50% of words correctly. Frequently exhibits correct sound/letter awareness. Uses line for unknown words. Poor spelling often interferes with understanding the meaning.	**Words** Spells at least 50% of words correctly. Consistently exhibits correct sound/letter awareness. Uses lines for unknown words. Spelling sometimes interferes with understanding the meaning.
Sentences May use upper- and lower-case letters, but not correctly. Does not use punctuation.	**Sentences** Uses upper-and lower-case letters, but not correctly. Does not use punctuation. Omits some words .	**Sentences** Uses upper- and lower-case letters, but rarely correctly. Uses periods, but rarely correctly.
Content Content is not evaluated at these levels because test administrators do not uniformly transcribe learners' writing, which is necessary for an evaluation of content.		
Length (Optional) 1–5 lines or sentences.	**Length (Optional)** 2–6 lines or sentences.	**Length (Optional)** 3–8 lines or sentences 1 of 3.

Literacy Partners Writing Assignment Scoring Rubric

Intermediate Writing

Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Words Spells at least 50% of words correctly. Uses vocabulary she/he is confident spelling. Sometimes uses lines for unknown words.	**Words** Spells more than 50% of words correctly. Uses more difficult vocabulary that exhibits correct letter/sound awareness.	**Words** Spells more than 50% of words correctly. Uses more difficult vocabulary that exhibits correct letter/sound awareness.
Sentences Occasionally uses uppercase letters to begin sentences. Uses incorrect mid-sentence capitalization frequently. Uses periods, but not always correctly.	**Sentences** Frequently uses uppercase letters to begin sentences. Uses incorrect mid-sentence capitalization only infrequently. Uses periods, but not always correctly. Uses other forms of punctuation (e.g., commas, question marks), but uses them correctly less than 50% of the time.	**Sentences** Consistently uses uppercase letters to begin sentences. Uses periods correctly at least 50% of the time.
Content Ideas expressed by learner (i.e., not transcribed) are understandable.	**Content** Ideas expressed by learner (i.e., not transcribed) are understandable. Uses descriptive vocabulary, but not necessarily supportive of topic.	**Content** Uses details (e.g., gives examples) to support topic. Remains focused on topic. Sequence is often logical.
Length (Optional) 8–15 lines or sentences	**Length (Optional)** 1–2 pages	**Length (Optional)** 1–3 pages

Literacy Partners Writing Assignment Scoring Rubric

Advanced Writing

	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
	Words Spells most words correctly. Uses contractions and/or apostrophes correctly more than 50% of the time.	**Words** Few spelling errors, which occur with more difficult words. Capitalizes correctly.	**Words** Spelling errors are rare. Capitalizes correctly.
	Sentences Uses periods correctly. Exhibits subject-verb agreement at least 50% of the time. Varies sentence structure.	**Sentences** Uses periods correctly. Uses mid-sentence punctuation (e.g., commas, semi-colons) is used correctly more than 50% of the time. Exhibits consistent subject-verb agreement. Varies sentence structure effectively.	**Sentences** Uses mid- and end of sentence punctuation correctly. Exhibits consistent subject-verb agreement. Uses varied and complex sentence structure effectively.
		Paragraphs Indents paragraphs consistently. Develops paragraphs consistently.	**Paragraphs** Indents paragraphs consistently. Develops paragraphs consistently. Paragraphs are tightly focused.
	Content Uses details to support topic. Remains focused on topic. Sequence is mostly logical Uses essay format (intro-body-conclusion).	**Content** Vivid details clearly enhance message. Remains focused on topic. Sequence is always logical. Uses essay format (intro-body-conclusion). Writing has cohesiveness (ideas are well-integrated).	**Content** Vivid details clearly enhance message. Remains focused on topic. Sequence is always logical. Uses essay format (intro-body-conclusion). Writing has cohesiveness. Shows a creative and effective command of English language.
	Length (Optional) 1–3 pages	**Length (Optional)** 2 -3 pages	**Length (Optional)** 2–4 pages

Case Study H
Literacy Volunteers of America–Chippewa Valley

Improving data collection

"Clearly define your progress goals through strategic format planning."

The challenge

A literacy program, with a tendency to collect too much data, needed to develop an efficient and concise data plan that would clearly communicate its successes and challenges to our staff, funders (public and private), Board, learners, and community.

Who we are

Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley (LVA-CV) is a community-based nonprofit organization serving a tri-county area in western Wisconsin, with a total population of 182,000 residents. Since 1986, LVA-CV has developed many strong partnerships to help students achieve their personal, educational and job-related goals. We operate as an outreach site for our partner Chippewa Valley Technical College. Many of their adult basic education instructors are assigned to enhance our programming and work collaboratively with our trained volunteer tutors. LVA-CV offers services through several programs: One-to-one tutoring, citizenship preparation, comprehensive family literacy, and prison inmates and workplace education. During the 1999-2000 fiscal year, 246 adult students and 96 children were served with a total of 13,701 instructional hours. During 2000-2001, 305 adult students and 100 children were served with a total of 14,851 hours of instructional hours. Our annual budget is $380,000. We have 27 staff involved, many for about 30 hours per week, for a total of 17 full-time equivalents.

Our story

At LVA-CV we worked hard to collect the data needed to satisfy a long and varied list of partners and funders. At year's end, we found ourselves floundering in long, detailed reports from 10 programs spread out over three counties. Each used slightly different recording systems to collect and report data. This made it challenging to compile program and organization-wide evaluations, analyze the data, and share it with others. The sheer volume of data obscured essential information and limited our ability to share the successes and challenges of the students served.

Our challenge was to standardize our system so we could pull consistent pieces of information from all programs, record that data accurately in a computerized collection system, consolidate the findings, and produce a comprehensive report. Our involvement with the *What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP)* led to improvements in our approach. We started by determining what exact information we needed to collect and report. By asking the right questions—and the same questions—on a consistent basis, we saved time and energy.

What works

Developing an efficient data plan involves a cycle of collecting, analyzing, organizing, revising, and articulating. Our work has only just begun, but based on what we have learned, these are the steps we recommend when developing a data plan.

1. Examine your organization's strategic plan.

Clearly define your program goals through strategic planning. LVA-CV's strategic planning process involves both staff and the Board of Directors. The strategic plan incorporates a healthy cycle of planning, reviewing, and evaluating at all levels. Each staff member develops an annual action plan as a focus for his or her individual staff goals. It takes time for an organization to build capacity. The goal of effective data collection must be built into the overall planning process.

2. Determine the questions you need to ask.

These questions should support the goals and objectives stated in the strategic plan. Be sure to include your staff at all stages, both to ensure staff "buy-in" and thoroughness. The staff is in touch with what information can be easily gathered and what is required for consistent data collection. Although general questions may guide the early stages, these will evolve and become more sophisticated with time.

Examples of general questions:

- What do we need to show learner progress?
- What do we need to accurately measure outcomes?
- What do we need to guide program planning?

More specific questions can help to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses with individual programs.

Examples of more advanced questions:

- Are family literacy students making progress after 50 hours of instruction?
- Are students in one-to-one tutoring making progress after one year of tutoring instruction?

By asking what we need to know to become more effective, we are better prepared to determine from our data such factors as the percentage of students who make gains on standardized tests, the percentage of tutors who have completed the competencies for training, and the percentage of students who have achieved one or more personal goals. By including the staff in creation of the questions, all data can then be gathered in an efficient and consistent way.

3. Define roles.

Determine who is in charge of data, whether it is the data person, the teacher, and/or program coordinators. In our program it was decided that educators and technical personnel should share responsibility for data decisions. They determine as a group how they will collect, process, manage, and analyze data.

4. Develop/revise the data plan.

Changing needs affect the selection of questions. Schedule time to review and assess what you have learned from data collected at the end of each review period. This analysis can help ask better questions and adapt programming to better meet students' needs.

5. Establish a timeline for the assessment process.

Decide what information should be collected, and when. Should reports be made monthly, every six months, yearly, or a combination? When will testing take place? In our program we decided we needed to minimally pre- and post-test on a yearly basis. For Family Literacy we try to test at 100 hours of instruction and for Adult Basic Eduction at 50 hours of instruction. The data questions we ask help to determine the timeline.

6. Standardize the data collection and testing process.

We incorporated a computerized data collection system that provides consistent data recording. All teachers receive training and are expected to follow the same collection procedures, time guidelines and appropriate assessment procedure. At the start of every program year, we review our test practices to assure consistency in timing and administration. Students receive the same pre-test and post-test. We revise inefficient strategies, such as our original decision to administer standardized tests after 50 hours of instruction, which proved to be too soon. We now do pre- and post-testing every year with approximately 80 percent of our students.

7. Revise all forms to reflect the questions needed for data entry.

This streamlines data entry and assures that we are collecting necessary information. Thoughtfully designed forms help to ensure the information is collected up front, and *that it will not be necessary to try to retrieve missing information later in the process.* We accomplished this by taking all the forms we were given by Literacy Volunteers of America, the State technical college, human services, United Way, Even Start etc., and *the designing* of one form that is used to collect all the information needed.

8. Define terms for consistent usage.

One of the things we discovered is that different staff members used different definitions for "full-time" employment, resulting in inconsistent data. We now provide time in monthly staff meetings to ensure that terms such as "on hold" and "waiting to be placed" mean the same to everyone working with data collection and assessment.

9. Strengthen staff communication.

Monthly staff meetings focused on data collection issues, provide an opportunity to share information and ask questions. Such meetings foster a supportive environment that encourages a team effort to do things right, as do occasional staff lunches. Bringing in experts who can help clarify the crucial questions and assist with technology can save time and money later.

10. Analyze your data.

It is critical to take time to interpret the data that has been collected. This is the foundation for telling your story. It is also how we learn to do it better. As service providers, we need to have the courage to make changes in our programs, curriculums and/or strategic plans based on the insights, trends, strengths, and weaknesses revealed by our data.

Outline of planning cycle:

A brief outline of an annual cycle for data collection appears below.
(Also see Tab 6 "The annual cycle of program review at a glance" on page 121)

A yearly cycle for systematic data collection:

- Examine organizational strategic plan
- Determine the questions you need to ask
- Develop/revise the data plan
- Define roles
- Establish timeline for assessment process
- Standardize data collection process
- Revise forms to reflect questions
- Define terms for consistent usage
- Review and standardize testing practices
- Strengthen staff communication
- Aggregate data for reporting
- Analyze your data to tell your story
- Begin the process again...

A word to the wise

Recognize that you are probably never going to achieve the perfect system. Working to refine this process should be an ongoing process. Sound analysis and interpretation of the results is key to both improving and reporting on our programs.

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Case Study I
Pima College Adult Education (PCAE)

Tracking student progress

"Proper standardized testing requires a commitment of time and money. The results are worth it, otherwise our data is garbage—not valid or reliable."

The challenge

Our challenge was to improve our testing practices and develop a database to organize the test results in a way that allowed for an easy review of learner progress. We needed to develop testing procedures that would yield accurate pre- and post-scores and generate reports so we could analyze test results and better understand learner progress and needs.

Who we are

Pima College Adult Education (PCAE), a division of Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, is responsible for providing adult education services to all of Pima County, an area larger than the state of Vermont with one-and-a-half times the population. Established in 1969, PCAE today has over 170 employees, 12,000 students, and 50 locations in both urban and rural areas. Located 50 miles from the border of Mexico, our student population is nearly 70 percent Hispanic. PCAE offers over 1,200 hours of weekly instruction in literacy, family literacy, basic skills, General Educational Development (GED) preparation, citizenship, and English as a Second Language (ESOL). PCAE receives significant contributions from the community, including dozens of donated facilities and the work of over 150 volunteers. PCAE was one of 10 programs to receive the U.S. Secretary of Education's Award for Outstanding Adult Education and Literacy Programs in 1992 and 1999.

Our story

When we joined the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP) and agreed to track and document student progress, we were fairly confident that the procedures we were following would allow us to fulfill the agreement easily. We found, however, that we had many improvements to make before we could obtain clean data on our students' progress.

Pre- and post-testing dilemmas

As part of student intake, we were already giving the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). We had thought if we administered a GED practice test as a post-test and developed a way to record and compare pre- and post-test scores, we would be able to document student progress. However, we could not do so. Therefore, our first modification to our testing procedure was to use the TABE for both pre- and post-tests.

Locator testing

Our next modification was to administer the TABE locator test that indicates which level TABE an individual should take. Students come to us with a wide range of skills and abilities. For example, students who read at a second-grade level should be given the E level. Therefore, all learners who score between 1.6 and 3.9 on the locator are then given the E-level TABE. Giving the appropriate level of TABE based on the locator test greatly enhanced the accuracy of the test results and, to some extent, buoyed students' hopes.

Post-testing issues

We next noticed that we needed to modify the timing of the post-tests. Some students took the post-tests after 40 hours of instruction; others after perhaps 60 to 100 hours. The problem was that some classes met 10 hours per week;others met four hours per week. If it were decided that 40 hours between pre- and post-test was ideal, some students would be tested every month, others every two months. Monthly seemed too often; once every two months seemed not often enough. After looking carefully at how long students attended our classes, we came up with a recommendation based on average attendance by class. Our preference is to post-test students who attend classes between four and eight hours per week after 30 hours of instruction, and to post-test those who attend classes 10 hours per week after 40 hours. Then, if the 10-hour per week students stay long enough for a second post-test, they would take it after a total of 60 hours.

Timing the test

Despite these modifications, we were troubled about the number of students whose scores dropped on the post-test, especially when the student or teacher thought that the student was making progress. One contributing factor was that we were not timing the tests. A student might have exceeded the recommended time for the initial test but stayed within the recommended time for the post-test, therefore not doing as well on the post-test. When we began using the recommended times for the tests, fewer student scores declined. We were convinced, however, that there were other explanations for a drop in test scores that probably had little to do with testing procedures.

Learners like the tests

When we first began to test our students systematically, we were in a mode of resistance. While we had administered the GED practice test as an unofficial post-test for years, we assumed that students would resist adding a post-test other than a GED practice test to their regimen. "We" in this case refers to teachers and administrators, and we were all pleasantly surprised to find that students did not consider the additional testing to be a burden. In fact, they *wanted* to know if they were progressing and appreciated the tests. Their attitude not only wore away much staff resistance, but also inspired us to make the results as meaningful for students as possible.

What works

Once we had solved the testing issues, we realized that we needed to build a new database. Our program was fortunate to have funding from the WWLP to begin to develop a program database using standardized testing. It was necessary to develop a specialized computer program for the database because of the large number of students in our program (over 7,000 ABE/GED students annually).

Steps to improvement

First, we hired computer programming consultants to develop a specialized database. Next, we hired a part-time staff person to record test scores and monitor student progress. Finally, we assembled a team of participating WWLP staff members to monitor results. The "team" received quarterly printouts (see below) from the specialized database, and met as a group to evaluate student progress, review the entire process, and make recommendations for improvement. The database is programmed to provide reports on three different TABE tests, math, applied math, and reading. Each type of test is a complete and separate report. Any organization could create a database to meet their specific needs regardless of the state database they are required to use.

A sample report

Pima College Adult Education TABE Gain Report

Instruction Type: *Mathematics Computation* First and Last Tests Compared

	Test Types		Test Dates		Scale Scores			Grade Equivalent			
Student Name	*Pre-Test*	*Post-Test*	*Pre-Test*	*Post-Test*	*Pre-Test*	*Post-Test*	*Gain*	*Pre-Test*	*Post-Test*	*Gain*	*Hours Btwn Tests*
Student A	7E	8E	1/12/00	5/10/00	400	412	12	3.20	3.40	0.20	65.00
Student B	7M	8M	9/14/99	11/30/99	487	552	65	5.30	8.00	2.70	78.00
Student C	7D	8D	7/13/99	12/13/99	531	493	-38	7.20	5.40	-1.80	110.00
Student D	8D	7D	9/14/99	1/27/00	515	544	29	6.30	7.70	1.40	47.00

The sample report shown above compares mathematics computation results. Each student's name is followed by test result information, including: 1) the type of pre- and post-test administered; 2) the date each test was administered; 3) a comparison of scale scores and post-test gain (or loss); 4) a comparison of grade equivalent scores and post-test gain (or loss); and 5) the number of classroom hours between tests.

Both scale scores and grade equivalent scores are included in the report, scale scores to note incremental increases, and grade equivalencies because they are more easily understood by students, instructors, staff, and funders. Because the reports also include the number of instructional hours between tests, it was important to develop a systematic way to count these hours for the database. A tricky issue with some programmed databases is not being able to continue accumulating student data between fiscal years. While the number of tests that can be entered is infinite, these databases can only retrieve hours entered for the current year. Unfortunately, at the beginning of a fiscal year, these databases report students with no hours or with incorrect hours. Ideally, reports should ignore fiscal boundaries. Currently, our program requires that the hours be added in manually for students who attend during two (or more) fiscal years.

Lessons learned

- Standardized tests need consistent administration.

- Timing the TABE test is important to obtain accurate results.

- Rapid feedback to students on their progress is vital.

- Standardized testing procedures need constant monitoring and evaluation.

- Overall, instructors were more fearful of post-testing than were students.

- Proper standardized testing requires a commitment of time and money.

- The results are worth it, otherwise our data is garbage—not valid or reliable.

A word to the wise

Testing alone may not reflect all the progress that many instructors and students feel certain is taking place, but it is an essential tool that adds credibility to your program. The use of correct test administration procedures optimizes the validity of pre- and post- standardized test results. A programmed database also provides a consistent and systemized way to review student progress. It allows for greater understanding of both programmatic and student needs while staff continues to seek additional ways to document student progress. While we feel reasonably satisfied with our testing procedures at the moment, we know we will continue to recognize problems and challenges and, as a result, continue to make modifications.

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Case Study J
Southern State Community College,
Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE Program)

Building an intake/orientation team

"Change is inevitable, but it is seldom inexpensive, fast, or pain free."

The challenge

In a five-county, multi-site program, we were challenged to provide consistent student orientation,data collection reporting, and assessment. We met this challenge by establishing a traveling Intake/Orientation Team to deliver orientation to the individual class sites.

Who we are

The Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Program at Southern State Community College in Southern Ohio serves an average of 500 to 800 learners per year. As a full-service program, we offer classes for new readers, General Educational Development (GED) prep, college prep, college developmental, English as a Second Language (ESOL), family literacy, workforce and adult basic education. Although we have a few volunteers, paid instructors teach the classes. For the most part, part-time, hourly employees staff the program. Only two employees are salaried.

Classes are held on campus and at off-campus locations, including community-based organizations, schools, churches, and libraries. Because our 2,400-square-mile rural area is not served by any form of public transportation, ABLE sites bring the services to those who need them. Classroom activity ranges from six to 20 hours per week. A central office houses administration, student records, student registration (via a toll-free number), and the information management system (ABLELink).

Our story

We believe in perfection, but we do it in stages. The new Intake/Orientation process is a prime example of perfection in stages.

Stage 1

An Intake/Orientation Team was established to travel to each site. During the first year, a team member was designated to:

- Explain the program and available services.
- Explain the forms and direct the completion.
- Administer the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) Locator.
- Assign the student to a class.

Instructors at the sites administered the TABE battery as the students entered class. We found that having the instructor administer the TABE battery was not a good process for several reasons.

- Completing the assessment and the paperwork left the instructor with less time.
- Time was taken away from the students already enrolled to meet the testing needs of the new students.
- The classroom setting was not the optimal environment for assessment.

Stage 2
The process was reviewed and revamped with new goals:

- Make the assessment process more consistent from site to site.
- Remove the assessment process from the classroom where other activities were taking place.
- Make teaching and learning the top priority in the classroom.
- Provide a better environment for assessment.
- Improve the data collection process.

The major components of the first day of Intake/Orientation (I/O) were essentially the same as the previous year. The addition of a writing sample, a discussion of appropriate goal-setting, and a learning activity rounded out the revised schedule.

The second day included:

- TABE battery.
- Learning styles inventory.
- Computer skills inventory.

Each person on the I/O Team was assigned a specific responsibility (e.g. day one person, Day 2 person, ESOL person), but members were cross-trained to fill in for other team members. Staff personalities and skills were matched with the components of the process so that staff members were doing the parts that they did well and enjoyed.

What works

We haven't reached perfection yet, but we are getting closer! We continue to face additional challenges:

- Paying mileage is a large expense, but the distance is too great to expect staff to assume the expense.
- The extra personnel required for a new Intake/Orientation process creates two challenges: covering the cost and finding the personnel. Good, qualified, candidates willing to work in part-time jobs have been rather scarce. (Operative words: good, qualified, willing.)

Finding the appropriate person for each component is not easy, nor is it easy to determine in advance who is "right" for each role.

We continue to make improvements. We are in the process of incorporating the post-testing during the Day 2 component. Instructors send students, who are ready for a post-test, to the Assessment Team during the visit to the site. This more closely duplicates the assessment conditions for both pre- and post-testing. The environment is also more conducive for testing.

Lessons learned

In developing a new and improved Intake/Orientation process, we have learned many important lessons. We also continue to make changes and refinements as we review the process and as the expectations from funding sources change. This is what we have learned.

Open enrollment is not the answer to anyone's needs.

We used to offer the "feel good" approach. Enter when you are ready./Come when you wish./Stay as long as you like. We thought that if we did not take the students when the notion struck,we would lose them. As coordinator and later director, I could see no real benefits to anyone. If students had so little commitment to education that we had to grab them at their whim, they were not likely to stay and retention would be the next issue.

As we tightened the process, retention increased. Enrolled students were staying longer because they were not frustrated with the constant interruption of open entry. Students,who were committed to enhancing their education, enrolled and stayed long enough to show gains. Those who were "just shopping "continued to call periodically until they were ready to "buy."

Consistency requires specific and comprehensive guidelines and procedures.

With each instructor doing his/her own orientation and assessment, opportunities for inconsistency were abundant. The issue of consistency became more apparent as the program grew, geographically and numerically.

Although we have staff who have been with the program for 10 to 15 years, we experience the turnover typical of most adult programs. Constantly training to ensure that all the information was provided, all the data collected accurately, and the assessment instruments administered correctly became an overwhelming task. Maintaining a core group made communication easier and faster, training more manageable, and the provision of information and data collection more consistent throughout the program.

Computerized record-keeping brought consistency issues into prominence .
The implementation of the state's system of computerized record-keeping brought new challenges as well as new opportunities. Although we have an excellent instructional staff, not everyone was equally prepared to provide consistent information to students during intake and orientation, collect data from students, and see that the records clerk received the information in a timely and efficient manner. A large part of the collected data comes from orientation and registration. Having an Assessment Team allowed the records clerk to work with the team to ensure that information collected was complete and accurate. Because the team members were familiar with the process, they knew where to look for problems (e.g., recording *country* instead of *county*) and could make the corrections immediately.

Administration techniques can alter the assessment results.
Inconsistencies were observed in the administration procedures for the standardized assessments. The amount of assistance varied from saying, "Here's the test. Read and follow the directions." to an inordinate amount of assistance and direction. Student gains were skewed by the amount of assistance that was given during the assessment process. With the restructuring of the program, Assessment Team members have worked with the records clerk, instructors, and director to ensure that tests are administered the same way at each site.

Completion and submission of records were inconsistent.
Our records were lacking in both quantity and quality. Some of the instructors did a great job of explaining the forms. Some did well in seeing that they were completed fully and accurately. Some were able to complete the process and submit the results in a timely manner. Few were good at all aspects of the records process. They seemed to fall into two categories: just not good at paperwork or did not understand how critical the process was.

Not having a better process for collecting data made the records staff's job even more difficult and made analyzing data almost impossible. Our reports were not as accurate as we desired. We were losing information that allowed us to count students as enrolled. The inconsistencies made our conclusions questionable. By limiting the responsibility to a smaller group, we could work together to improve the process. A series of checks and balances developed as the instructors reviewed the completed documentation for students entering their classes.

The process required a commitment of time and money.

Change is inevitable, but it is seldom inexpensive, fast, or without pain . We had to change in increments we could manage (financially, physically, and psychologically). We learned from the journey and particularly from our mistakes.

A word to the wise

Getting buy-in from all who are affected is one of the biggest challenges. We have had to explain many times to many people what we are doing and why. Instructors had to be reassured that the process was in their best interest and in the best interest of the students. Students wanting immediate gratification were not happy. Referring agencies, especially those who wanted a quick and easy assignment for a client, did not like the wait. We have responded with hard data: better retention, educational gains, and goals attained.

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Case Study K
Vertical Adult Learning (VAL)

Ingredients to build support for decision-making and program improvement in assessment

"Ongoing staff development is a necessity. Planning for teacher development is an evolving and changing process depending on staff, program, learner, and funder needs."

The challenge

Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) wanted to build a staff support system to gain "buy-in" for a new student assessment system that met the needs of learners, staff and funders. The system was designed to measure learner progress more accurately, and it was tied to program improvement. To accomplish this, the leadership needed to actively involve the staff at six diverse regional locations in a decision-making process so that staff were committed to developing and using the new system.

Who we are

VAL, (originally founded as the Vermont Institute for Self-Reliance in 1985), is a statewide provider of educational services, whose mission is to help adults gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to achieve their personal and educational goals. VAL works with students seeking to increase their basic academic skills, increase their English-language proficiency, obtain their high school diplomas or GEDs, engage in a structured life-planning process, and find sustainable employment in a small, rural state. VAL consists of six regional sites and a central administrative office. Each site provides similar services, but the delivery model varies dramatically, reflecting the differing resources and demands of each region. While instruction at VAL is primarily teacher-led, some sites make extensive use of volunteers. VAL serves approximately 2,800 learners per year in a 9,500 square-mile area.

Our story

When VAL started participating in the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), the leadership of the organization began to understand that a uniform learner assessment system across the six locations was essential to program success. They realized that VAL did not have standard assessment procedures in place. Sometimes standardized tests were administered by teachers and tutors; other times they were not. Staff commitment to standardized tests was low. Using tests was seen as a step away from a student-centered approach, and teachers often developed authentic assessment measures. Though some informal assessments were being used, no uniform system for collecting core data and student outcomes was in place. Staff did not oppose an assessment process. Actually, they wanted test results to guide instruction between the teacher and learner.

However, they did not want to share the results with outside sources. A centralized and systematic plan to accurately assess learner progress and improve program services needed to be developed and agreed to by staff at the diverse sites.

As VAL began to better understand and develop a comprehensive student assessment system, many lessons were learned along the way. Such a system is not developed overnight. Rather, it takes time, leadership, planning, commitment, and resources to create an effective and sustainable system. Through a rather lengthy, but worthwhile journey, staff began to understand that a structured system, aligned with curriculum and standards, was essential to providing student-centered instruction and improving program services.

What works

Staff support and involvement at all levels in the decision-making process is a must for developing a learner assessment and program improvement system. Several strategies were undertaken to obtain commitment from managers, teachers, and support staff. Below are some steps that describe our journey.

Piloting a standardized test

VAL saw right away that in order to gain commitment to a new learner assessment system, teachers needed to be involved in that process. Therefore, a group of experienced teachers was recruited to pilot a standardized reading assessment, the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR). Teachers received a small stipend in return for learning how to administer the test, assessing 20 learners, and report the findings. The teacher reports were distributed internally as a way to generate discussion and understanding of how standardized tests and results could support teaching and learning. The teachers met on a monthly basis to discuss what they were learning and how the tests could be used more effectively. This group formed the Assessment Team.

Engaging teachers in developing an assessment system

Based on findings from the pilot, the following year the Assessment Team, now made up of teachers and managers, oversaw the planning and implementation of an assessment process for the entire organization. The team led an organization-wide discussion on the selection of an assessment instrument. An unforeseen outcome was that the teachers split evenly (and adamantly) in preference between the Test of Adult Basic Literacy (TABE) and the Adult Measure of Essential Skills (AMES) tests. The Assessment Team decided to use both tests with each teacher choosing whether to administer the TABE or the AMES to learners.

The team also developed policies and procedures to support a structured learner assessment system. Experienced teachers became lead trainers in coaching other teachers in the administration of tests and reporting results. The Assessment Team chair visited every site to present and fine-tune assessment policies, a key step for buy-in from all stakeholders.

Working to meet state and federal guidelines

Another team of teachers, managers, and support staff developed a set of new forms that provided internal consistency and also met the National Reporting System guidelines, an assessment system required by the U.S. Department of Education. This group met regularly with staff from the State Department of Education to review state and federal requirements and translate these requirements into a set of forms that worked with all of VAL's programs, including those not funded through the Department of Education.

The key challenge for this group was to develop forms that met the needs of different stakeholders, supported an assessment system not yet in place, and fit a new electronic data system. The team continues to operate and is now called the "Data Systems Team."

Using resources that are available to the program

WWLP resources were used in two major ways to provide support for program changes. Stipends were made available to the sites and allocations based upon plans submitted to the WWLP project director. In one case, teachers were compensated for participation in piloting new literacy assessment tests. In another case, a small stipend was used to encourage piloting a standardized screening for learning disabilities. We found that even when staff was involved in identifying a specific need for change, they would support the change more if organizational mangers put money into creating the change. It did not matter if the stipend did not cover all the costs, as long as some resources were allocated to support making the change.

Key teachers and managers were exposed to the standardized assessment work of WWLP partners through national WWLP meetings. Those staff members returned to VAL and shared what they had learned with all staff. Staff who had been neutral or against standardized tests saw the positive outcomes as a result of what their peers in WWLP were doing and became more outspoken in their support of standardized testing.

Developing a technology plan

As VAL started to plan a new assessment system, a key obstacle was the organization's patchwork technology. One lesson learned in VAL's original pilot of the DAR was that VAL did not have the technology infrastructure to report results in a timely manner. As a technology team began planning for what was needed, it became clear that a multi-year investment was required in both financial and human resources. Although we did not begin with a technology plan, we quickly realized the necessity of developing one, to specifically spell out how to standardize the data collection and testing process, and agree to the hardware and software requirements to support the assessment process. We also had to identify who would be responsible for each step. This plan has helped us to identify a variety of critical staff development needs when creating and implementing a database system (e.g., data entry, report development and network maintenance). Initially these needs were not considered, but they became evident after we began to standardize the assessment system.

Lessons learned

- **Leadership is necessary.**
  Leadership and support must begin with the top administrator. In our case, that leadership understood the need to have a clear strategy for creating change and to put into place a collaborative process to develop new data collection and testing procedures.

- **Manager, teacher, and support staff buy-in is crucial to success.**
  To gain commitment to new data collection and testing procedures, consensus-building processes were needed so that all staff was involved in decision-making. Managers, teachers, and support staff became members of committees that addressed specific issues related to the changes taking place in the program. All staff voices were heard and acknowledged in making final decisions, a crucial component to gain buy-in for the new assessment process.

- **Standardized data collection and testing procedures are needed.**
  The six regional program sites were used to create data collection procedures and data forms on an individual basis using different kinds of software programs. Some teachers had been using standardized tests; some had not. Data collection procedures and forms were standardized by reaching consensus among the staff participating on the assessment teams. Once teachers bought into which standardized test(s) were to be administered, consistent procedures were followed across all sites.

- **Ongoing staff development is a necessity.**
  Staff development is not just a one-time workshop. Rather, it is sequenced and planned on an ongoing basis. It is important to recognize that staff development can occur in many forms. In our case, staff was actively involved in pilot projects, team meetings, and peer mentoring. Planning for teacher development is an evolving and changing process depending on staff, program, learner, and funder needs.

A word to the wise

Building a support system for decision-making and program improvement in assessment affects every aspect of the literacy program. It may not be obvious at the early stages of implementation how these changes reverberate throughout the entire program. Engage staff at all levels when creating, testing, and using a new standardized system. Try to make their jobs easier, not harder, and ensure that they buy into the changes to create a system that works.

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Case Study L
Missoula Adult Basic & Literacy Education (ABLE)

Off to a good start: Using orientation and goal setting to improve retention

"One of the most important concepts imparted to our students is that initial goals are not set in stone. We encourage our students to voluntarily reassess their initial goal-sets with their instructors and counselor, and to make necessary changes in their intermediate tactics."

The challenge

Students of Missoula (Montana) Adult Basic & Literacy Education (ABLE) were exiting from the program before attaining their goals and/or showing measurable gains in educational functioning levels.

Who we are

Missoula Adult Basic & Literacy Education, a component of the Missoula County Public Schools' Adult and Continuing Education Division, is located at Dickinson Lifelong Learning Center in Missoula. We provide reading, math, language, writing, English as a Second Language (ESOL), and computer literacy instruction to 800 students annually in Missoula, Mineral, and Sanders counties, an area covering 6,500 square miles in western Montana. ABLE has an Even Start program at Dickinson and a Family Literacy program in a neighboring elementary school. We also offer classes in Personal Living Skills for adults with developmental disabilities, study skills for post-secondary entrance, career exploration, and employment preparation. ABLE has a staff of 11 instructors, two support staff, one program coordinator and over fifty volunteers *who* help us serve students in Missoula and the surrounding area. Our annual budget is approximately $250,000.

Our story

Involvement in the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP) has been instrumental in motivating ABLE to improve data collection and change assessment methods. Missoula ABLE collected mandated data on students for years but had never used the data in a systematic way to assess and improve our program. When we compared three consecutive years of data, we realized many students were exiting before meeting their goal of gaining a GED.

A review of data suggested that we could improve student retention and goal achievement through a mix of program improvements including:

- Formal, comprehensive student orientation that gives an overview of the program's culture and expectations for participation.
- Structured intake, counseling, and assessment process.
- Realistic, incremental goal setting that includes periodic goal/progress checks.
- Follow-up and tracking systems to assist staff in their efforts to retain students and help them meet their goals.
- Co-location of ancillary programs.
- Staff development and participatory program planning process.

In the fall of 1999, we instituted a weekly group orientation followed by individualized intake appointments to help students set goals and learning plans. At the same time, our program moved to a different building that housed Even Start and ABLE. The third piece of our program improvement was scheduling time for staff members for professional development and program planning.

Two years have passed, and we see a marked improvement in student retention and goal attainment. We believe that the increased retention and goal achievement are the result of several program changes and environmental factors.

Getting started

When students enter Adult Basic Education, we want to give them every opportunity to be successful. That goal is at the heart of what we do and what the National Reporting System wants us to document. After researching and discussing various intake processes with *WWLP* partners, we instituted a new enrollment process that includes the following key elements.

Orientation

This is when students gain necessary information about our program, how to become a student, types of educational opportunities available, and GED test information. We also lay out the expectations we have of them—to set goals, attend classes, and become our partners in the education process. Each student receives a handbook with all the information covered at orientation plus telephone numbers and other pertinent information. We ask students to make a commitment to their educational process by filling out their enrollment form and making an appointment for the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and intake.

Testing

Students must make an appointment to take the TABE. We offer three testing times daily at 8 a.m., 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. Our test examiner goes over the instructions orally and gives each student a printed copy of the instructions to read. The tests are timed with five-minute breaks between each section. Test results are scanned and sent to the counselor with the intake form.

Counselor interview

Every enrolling student visits our counselor. The counselor and student review the test results, then talk about goals and expectations. By the end of the interview, the student has a schedule of classes, a student learning plan to take to the instructor, and a plan for follow-up and post-testing.

Goal setting

One of the most important concepts imparted to our students is that initial goals are not set in stone. Students are asked to start by answering a question: What do you hope to accomplish by attending classes at our school? We encourage our students to *voluntarily* reassess their initial goal-sets with their instructors and counselor, and to make necessary changes in their intermediate tactics.

What works

A comparison of historical data with current data strongly indicates that our new intake, counseling, and orientation procedures have had a positive effect on student retention and goal achievement. Other equally important qualitative factors are:

- **Co-location of ancillary services and programs**
  Literacy Volunteers of America, the EvenStart Family Literacy Program, the Steps to Excellence for Personal Success (STEPS) Program, the Job Service Workplace Essentials Program, the Youth Advocate Program, the Life Skills Program and the GED Testing Center are all in the Dickinson Lifelong Learning Center. Grouping these services within the same building fosters an integrated learning and support environment.

- **Collaboration with social services agencies**
  A weekly Round Table group, which includes agency representatives, the ABLE counselor and chairperson, convenes to discuss the progress of our mutual students/clients. The Round Table connects students with community resources that may help them overcome barriers and attain their educational and personal goals. Some important outcomes of our agency collaboration are more effective student monitoring, better information flow, and more timely problem intervention. Collaboration seems to have positively influenced student retention and goal achievement rates compared to previous academic years. During fiscal year 2000/2001, for example, the average attendance increased from 58 to 63 hours per student. Out of 503 students served that year, 474 students or 94 percent met their stated achievement/outcome goals.

- **Centralized classrooms**
  The design of our ABLE center with classrooms surrounding a central commons is a serendipitous feature that facilitates student and staff interaction as well as student supervision. Proximity has also made it easier for staff and students to become personally acquainted and has changed the way students of all educational and cultural backgrounds relate to each other in and out of class. The space is safe and, to a certain degree, casual. It is conducive to respectful, productive social interaction and helps students freely assume the role of study partners.

- **Professional development**
  Regularly scheduled staff time is essential for program planning and improvement. It is not a luxury. Missoula ABLE allocates four hours of staff time every Friday morning throughout the regular school year. The time is used for meetings, program planning, professional development, curriculum development, and student staffing. The primary, intangible benefit of our staff time is the chance to communicate on a program-wide basis.

A word to the wise

Students have a greater chance of succeeding in their endeavors if they work within parameters of established and agreed upon expectations. The Missoula ABLE team is becoming a fully integrated organization with all instructional and administrative components supporting our common goal of student success through program improvement.

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Self-assessment of resources and skills
I. Resources and procedures

Staff resources

What is the total number of staff by type in your organization?

	Salaried		*Volunteer*	
	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T
Program management *(i.e., directors, coordinators, managers)*				
Administrative support staff				
Teachers				
Tutors/volunteers				
Instructional support staff				
Total number of staff				

Data collection and entry

1. **What information does your organization collect about your students?** Please check below and estimate the percentage of the student population for which you collect this information.

Category	**Percentage of students**
☐ Demographic information	
☐ Student performance information	
☐ Student goal information	
☐ Standardized test scores	
☐ Locally developed assessment tool results	
☐ Contact hours/student	
☐ Instructional hours/student	

Self-assessment of resources and skills

Data collection and entry (cont.)

2. **Who collects the student intake information?**
   (Please check multiple items if they apply)
   - ☐ A program manager
   - ☐ An administrative staff person
   - ☐ A teacher
   - ☐ A tutor/volunteer
   - ☐ All of the above

3. **Who maintains ongoing student record information?**
   (Please check multiple items if they apply)
   - ☐ A program manager
   - ☐ An administrative staff person
   - ☐ A teacher
   - ☐ A tutor/volunteer
   - ☐ All of the above

4. **Do you have one or more staff position(s) dedicated to data entry?** ________
   How many are full-time?________ part-time?________

5. **How many hours in total per month do you estimate that your organization spends on data entry?**
   ☐ 0–10 ☐ 11–20 ☐ 21–40 ☐ Above 40

6. **How frequently do you do computer entry of your data?**
   ☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Annually ☐ Biannually
   ☐ No pattern, whenever it accumulates

Self-assessment of resources and skills

Data analysis and reporting

1. **Do you have one or more staff position(s) dedicated to data analysis and reporting?**
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   How many are full-time? ______ part-time? ________

2. **How many hours in total per month does your organization spend on data analysis and reporting?**
   ☐ 0–10 ☐ 11–20 ☐ 21–40 ☐ Above 40

3. **Do you have a staff person(s) assigned to the quality control of your data?**
   (i.e., data verification and error collection)
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. **In what ways does your organization use its data analysis and reports for decision-making and program improvement?** *(Please check multiple items if they apply)*
   - ☐ Distribute reports to managers and designated staff as an FYI.
   - ☐ Require review, verification, and explanation of results from managers and staff.
   - ☐ Hold regularly scheduled meetings to discuss the information.
   - ☐ Combine management and teaching staff in the discussions of information.
   - ☐ Provide students with information about progress.
   - ☐ Present and discuss regularly at Board of Directors' meetings.
   - ☐ Allocate resources based on the results of the analysis.
   - ☐ The analysis and reports are a primary resource to the decision-making process.
   - ☐ The information is discussed infrequently.
   - ☐ Other (*Describe*)

Self-assessment of resources and skills

Data analysis and reporting (cont.)

5. **The distribution list for your reports includes:**
   (Please check multiple items if they apply)
   - ☐ Administrative staff
   - ☐ Board of Directors
   - ☐ Funding sources
   - ☐ Program managers
   - ☐ Teachers
   - ☐ Tutors/Volunteers
   - ☐ All of the above
   - ☐ None of the above

6. **What are the major benefits of distributing and discussing your information?**
   - ☐ Assists us in planning
   - ☐ Helps to keep us on the same page with program operations
   - ☐ Increases awareness of programs and each other's responsibilities
   - ☐ Assists in formulating new approaches to problems

7. **What are the your constraints (if any) to doing data analysis?**
   (Please check multiple items if they apply)
   - ☐ Not enough staff
   - ☐ Not enough time
   - ☐ Not enough money
   - ☐ Inadequate computer equipment and software
   - ☐ Skill level of staff
   - ☐ Lack of interest among staff and managers
   - ☐ Other (*Describe*)

Self-assessment of resources and skills

Hardware and software resources

1. **What software is your organization using to maintain your data?**
   - ☐ LitPro
   - ☐ State specified/designed
   - ☐ Alies
   - ☐ Stairs
   - ☐ Other

2. **Does your computer hardware adequately meet your data analysis and storage needs? If not, what hardware additions are needed?**

3. **Do your current software packages give you the tools you need to analyze and report on your data? What additional features in your software would be helpful to you?**

Self-assessment of resources and skills II. Skills inventory

Key for priorities
Level 1 – needed within next 6 months
Level 2 – needed within next year
Level 3 – needed within next 1-2 years

Does our organization/staff need to build skills in this area?

Assigned priority level

A. Collection and entry of data	Yes	No	1	2	3
1. Identifying what data you need to collect	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Improving upon current data collection practices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Setting up routine and efficient data entry practices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Establishing quality control procedures to minimize errors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Asking the right questions about your program's performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assigned priority level

B. Analyzing & reporting on program data	Yes	No	1	2	3
1. Identifying the data that will assist you in assessing your program's performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Preparing effective and informative reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Basic approaches to analyzing data *(Describing the student population by calculating averages, frequencies and percentages)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. More advanced data analysis techniques *(Identifying multi-year trends, sampling, making correlations)*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assigned priority level

C. Using data to monitor program improvement and assess impact	Yes	No	1	2	3
1. Evaluating effectiveness of each program offering	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Monitoring program improvements over time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Assessing the effectiveness of different instructional practices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Identifying what programs/practices to change/add/delete	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Assisting staff and management to see the value of data collection and analysis and how it applies to their jobs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Self-assessment of resources and skills

Key for priorities
Level 1 — needed within next 6 months
Level 2 — needed within next year
Level 3 — needed within next 1-2 years

Does our organization/staff need to build skills in this area?

D. Computer skills

	Yes	*No*	*1*	*2*	*3*
1. Improving staff's basic computer skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Basic training in analytic software package(s) (spreadsheet/database)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Advanced training in analytic software package(s) (charts and graphs)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assigned priority level

E. Monitoring student progress

	Yes	*No*	*1*	*2*	*3*
1 Identifying methods to monitor student progress over time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2 Using student progress data to inform instructional practices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3 Ways to use data when providing feedback to students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assigned priority level

F. Meeting (National Reporting Systems NRS) requirements *(if applicable)*

	Yes	*No*	*1*	*2*	*3*
1 Staff is aware of new NRS guidelines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2 Organizational procedures are in compliance with NRS guidelines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3 Organization currently has methods in place for collecting the following required NRS data?					
Demographics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Core & secondary outcomes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Student participation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Educational gains	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Follow-up measures	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assigned priority level

Organization

Completed by Date

For additional information regarding this survey, please contact Gwen Gourley, Business Solutions Consulting at ggourley@nyc.rr.com

"...No amount of training could replace what I learned as a partner in the WWLP project. Many of the improvements in our program are a direct result of the work we did and the knowledge I gathered as a participant in this project..."

Annual cycle of program review at a glance

Examine organizational strategic plan.

- Identify external and internal changes in educational trends and requirements.
- Identify new external and internal benchmarks.
- Revise strategic plan to reflect changes.

Evaluate operational results from the previous year.

- Compare the results to the plan.
- Evaluate and revise assessment and intake process to reflect new goals or changes as needed.
- Identify any area of your program operations about which you would like to have more information, or that is currently not addressed in your data collection and reporting system.
- Determine the value of this information to increasing your understanding of your operations and assess if it is worth your time and effort to change your current system to include this information.
- Develop the specific questions you want to answer with your data as you begin a new year.

Determine data needs.

- Review and update specific data required for funding sources and organizational questions.
- List and review all data to be collected. Define any new data elements to be tracked.
- Update any data collection format as needed.

Review and revise procedures.

- Evaluate data collection process to ensure smooth flow of data entry and reporting
- Evaluate timeline for data entry and quality control check of data. Revise as necessary.
- Identify any glitches in communication or responsibilities that arise.
- Review and refine procedures and staff roles as needed.
- Create list of "good practices" to maintain and a list of practices to re-evaluate and update.

Annual cycle of program review at a glance (cont'd)

- Review report formats. Revise and develop new reports as necessary.
- Revise schedule of report distribution as necessary.
- Distribute revisions of procedures to all staff.
- Prepare to train staff as necessary.

Update and revise your data plan.

- Evaluate hardware and software:
- Survey users for software related difficulties they are experiencing with data entry, data retrieval, generating reports, reliability, accuracy, accessing or saving data.
- Survey users on hardware-related issues including not enough memory, slow applications, crashes and freezes, or broken components.
- Implement strategies to increase staff buy-in for plan.
- Identify staff skills that need to be strengthened and enhanced.
- Prepare to train staff as necessary.

Use your data and reports to show accomplishments of your students and your organization.

- Compare results reflected in your reports with your staff's expectations.
- Review your reports at intervals throughout the year to assess if your performance is on target with your goal.
- Discuss variances between expectations and results.
- Schedule time to brainstorm with staff on what steps you need to take to eliminate the gap between your expectation and results.
- Make decisions and implement procedures to improve your operations and increase the likelihood of your student's success.

BEGIN THE CYCLE AGAIN!

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