MODULE B: PARTNERSHIPS

The Adult Education Program is the center of the PluggedInVA career pathway, responsible for forming and maintaining partnerships with employers, postsecondary institutions, other state agencies, and the local community.

Effective partnerships are essential to the success of PluggedInVA.

The content, skills, and activities associated with each of the PluggedInVA partner organizations are integrated throughout the program, providing the learners with a pathway to entry-level employment in high-demand, high-wage jobs.

IN THIS MODULE

- PluggedInVA partner descriptions
- Collaborating with partners
- Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)
- Familiarizing partners with adult learners

Familiarizing Partners with Adult Learners

If your partners are unfamiliar with adult education, a brief introduction to the field may be helpful. This article highlights the unique, and often challenging, characteristics of the adult education field. The main points outlined in the article can be a helpful introduction to working with adult learners for industry or community college partners who are new to this situation. Talking points are underlined.
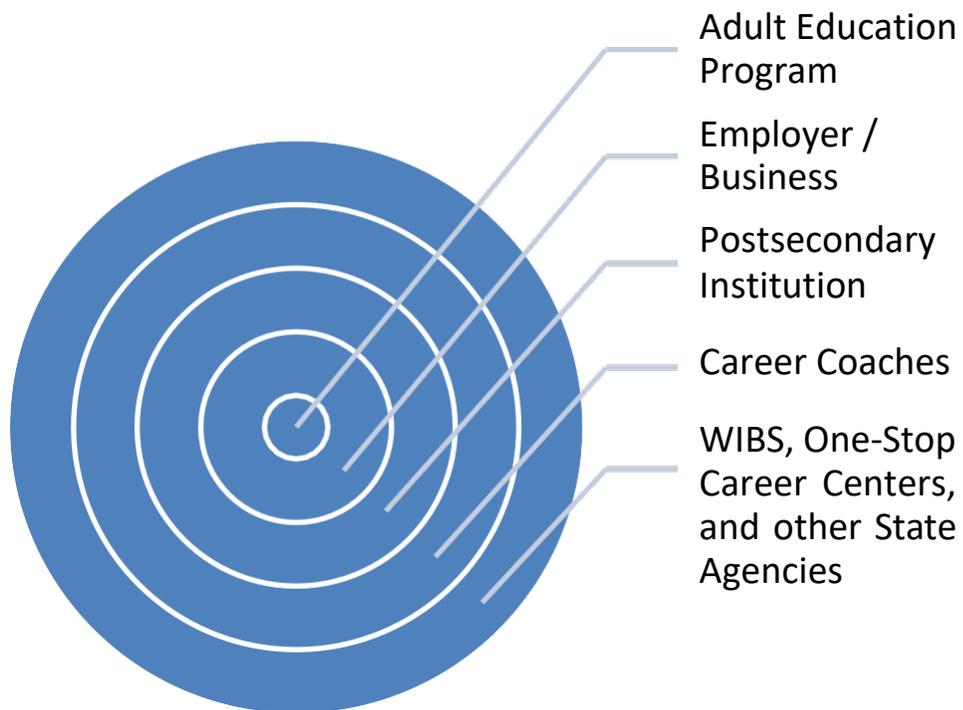

Guidelines for Working with Adult Learners

"The adults did not have to be there: if the class was disagreeable, they could simply stop coming. In teaching [adults], the customer, not the subject, comes first and is always right, and the customer is the learner." (Rogers 1989, p. 3)

"Adults vote with their feet," a favorite adage of adult educators, is frequently used to describe a characteristic of adult learners. In most circumstances, adults are not captive learners and, if the learning situation does not suit their needs and interests, they will simply stop coming. In discussing adult education, Knowles (1980, 1984) distinguished between teacher-centered and learner-centered instruction. He promoted the latter because it viewed learners as mutual partners in the learning endeavor (Merriam and Caffarella 1991). Known as the andragogical model, the use of learner-centered instruction--which supports addressing the needs and interests of learners--is regularly championed in the literature as the most effective way to teach adults. However, Merriam and Caffarella (ibid.) assert that "adult learning in formal settings, for the most part, is still instructor designed and directed" (p. 26). Given the wide support for learner involvement, the discrepancy between adult education theory and practice is perplexing. How can instructors of adults become more learner centered in their practice? This ERIC Digest suggests guidelines and strategies that can be used in formal settings by instructors of adults to involve learners more effectively.

ANDRAGOGY REVISITED

I. PluggedInVA Partner Descriptions

Adult Education Program

Employer / Business

Postsecondary Institution

Career Coaches

WIBS, One-Stop Career Centers, and other State Agencies

The adult education program is the center of the PluggedInVA Career Pathways program. This is where learners strengthen basic skills, earn their GED credentials and Career Readiness Certificates, and develop 21st century and technical skills to prepare them for entry-level work in a targeted industry. The adult education program works with employers and the postsecondary institution to develop a contextualized curriculum, focused on the targeted industry.

Employers inform the focus of the PluggedInVA cohort. This is an employer-driven model. Industry partners provide insight into the skills and knowledge that are needed for success in entry-level jobs. These skills and knowledge form the content of the contextualized curriculum and inform the selection of postsecondary courses that learners will take as part of their PluggedInVA program.

Postsecondary institutions provide co-enrollment for learners, giving them the opportunity to earn college credit. They also give learners college experience, lowering emotional barriers that deter many adult learners from entering into a postsecondary program of study. The postsecondary partner will also provide guidance in curriculum

development. Postsecondary institutions may also provide a direct link to employers and the technical training needed for employment in the targeted industry.

Consider other services that may be offered by postsecondary institutions, such as tutoring and academic advising. Encourage participants to take advantage of available services and to become familiar with what the college can offer them. Visit the college for a tour or to have college staff talk about their services with the students to make them more comfortable with the process.

[Career coaches](#) from the state community and technical college system will be utilized to help learners establish long-term career goals. Their services may include whole group as well as individual consulting related to available college programs, services, and career assessments. Career coaches may also help learners with applications for college, financial aid, and scholarships. Instructors and facilitators should work directly with career coaches to coordinate and facilitate their involvement with the program.

Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and One-Stop Career Centers

Contact local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and One-Stop Career Centers to partner in the development and implementation of the program. Determine shared needs and discuss how your program can contribute to the needs of the One-Stop or WIB (e.g., their need to achieve a specific number of industry credentials).

[Virginia Workforce Network](#)
The Virginia Workforce Network (VWN) is a system of career development, business and educational partners, and agencies that seek to connect Virginians to opportunities that help them develop a better career. Through the VWN, individuals receive support, education and training that prepare them for the jobs of today and tomorrow and businesses are connected to a skilled and prepared workforce.

[Workforce Investment Works](#)
Workforce Investment Boards have transformed over the years and their recent focus has remained constant — create workforce talent in America to keep our nation competitive. Each Board has a majority of business champions who work collaboratively with public sector organizations to build workforce strategies in their local communities. Approximately 12,000 business volunteers serve on the nation's Workforce Boards, with the average local Board consisting of approximately 45 total members.

The strategies and vision of the Workforce Investment Boards are carried out through a network of One-Stop Career Centers which offer businesses, job seekers and youth innovative employment and training services. Workforce Investment Boards across the country focus on keeping these resources market-driven; accessible to any individual who wants or needs a job, education, or training; and finding and training the right workforce talent for employers.

Optional support services, such as meal vouchers, bus passes, or childcare, may be provided by organizations and businesses in the community. These services can be incentives for students and may reduce challenges to attendance. During the planning and recruiting phases of PluggedInVA, approach local businesses and community organizations that may be interested in assisting with the project or in donating resources to PluggedInVA participants.

II. Collaborating with partners

► Develop program plan with potential partners

Commitment from partners is essential to the success of PluggedInVA. Collaborate with partners so that their needs are being met. Communicate the program's goals and expectations clearly, and maintain regular and open communication.

Tips for discussions:

- Focus discussions on the **needs of the partners**, and incorporate those needs into the program model.
- Share the mission, goals, and values of the adult education program and PluggedInVA.
- Consider the partner organization's mission, culture, and values.
- Ask how PluggedInVA can help them meet their goals and needs.
- Establish one point of contact for each partner organization.
- Consider the partner organization's capacity to provide needed or suggested services.
- Do business partners understand concepts of adult learning?

► Develop a Project Timeline

Work with the partnering postsecondary institute, employer(s), other agencies, and community partners to develop a timeline for program development and implementation.

The PluggedInVA Checklist, located in Part II of the Implementation Guide, may serve as a good starting point for planning discussions with partners.

PluggedInVA Timeline for Planning and Implementation

Involve all partners in the development of the project timeline. The adult education program should take the lead on developing the timeline and incorporating the needs and feedback of the partner organizations.

Timeline Template

Planning and Implementation: 1 year		
Throughout the whole year	Planning: 6 months	Implementation: 6 months
- Collaborate with partners to plan and implement program - Collect data on the process and learner outcomes - Analyze data for improvement - Report data to OAEL	- Research employment trends / labor market - Research skills and training needs for identified industries - Build partnerships - Employers - Community College - Community - Develop MOUs - Develop curriculum - Begin marketing and recruitment 3 months prior to start date	- Deliver integrated instruction at the adult education center - Support learners with co-enrollment at the community college - Support learners with workplace experience and training - Begin work on Capstone project 3 months into implementation - Host Capstone presentation and graduation at 6-month mark
After Year 1 • Submit an evaluation for program improvement • Use evaluation to plan next PluggedInVA program		

► Sample Services and Opportunities for all Partners

Discuss the needs of each partner and develop the program so that all partners have a vested interest in its success.

PluggedInVA Partners Sample Services and Opportunities			
Adult Education Program	**Postsecondary Institution**	**Business Partner**	**Supplemental Support (Optional)**
• Student recruitment • Curriculum design • Student intake and assessment • Basic skills instruction • GED credential • Contextualized Curriculum • 21st century skills instruction • Professional soft skills instruction • Digital literacy • Career Readiness Credential (CRC)	• Co-enrollment • Academic advising • College experience • Curriculum development • Career Coaching	• Input in curriculum development • Site visits • On-the-job training • Job shadowing • Internships • Class visits • Mock interviews • Real interviews • Career exposure	• Childcare • Transportation • Incentives • Clothing Allowance • Food or meal vouchers

► Maintain consistent and open communication with all partners.
   ▪ Schedule regular updates either by phone, emails, or in face to face meetings.
   ▪ Use an online forum to maintain consistent communication and collaboration.
   ▪ Involve partners in program activities and events, such as the Capstone project presentations.
   ▪ Develop course activities and events that involve the partners.

► Encourage active employer participation

   Business/Industry Mentors

Subject matter experts from local business/industry partners will serve as mentors to the learners enrolled in the PluggedInVA program. They will help learners obtain a better understanding of **job skill and professional soft skill requirements** for potential employment within specialized career fields.

Business mentors may provide
- job-shadowing opportunities,
- tours of business/industry facilities,
- feedback on a resume or job application,
- mock interviews,
- visits to the PluggedInVA class to discuss aspects of employment,
- or assistance in coordinating a job fair.

Business mentors should also be invited to the capstone project presentations at the end of the program. Instructors and facilitators should work directly with business mentors to coordinate and facilitate their involvement with the program.

► Maintaining ongoing partner collaboration

It is important to maintain and encourage active participation among all PluggedInVA partners throughout the six-month program and beyond. Below are some ideas for sustaining partner involvement, even after initial planning is done.

- Regularly check in with postsecondary and business partners via phone calls and face to face visits or meetings.
- Create and distribute a PluggedInVA program newsletter with updates and news. This can be delivered either electronically or by mail.
- Invite partners to special events, such as Capstone presentations.
- Invite partners to observe classes.
- Invite partners to continue to contribute input on the skills and knowledge that are taught in the PluggedInVA curriculum.
- Share student work with partners (e.g., mini-capstone projects or projects from postsecondary coursework).
- Create an online community (e.g., Ning, Spruz, Facebook, or Wiki) and invite all stakeholders to participate. Students can help update the site as an ongoing class project.
- Have students plan a mid-program event to celebrate their progress and invite all partners and stakeholders.

► Determine Staff and Partner Responsibilities and Activities

Within the PluggedInVA team at the adult education center, decide who will be the point person for each of the checklist items below.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT	
ROLES	**PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE**
Partner development and management	
Identification of target population	
Identification of targeted jobs and skill requirements	
Program design and planning	
Curriculum development	
Fundraising	
Recruitment of staff and instructors	
Training of staff and instructors	
Equipment, supplies, and facilities	
Monitoring and tracking of program outcomes	

PROGRAM DELIVERY	
ROLES	**RESPONSIBILITIES**
Marketing and recruitment of students	
Intake, assessment, screening, and counseling	
Program orientation	
Instruction: basic and technical	
Certifications and degrees	
Tutoring and other academic support	

Adapted from *Bridges to Careers for Low-Skilled Adults*, Women Employed,
http://www.womenemployed.org/docs/BridgeGuideFinal.pdf

► PluggedInVA Staff: Roles and Responsibilities

Ensure all PluggedInVA staff in all partner organizations have this information.

PluggedInVA Staff and Partners				
Role	Name	Organization	Contact Information	Responsibilities
Project Director				
Regional Specialist				
ABE Instructors				
Postsecondary Instructors				
Career Counselor				
Postsecondary Institution Contact				
Business Partner Contact				
Other Roles				

III. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)

Once partners are identified and roles and responsibilities have been agreed upon, write MOUs to solidify the agreement.

Two sample MOUs are below.

#1 Sample Memorandum of Understanding

Local Community & Technical College

Community College Dr.

Boston, MA 02210

January 1, 2006

Program Director

Adult Learning Center

555 Adult Learning Way

Boston, MA 02210

Dear Program Director:

On behalf of the Admissions Office at Local Community and Technical College (LCTC), I am pleased to express our support for the College Transition Program. I believe the services provided through this program will offer important resources for the Adult Basic Education students in further their education at LCTC.

LCTC will offer group information sessions to students on a pre-arranged basis. We can also offer individual appointments that can be scheduled with one of our Admissions Counselors and/or with other personnel as needed. Other services, such as preliminary academic assessment testing and tours of campus facilities can be arranged.

LCTC Admissions staff is strongly committed to the goals of this exciting new College Transition Program and will offer our assistance to support the staff with its implementation.

Sincerely,

_____

Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management

#2 Sample Memorandum of Understanding

Reviewed and revised by the Maine Department of Education, Transition Project Advisory Committee, May 19, 2005

Outline and Discussion points

This MOU draft incorporates a rationale for formal collaboration and a menu of discussion items to be drawn from or added to as local needs and protocols require.

Menu Format

The menu is divided into three areas of consideration: administrative issues, instruction and student services, and staff development.

Introduction & Rationale:

This agreement is a cooperative effort between the xxxxxxxxxx (College) and the xxxxxxxxxxxxx (Adult Education Program) with the goal of assisting Maine adults secure greater economic opportunities by providing cost effective and attainable pathways to post secondary education.

> Whereas, a growing number of Maine adults recognize the need to enter postsecondary institutions in order to improve their employability and workforce productivity; and

Whereas, many adult learners and high school graduates who desire to go to college lack the preparation or skills required for entry and success in academic courses at the postsecondary level; and

Whereas, adult and non traditional students often lack the financial or academic resources required for a transition to a college experience; and

Whereas, xxxx and xxxAE have a long history of collaboration in remedial, developmental or preparation courses and assessment of interested students; and

Whereas, both parties have specific areas of high effectiveness and specific activities which overlap and duplicate services;

Now, Therefore, in consideration of the premises and conditions contained herein, the parties enter into the following basic agreement:

Areas of Agreement:
Administrative:

1. To develop and implement a comprehensive and seamless referral system which will include but not be limited to a clear understanding of admission procedures and placement of incoming students.
2. To provide the adult education program collocation of activities at the college campus(es) or centers. [*Recommended where and when possible, given distance and facilities*].
3. To utilize a common data collection system to provide tracking and evaluation of program services.
4. To define and utilize assessment tools and appropriate score limitations for entry into academic programs or courses.
5. To develop joint marketing strategies to address and advance the transition initiative.
6. To establish a joint steering committee at the campus level and hold at least one meeting per semester to evaluate the status of the agreement and determine any necessary changes. (Define membership)

Instruction and Student Services:

7. To articulate and jointly develop college transition courses addressing the placement requirements of academic courses at the college level.
8. To articulate and jointly offer college transition courses addressing the placement requirements of academic courses at the college level.

9. To incorporate the adult education offerings of college transition courses in the recommendations for attaining appropriate placement scores.
10. To establish and support a mentor or cohort system of informal counseling for the non- traditional student.
11. To jointly address and service the needs of ESOL students in placement and course activity.

Staff Development
12. To provide and prepare the adult education program and staff with appropriate assessment tools and training for the testing of adult education students.
13. To share professional expertise in scheduled regional staff development activities for administrative and instructional staff on a regular basis.

Signature Lines, both parties

Date

Sources:

Collaborative Agreement Between University College of the University of Maine System and

Maine Adult Education Association, April 2003

Maine Technical College System and Maine Adult Education Association Collaboration Agreement, 2003.

Community Partnerships for Adult Learning: Partnership Profiles (Kentucky), 2003.

Collaborative Agreement between Kennebec Valley Technical College and Fairfield Adult and Community Education Program, 2003.

The following assumptions underlie Knowles' (1984) andragogical model:

--Adults tend to be self-directing.

--<u>Adults have a rich reservoir of experience</u> that can serve as a resource for learning.

--Since adults' readiness to learn is frequently affected by their need to know or do something, they tend to have <u>a life-, task-, or problem-centered orientation to learning as opposed to a subject-matter orientation</u>.

--Adults are generally motivated to learn due to internal or intrinsic factors (such as helping their child with homework) as opposed to external or extrinsic forces (such as a raise in salary).

A logical outcome of these assumptions is the use of a <u>collaborative teaching model that involves the learners as partners</u> (Knowles 1980).

Pratt (1988) suggests that a number of situational variables (e.g., teacher or learner characteristics, institutional environment) affect the extent to which learner-centered instruction is appropriate or desired. In some situations, learners may need direction because they do not have the requisite skills and knowledge to be self-directed or they may need support because they lack confidence or are not committed to the learning endeavor. Therefore, adult learning in formal institutions can be viewed in terms of the direction and support needed by the learner in the following ways: learners need both direction and support, learners need direction, learners need support but are reasonably self-directing, or learners are moderately capable of providing their own direction and support (ibid.).

Pratt's model establishes the level of learners' competence in deciding what to learn and how to carry out the learning process (direction) and their competence to do so (support). These key factors provide the foundation for initiating a partnership between instructors and learners. <u>Even though learners may need both direction and support, they can still be involved in designing and directing their learning in meaningful ways</u>.

ASSESSING LEARNER NEEDS

Information about the amount and type of direction learners require can be obtained through a needs assessment. Adult learner involvement in needs assessment initiates a partnership with the instructor. Through needs assessment, adults can identify their problem areas in relation to the course topics, which are frequently a starting point for their learning (Cranton 1989). Vella (1994) suggests looking at the needs assessment

process as the WWW question: Who needs What as defined by Whom, in which Who is the learners, WHAT are their needs, and WHOM are the definers. The key question is "How do we listen to adult learners before we design a course for them, so that their themes are heard and respected?" (ibid., p. 5). Before designing the course, some practical and feasible ways of involving a sample of learners who are representative of the class membership include using faxes, telephones, electronic mail, and focus groups. For multiple-session programs, the course content could be negotiated during the first session.

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Support for adult learners is provided through a learning environment that meets both their physical and psychological needs. Such a learning environment is also an essential element in successful partnerships between learners and instructors. Developing an atmosphere in which adults feel both safe and challenged should be the goal (Cranton 1989; Rogers 1989; Vella 1994). Any anxieties learners might have about appearing foolish or exposing themselves to failure should be eased, but they should not feel so safe that they do not question their current assumptions or are not challenged in other ways. Instructors need to balance being friendly with challenging learners (Rogers 1989). An ideal adult learning climate has a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental atmosphere in which adults have permission for and are expected to share in the responsibility for their learning.

Suggestions for creating a learning environment that fosters a sense of support for and partnership with adults include the following:

--Capitalize on the first session. First impressions are frequently lasting ones. The first session should create the foundation for a healthy learning partnership and set the tone for the balance of the program. Consider informal furniture arrangements with chairs in a circle or around a table and allow time for introductions, including information about the instructor. Even if the first session is devoted to needs assessment and discussing learner expectations for the course, provide written information about the course. Assignments should be discussed at the outset with the promise of a complete syllabus (incorporating learner input) at the next session. (Adapted from Apps 1991.)

--Incorporate group work. Well-designed group work can contribute to the development of a collaborative, participative learning environment in which the instructor is perceived as a partner. Small group activities foster the development of positive peer relationships among learners, which frequently have a much greater influence on learning than teacher-learner relationships. Informal, spontaneous groups can be used for short-term activities such as brainstorming; groups can also be formed

around ongoing projects. Formal, ongoing groups often result in stronger affiliation among members of the small group than among members of the whole class.

--Break the traditional classroom routine. <u>Deviating from the conventional practices associated with classrooms can help create an effective adult learning environment.</u> A potluck or snacks during a class break can create opportunities for interaction and break down barriers between instructors and learners. For classes that meet more than six times, varying the meeting place can help add interest (Apps 1991). Before changing the class meeting location, however, all participants should be consulted to ensure the change does not conflict with any existing arrangements for transportation and child care.

--Use humor. Humor, which must be incorporated into regular classroom activities, can free creative capacities by providing novelty and helping learners break out of ruts. Humor can also help learners see the "human" side of the instructor. For example, by laughing at their own mistakes, instructors can help learners understand that errors are a normal part of the learning process. It goes without saying that instructors should never resort to sarcasm or ridicule for then humor becomes destructive. Properly used, however, <u>humor can assist in building relationships between and among learners</u> (Apps 1991).

--Support opportunities for individual problem solving. Adults have many responsibilities besides that of learner and consequently may feel a sense of isolation in their student role. If appropriate, instructors can <u>encourage the formation of study groups</u> (another opportunity for group work) to link those learners who may wish this type of support. In addition, instructors should always <u>be available for individual conferences </u>(Apps 1991).

PROVIDING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

A corollary of creating an effective learning environment is providing an equitable learning environment. Many adults--especially women, the elderly, the less affluent, members of minority communities, persons with disabilities, and the educationally disadvantaged--have not experienced support or equality in the learning environment. As a result, they have frequently felt disconnected and disengaged from the formal learning task. Engaging all learners as partners in the learning process requires that instructors do the following:

--Consider their attitudes toward and knowledge about the variety of people they teach. Their expectations, behavior, and language may say something about the way they perceive people in general and the learners in particular. For example, do they respond differently to men than to women, to younger students than to older adults?

Instructors have a professional responsibility to accept every adult learner as of equal worth regardless of race, gender, ability, or background.

--Think through the way they present their subjects or topics. The examples and images used should reflect and acknowledge the diversity of learners and their experiences. Engaging learners in the process of extending beyond stereotypical or narrow examples can be another means of developing partnerships.

--Analyze their expectations for the potential of learners to ensure that they are not based on an individual's membership in a particular community. Instructors must act on the belief that change and development are possible for all people and that their role is to assist the process in all learners (Daines, Daines, and Graham 1993).

CONCLUSION

According to Rogers (1989), "Learning is part of a circuit that is one of life's fundamental pleasures: the [instructor's] role is to keep the current flowing" (p. 38). Instructors who have successfully engaged adults as partners by providing direction and support will have succeeded admirably.

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