

Volunteer Opportunities in Adult Literacy Programs

The following is a partial list of opportunities for volunteer involvement with adult literacy programs. Use it to help you start thinking about how you want to become involved. But don't let it limit you. The opportunities are almost endless. [Contact an adult literacy program in your area](#) to discuss these and other opportunities.

Instruction

Although some publicly-funded adult education programs have volunteers who assist paid teachers, many other programs depend primarily on trained volunteer tutors. Some programs use a combination of paid and volunteer instructors.

You can:

- Serve as the primary tutor for a student or small group in one of the following:
 - basic reading and writing
 - English as a second language (ESL)
 - Math
 - Obtaining a GED (high school equivalency diploma)
- Enhance the student's primary instruction by working with an individual or small group on topics such as
 - creative writing
 - spelling
 - job-specific literacy tasks
 - using the computer
- Lead an informal weekly conversation group where ESL students can come to practice their English.
- Help a student practice writing by serving as an on-line pen pal.
- Teach special short-term classes to meet student needs such as:
 - job interview skills (appropriate dress, practice interviews)
 - how to register and vote
 - basic first aid
 - how to pass the citizenship test
 - how to use the library
- Work with students on short-term group projects such as:
 - publishing a collection of student writings
 - sponsoring a neighborhood health fair
 - planning a potluck dinner for students and volunteers
- Start a book discussion club.
- Serve as a reading buddy for students who live alone. Listen to them read by phone.
- Serve as a teacher's assistant to increase the amount of individualized help available to students having difficulty.

Awareness

Raising awareness about adult literacy and making the connection between your community and adults who are struggling to function without basic skills are important steps to ensuring success.

You can:

- Volunteer to be a guest speaker in your community on behalf of adult literacy programs
- Persuade your civic, social, or religious group to help support a local literacy program.
- Contact your federal, state, and local politicians and let them know that literacy is important to you; urge them to support programs in your community, and set up opportunities for them to visit local programs.
- Advocate for the use of “plain English.” Talk to businesses, government officials, hospitals, etc. about how to make information more accessible to people who have difficulty reading and writing.

Program Support

Adult literacy programs offer countless opportunities to volunteers who want to support the program but don’t think that tutoring is the job for them.

You can:

- Provide childcare for parents while they attend classes.
- Make recordings of low-level high-interest books so students can work independently on their reading outside of class.
- Donate new books to the program.
- Set up and maintain a lending library of materials for tutors and students.
- Offer to accompany a student who is anxious about a meeting at a child’s school.
- Set up a mini-grant program to help students continue their education and training after they leave the literacy program.
- Help in the office by greeting visitors, answering phones, keeping records, duplicating, going basic cleaning and maintenance.
- Serve as a newsletter editor.
- Make sets of teaching tools for loan to volunteer tutors (example: picture collections for teaching vocabulary to ESL students).
- Write original stories at easy-to-read levels to provide extra practice for beginning readers.
- Write proposals to solicit funds to support the program and its activities.
- Plan and implement a fund-raising event such as a corporate spelling bee, a run for literacy, a raffle, or a read-a-thon.
- Become a trainer and conduct workshops to train volunteer tutors.
- Become a regular donor.

Policy-making/Governance

Community members can play an important role in helping to make sure that the program is run effectively, has adequate resources, and is responding to the real needs of the community.

You can:

- Serve as a member of the board of directors or advisory board.
- Serve on a committee that oversees areas such as program, public relations, or fund development.

Donated Goods/Services

Think about how someone in your profession or business can contribute goods and services that adult literacy programs need but might have difficulty paying for because of inadequate resources.

You can:

- Offer to conduct free or low-cost screening or diagnostic testing for vision, hearing, or learning disabilities.
- Help a community-based literacy program file for incorporation and apply for tax-exempt status.
- Set up a bookkeeping system and train staff or volunteers in how to use it.
- Offer to print newsletters, stationery, or brochures at no cost.
- Do initial testing of students and advise tutors on how to meet special needs.
- Donate time to counsel students who are dealing with personal crises that impact their ability to learn.
- Donate materials or services to complete renovations or major repair/building projects such construction of a handicapped entrance ramp or replacement of a leaky roof.
- Provide graphics/design services.
- Present life skills workshops related to your profession (for example, realtors [how to buy a house]; bankers [how to set up a family budget]).
- Make space for tutoring available at your worksite.
- Donate used equipment (computers, photocopiers, etc.).
- Include volunteer recruitment notices in your company newsletter.
- Donate prizes that can be used as awards or incentives to students.
- Become a part of a Resource Pool. (Let your local program know what special skills you have and that you'd be available for trainings or presentations.)