

Best Practices for working with Adult Learners¹

Overview: Adult Learners pursuing educational, employment, language or civic goals face significant challenges. Each has their own unique goals and responsibilities that they need to balance. Here are some tips to help you better serve Adult Learners at the Adult Reading Center:

- **Adult Learners have different motivations. Get to know them and their needs. Make it relevant.** *Adult Learners are usually looking to improve their chances for a job or promotion, earn a High School Equivalency (HSE) Credential, learn English or become a U.S. citizen.*
- **Adult Learners want to see tangible results and take the most efficient path.**
- **While many Adult Learners are self-directed, they still need guidance.** *Make access to resources convenient and easy. Add some flexibility.*
- **Most Adult Learners have been in the job market for a decade or more and have life experiences.** *They want to be recognized for what they know rather than where they learned it.*
- **Many Adult Learners have families, jobs and other obligations. They are likely experiencing stress even before they add in their education, career or civic goals.** *Time is precious. When meeting with Adult Learners, stay on topic and focus only on their goals and needs.*
- **Adult Learners want to know the "why" as well as the "how."** *Why do they need their High School Equivalency Credential/Certificate? Why do they need to learn how to speak English? Why do they need their citizenship? What will be the value and benefit(s) that impact their lives?*
- **Each Adult Learner is on a different path and learns differently.** *Assessing where each student is can help you increase success. A younger student with a family to support may be motivated by increased earnings, but an older person whose children are grown may be more interested in personal fulfillment.*
- **Be aware that Adult Learners, like anyone else, may belong to groups that have been historically underserved. A percentage of them may have had no family members earn their HSE, learn how to speak English, obtain their citizenship.** *You may need to make special efforts to reach them and convince them that they can succeed and that education, employment and citizenship can benefit them.*
- **Adult Learners often face obstacles.** *For example, a person's spouse may feel threatened that their partner is moving in a world that excludes the other person, or fear that the partner may "outgrow" them. Students with children may feel guilty about having less time to tend to their needs. Be prepared to offer constructive ways for an Adult Learner to overcome any obstacles in the path.*

¹ **References:** Best Practices when working with Adult Learners was adopted from the 2018 The Council for Adult & Experiential Learning; Article: 9 Things to Consider When Starting to Work with Adult Learners, <https://www.cael.org/alert-blog/9-things-to-consider-when-starting-to-work-with-adult-learners>; Author: Scott Campbell (posted on February 17, 2016) retrieved online on August 10, 2018.