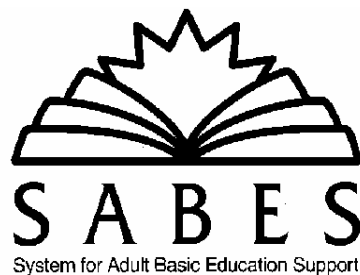


Planning for Program Improvement: A Manual for Adult Basic Education Programs

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The original version of *Planning for Program Improvement* was developed collaboratively in 2002 by a team from the Massachusetts Department of Education- Adult and Community Learning Services, System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), and Massachusetts ABE program directors. It was revised in August 2003 after using it in a variety of training models in Massachusetts with ABE program directors and coordinators and after reviewing a number of published materials on planning. During FY04, a 12-hour training on planning for program improvement, drawing from the steps and resources in this manual, was developed and presented in four of the five SABES regions. Programs were encouraged to send teams of people to the training, which was co-presented by SABES staff and ABE program directors. Detailed feedback on the training and on the Manual was compiled by summarizing participant feedback on evaluation forms, holding a meeting with the trainers on concluding all the training sessions, and meeting with Department of Education staff. The manual has been revised based on that feedback. Each edition has incorporated ideas and material from the *SABES Program and Staff Development Process: A Guidebook for Facilitators*, August 1995. Some minor revisions were incorporated in September 2006 after delivering the course in five SABES regions in FY06.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Manual

Why Plan?

“There are so many conflicting demands on our program. We need a process to decide what is most important.”

“Our funder has mandated we work on yet another new initiative. How do we plan for this new initiative and fit that plan into our overall program plan?”

“We expect significant reductions in our budget and we need to think about developing other funding sources.”

“We have grown so fast over the last few years that things are chaotic. We need to get the program under control.”

“We need to better coordinate and integrate the services we provide with other organizations.”

“We have some specific problems we need to address.”

“We need to figure out what program services to change and/or expand in order to better meet the needs of our students.”

“We want to make the GED graduation special this year but are uncertain what to do and how to go about it.”

These are some of the compelling reasons why ABE programs need to plan. Planning can address specific issues, questions or problems, or can guide the program’s development over several years. Each ABE program operates with its own philosophy, program design and methodology and yet, whatever organizational questions, issues, problems, or vision a program is addressing, the planning process remains essentially the same. Every literacy program needs to continually evaluate and improve its services. Every adult educator, no matter how experienced, needs to engage in continuous professional development. Planning makes it possible for these things to happen in an intentional and systematic way. Without a planning process, program development and staff development may be haphazard and disconnected; may not deal with the most important issues; may not be sustained; may not be informed by experience; and may not include the level of input and participation needed to be effective. Simply by engaging in a planning process as outlined in this manual, you will be practicing program improvement. Try it!

Purpose of the Manual

The purpose of this manual is to help programs and practitioners engage in a systematic process which will lead to program improvement and professional development. It outlines the steps to an effective planning process and provides tools and resources for programs to use. By taking the time to follow the steps of an effective planning process, programs can 1) articulate reasonable, attainable goals with realistic timelines; 2) assume and maintain control of their process; and 3) sustain progress toward their goals. All of the material can be adapted as appropriate to a program's philosophy, structure, and context as well as the limitations on resources (time and money) available.

Sections of the Manual

OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

This section shows the steps in a good planning process as well as pitfalls and strategies to consider when planning. The material is presented in three formats: a flow chart, a narrative, and a chart. Read this section first to get an overview of the process.

PLANNING TOOLS

This section provides templates and guiding questions for use in the planning process.

SCENARIOS

To help you visualize the process in action, we have developed two fictional scenarios.

RESOURCES

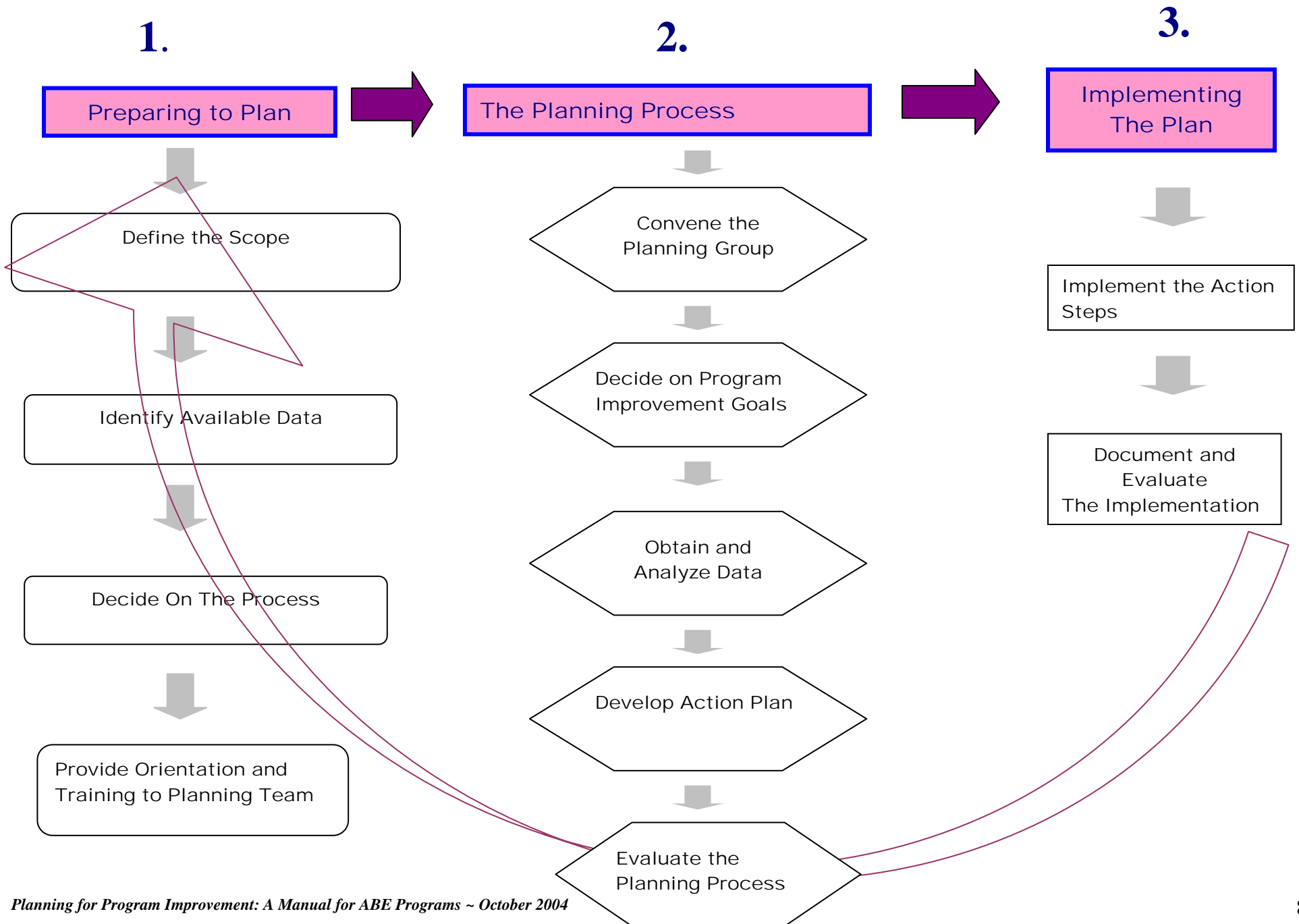
There are several resources that might help you focus your planning efforts, so that you are not starting in a vacuum.

The Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality, developed through a participatory process with the field, are the basis for the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) monitoring process. Whether or not your program is funded by the DOE, these indicators are a useful guide to evaluating program quality. Professional Standards for the ABE License is a set of competencies developed by DOE with strong input from practitioners and stakeholders as part of the requirements for the state's ABE teacher's license. These 29 standards reflect strong agreement across the state on what adult basic education teachers should know and be able to do in order to be considered competent. There are many sources of data for planning. Some are outlined here. Finally, there is a bibliography to lead you to additional resources.

For training and technical assistance in program planning, all Massachusetts ABE programs can contact their regional SABES center. See page 62 for contact information.

OUTLINE OF THE PLANNING CYCLE

THE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT CYCLE



Elements of a Good Planning Process

Planning is the foundation of organizational development. Planning involves *systematic* and *intentional* processes to produce fundamental decisions and actions that guide improvements in an organization (in this case, the ABE program). Sometimes the planning process is focused on a short-term goal, such as planning for an improved GED graduation event, where the timeframe for developing and implementing the plan is relatively brief. At other times the planning process is more complex but concentrates on a particular area, such as developing a Student Advisory Board. In other cases, the planning process is long-term, applied to setting 1 to 3 year program goals that are strategic to the development of the organization. For example, setting a goal of diversifying funding would be a long term, strategic goal that would likely require a plan spanning several years. Whatever the goal, planning is a systematic process that includes distinct elements or steps, each of which embed their own set of processes and tools.

These elements are illustrated in the flow chart on p. 8 and described in more detail below. On p. 14-18, a chart offers further analysis of the elements of planning and strategies for carrying out each of the steps. Although these steps are shown in a linear way, in practice you may vary the order of steps, and some may overlap.

Preparing to Plan: Are You Ready?

It is well worth taking some steps to prepare for planning before launching into the actual planning process. These initial steps need not take much time, but they will help you avoid wasting time and effort later. You will also need to assess whether this is the right time for your organization to engage in program improvement planning. If you are in a crisis situation or there are not sufficient resources for follow through, a different type of planning may be needed at this stage.

Use the pre-planning questionnaire on p. 22-23 to help you get ready to plan. Look at the sample calendar on p. 24-25 to help you decide on the best time of year to schedule the planning process.

Define the scope of the planning

Before embarking on the planning process, decide on the scope and timeframe that implementation of the plan will cover. First, determine how large an area you are looking at: all agency operations, one unit of the agency, or one aspect of the work. For example, a plan might encompass all the programs within a multi-service agency, just the ABE program, a part of the ABE program (e.g. the beginning literacy classes), or one very specific aspect of the program (e.g. the ESOL curriculum.) Then consider the timeframe of the implementation. This can range from a few months to several years. This initial definition of scope will help you to make decisions about who will be involved in the planning and what resources are needed. The scope may be affected by the program's funding cycle and staffing and whether the program is within a larger parent agency.

Identify available data

Identify what data are readily available to help you generate program goals and set priorities. For example, look for a program evaluation report, a monitoring report from your funder, data on student outcomes (e.g. from COGNOS), student evaluations of their teacher or of the program, census data, or a community assets and needs report.

Decide on the process

Depending on the goal and scope of the planning and the organizational structure of your program, the next step is to decide who will be involved in the planning process. In some cases, the entire staff and/or board of directors may be involved. In other cases, there may be a committee or team that does the planning. Generally, wider participation in planning increases ownership, improves communication, and allows creative ideas to emerge. Sometimes a larger group may set the priorities while one or several smaller groups discuss and draft action plans. If a team is created, it is important that you carefully consider the composition of the group. In order for it to be most effective, you may want to ensure that it is balanced according to relevant factors, e.g. the skills and experience of members, job functions, time with the program, gender/ethnic/racial diversity, etc. (See the large program scenario on p. 46 for one example of how to form a group.) Consider the pros and cons of allowing people to self-select. There may also be opportunities for people to be involved in different ways, e.g. through filling out a survey or responding to a draft. You may want to include members of your advisory board in the planning process. Also consider how to include input from your students. For example, students could fill out a survey, conduct a community survey, discuss issues in a student council meeting, or participate on a planning team.

Getting the right mix of people in the team, determining how the team will be supported (time, logistics, resources, group development), and putting the team together in an open and inclusive way are all crucial to the ultimate success of the team. If staff feel coerced or left out, they may not feel committed to implementing the plan. Transparency and buy-in are essential. Keep people informed along the way.

It is important to be clear from the start how much decision-making power the group will have. Will it make decisions or make recommendations to the staff or to the director? Be clear also about how much of a time commitment will be expected of participants, how planning will be structured, and how people's time will be compensated.

Look at "Insights from organizational development theory" on p. 58.

Provide orientation and training

Once the composition of the planning group is known, consider whether some training is needed. Team members may not have a history of working together and may need support during group development. Is there someone in the group with strong facilitation skills to guide discussion and decision-making? Are people comfortable setting goals and objectives? Breaking goals down into manageable steps? Analyzing data? You may need to organize an orientation on some of these issues before the planning process starts. This may be as simple as providing people with instructions or sample forms or as elaborate as a workshop with an outside trainer. Careful attention to orienting the team and providing opportunities to articulate internal team needs is likely to ease problems associated with implementing the process. Look to people on staff first to provide the training.

Linking professional development to your planning process is an essential element of good management. By identifying strengths among your staff and developing support for needed skill enhancement you can strengthen your team and increase ownership of the process.

The Planning Process

Use the planning checklist on p. 26-27 to keep track of the steps in the planning process.

Convene the planning group

Make sure everyone is clear on the roles, responsibilities, power, time commitment, and schedule. It is advisable to begin by setting ground rules for the group. Be clear on responsibilities for facilitation and note taking. Pay attention to group dynamics and building trust among the participants. Set up processes for communication among group members and for informing other stakeholders (e.g. staff, students, board members.) Be careful to document all work. Make sure it is clear what reports or products will be expected. Decide from the outset how you will evaluate the planning process.

Decide on program improvement topics and goals

To develop goals for program improvement and set priorities among the goals, draw on the available data that has been identified in the pre-planning stage as well as group members' knowledge and experience. Identify the program's assets and strengths. Discuss emerging needs, changing student needs, the program mission, and funder expectations. Two useful guidelines against which to evaluate program and staff strengths and needs are the Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality (p. 51) and the Massachusetts professional standards (p. 56-57). These can stimulate ideas for program improvement.

Often, ABE programs will have a staff meeting to brainstorm topics for program improvement and then decide which to pursue. It is helpful to establish criteria for selecting topics. See the criteria for prioritizing on p. 28 as a starting point. See also the matrix for selecting topics (p. 29) as one process to make a decision as a group. The two scenarios (p. 43-50) describe these processes in action.

Obtain and analyze data

Once the goal(s) are established, focus on the specific data that can inform the planning. Experience from program planning in Pennsylvania, for example, has shown that educators are used to fixing problems, not identifying them for further investigation, and are likely to want to jump right into problem solving. Data can be quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative data could include, for example, statistics about changes in community demographics, changing program demographics, program attendance patterns, or average times to complete various classes. It can be expressed in numerical counts, (e.g. 400 female and 300 male students), percentages (e.g. 57% female and 43% male students), averages (e.g. on average, students stay in the program for 100 hours), medians (e.g. the median income in the community is \$40,000), or range (e.g. the range of student ages is 16-81.) Qualitative data could be derived from open-ended questions on student, staff, or community focus groups or surveys, case studies, interviews, or observations. It consists of words and observations rather than numbers. Once the information is gathered, it can be categorized or coded in terms

of themes or patterns. Often both quantitative and qualitative data is needed to understand both what is happening and why it is happening.

Some of this data will already be collected, and some may be readily available through local resources. If the information is not available, you can build in data gathering as an early step in your action plan. For example, if a program had a goal of curriculum revision, the program might generate its own data by gathering student input through small group discussion and/or individual interviews.

For more examples of data sources and the types of questions they can address, see p. 62-63. Also see p. 30 for examples of the types of questions to ask when doing data analysis.

Make an action plan for program improvement

This is a process of identifying the steps that lead to the goal. Use available data and information to help you set objectives and indicators for evaluating success. As in the goal-setting stage, refer to the Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality (p. 51) and the Massachusetts professional standards (p. 56-57) when developing objectives and indicators. Whenever possible or relevant, refer to research that has been done on your topic area (e.g. research by NCSALL—see web resources p. 65-66) or build in time to review research as part of your action plan.

A good planning process comes up with a plan that is achievable within the constraints of the program. Think of objectives as SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Time and resources to implement the plan are identified. Staff development is integrated into the plan. Think about what evidence would indicate success.

See the sample action plan forms on p. 31-34 and p. 38-40. The first two are blank forms that you can use. The next two are samples of forms that were filled out as the planning group wrote and then implemented the plan.

Evaluate the Planning Process

You can start with the sample evaluation questions on page 37.

On-going evaluation of your progress, teamwork, and group dynamics allows you to uncover and deal with any problems as the process unfolds. A final write-up can inform future planning cycles. Planning is an iterative process and learning how to do the process better in the next cycle is in itself a program improvement – a sort of organizational “learning to learn”. Celebrations are also an important part of evaluation, and recognition of staff contributions, learning and participation are critical to building motivation for engagement with future planning efforts.

Implementing the Plan

Implement the Plan

This is the action phase of the program improvement process.

Document and Evaluate the Implementation

See page 41 for sample evaluation questions. These general questions will need to be tailored to your specific action plan.

The ABE director and staff have made a commitment to follow through on the plan. However, there are many reasons why even a solid plan is not fully implemented. These may include funding crises, unanticipated workloads, staff turnover, etc. Building in a clear documentation and evaluation process helps keep the plan from getting derailed. A specific individual should have responsibility for tracking and recording progress on the steps in the plan, and reviews should be scheduled into periodic meetings. Revising the plan as appropriate as a result of evaluation meetings helps keep it realistic. Consider ways to include your students in evaluating the implementation and build their input into your evaluation plan. For example, if your plan was to revise your GED curriculum, ask the GED students directly about their reactions to the change.

The final evaluation can be an important document to show program achievements when applying for funding. It is also a way for the program to learn from the experience when making another plan for program improvement as the planning cycle continues.

Outline of Steps and Considerations in Planning

Preparing to Plan

Steps	Rationale	Pitfalls	Strategies
Define the scope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope • Timeframe 	Clarity about the boundaries of the process will avoid misunderstandings and disillusionment later on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Being too ambitious or unrealistic ◆ Having too limited a scope ◆ Failing to communicate the scope ◆ Not considering timing of program activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Understand the organizational context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent agency • Funding cycle • Staff characteristics • Calendar of program activities
Identify available data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify what data is already collected 	Available data will be useful in deciding on priorities for program improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not knowing where to find data ◆ Data not available in summary form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Available data may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • program evaluation report • monitoring report • data on student outcomes • student evaluations of teachers or program • evaluations of prior planning efforts • census data

Preparing to Plan

Steps	Rationale	Pitfalls	Strategies
<p>Decide on the process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is involved inside the organization • Whether to involve people outside the organization • How decisions will be made • Advisory or decision-making • Time commitment needed • Initial structure • Identify resources for planning 	<p>Planning will be most effective if there is an appropriate mix of people involved. Clear initial understandings about the process and timeframe will enable the group to move forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ How to decide who to involve ◆ Problems of relying on volunteers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same people may always volunteer, but may not have time or it may not be fair • May not provide range of input needed • May not provide a balance ◆ Logistics: providing time and space for people to meet ◆ Staff without history of working together ◆ Pretend process (actually dominated by director) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Understand the organizational context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Parent agency • Mission • Culture • Staff characteristics • Decision making processes ◆ Set up boundaries around volunteering: categories of people needed to insure breadth of input needed and balance of skills ◆ Provide opportunities for people to be involved in different ways ◆ Find creative ways to have time and resources to meet
<p>Provide orientation and training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide what, if any, training is needed and for whom • Identify resources for training 	<p>You cannot assume that participants have the skills necessary to engage in this process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Logistics ◆ Lack of resources ◆ May need consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Training in facilitation and group dynamics ◆ Training in setting goals and objectives ◆ Training in collecting and analyzing data ◆ Identify in-house expertise among staff to support leadership development; use in-house leadership where possible

The Planning Process

Steps	Rationale	Pitfalls	Strategies
<p>Convene the planning group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene group members • Set ground rules • Set up communication processes within the group • Set up communication processes with other stakeholders: other staff, students, board members • Set up processes for documentation of the work • Set criteria to evaluate the planning process 	<p>A clear and positive launch to the group sets the stage for an effective planning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of experience with strong communication ◆ Group dynamics problems: domination, lack of participation, coming early or late, side conversations, lack of focus ◆ Not staying on track ◆ Crisis intervenes and derails the process ◆ Not devoting time and effort needed ◆ Feeling overwhelmed ◆ Morale problems, paralysis ◆ Different perceptions of what happened: lack of recognition of different perspectives, manipulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Establish ground rules and remind people of them ◆ Build in activities for group relationship building ◆ Strong facilitation skills ◆ Activities to focus people, encourage participation ◆ Set up system for reporting in and monitoring ◆ Be prepared to adjust timeframe or scope as necessary ◆ Specify steps, benchmarks, and responsibility ◆ Recommit and re-energize people; try new approaches, activities ◆ Take good official notes; keep them accessible ◆ Vote on key points and record votes ◆ Clarify authority of the group ◆ Build in celebrations of accomplishments
<p>Decide on program improvement topics or goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at available data • Identify program assets and strengths • List possible program improvement topics or goals • Prioritize and select one or more topics or goals 	<p>It will enable people to work in a purposeful manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Difficulty reaching consensus on goal or goals ◆ Difficulty articulating a meaningful and doable goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Agree on criteria for prioritizing ◆ Start with observations, including staff knowledge and experience, information from other sources, and available data ◆ Ask people to back up assertions with evidence

The Planning Process

Steps	Rationale	Pitfalls	Strategies
<p>Obtain and analyze data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate questions • Identify what data needs to be collected to address the program improvement goal • Compile available data • Identify other sources of data • Identify stakeholders who can provide information 	<p>It is important that planning be informed by data, whether this is quantitative or qualitative. This will provide information necessary for needs analysis and for evaluation of the success of the implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not knowing where to find data ◆ Not understanding types and functions of data ◆ Not knowing how to analyze data ◆ Data may be manipulated to support a point of view ◆ Not allowing enough time to compile data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Identify useful data to collect ◆ Identify types of data and data sources ◆ Develop format for collecting anecdotal data ◆ Have a current, accurate needs and assets piece ◆ Learn to use COGNOS ◆ Collect information about the opportunities, challenges, and threats in the wider environment ◆ Collect information from students
<p>Develop an action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write steps to reach the program improvement goal • Identify staff and other resources needed to implement the program improvement plan • Determine staff development needed to implement the plan • Determine how you will evaluate/measure success of the implementation 	<p>A clear step by step plan will allow you to move into the implementation phase.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Confusion about distinctions between goals, objectives, and activities ◆ Confusion between performance goals and staff development goals ◆ Tendency to keep discussing and not reach closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Break down a large task into parts; recognize you need steps to get to a goal, not just an end point ◆ Look at models of action plans ◆ Involve staff in decisions about tasks; use staff strengths and leadership ◆ Build a data gathering or research phase into the plan if needed
<p>Evaluate the planning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate during the process: adjust, revise process based on evaluation • Evaluate at the end of the process • Document the evaluation • Celebrate the process 	<p>Evaluation in the course of the process will enable the group to adjust as needed. Evaluation at the end will provide information that will be useful for future planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not learning from experience with earlier planning processes ◆ Fatigue at end of process—may be inclined to skip this step ◆ Other work has built up while doing the planning and needs attention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Review prior evaluations of planning ◆ Be flexible ◆ Create space for criticism of process to air difficulties; establish atmosphere of open, honest dialogue ◆ Recognize part-time staff constraints ◆ Set up an evaluation schedule with clear criteria

Implementing the Plan

Steps	Rationale	Pitfalls	Strategies
<p>Implement the action steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out the action steps • Provide related staff development • Document your work 	<p>Don't let the plan sit on a shelf!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Roadblocks when translating the plan into actions, e.g. lack of institutional support ◆ Too many separate plans (technology, community planning, curriculum)—how do they feed into and relate to the program improvement plan? ◆ Time constraints for part-time staff ◆ Funding crises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Find creative ways to have time and resources to implement the plan ◆ Identify ways to integrate different initiatives, e.g. curriculum and technology
<p>Document and evaluate the implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect information to support indicators of success • Review and analyze data • Prepare a report 	<p>Evaluation in the course of the implementation (formative) will enable the group to adjust the plan as needed. Evaluation at the end (summative) will provide information about what has been achieved and will be useful for future planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ May simply forget to do it. ◆ May be tempted to manipulate data to paint a rosy picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Build evaluation activities into job descriptions, staff schedules ◆ See evaluation, planning, implementation as a continuous cycle ◆ Set up an evaluation schedule with clear criteria ◆ Emphasize the importance of learning from accurate data

The Relationship Between Program and Staff Development

What is staff development?

Staff development focuses on the learning needs of individual practitioners (teachers, counselors, administrators, support staff, paraprofessionals.) Examples of staff development activities include attending workshops or courses, participating in sharing groups, teacher inquiry/research, study circles, reading relevant research, reviewing curriculum and materials, and participating in peer coaching or mentoring.

What is program development?

The goal of program development is to improve program effectiveness in a way that enables programs to better support learners in attaining literacy skills and meeting their goals. The focus is on the systems that create a program. Examples of program development activities include curriculum development, materials development, establishing a student council, restructuring a program, redesigning an intake process, preparing a staff handbook, designing a new program or subprogram, or fundraising.

How are program and staff development related?

Effective program development is not possible without examining the professional strengths and needs of staff. Both program development and staff development are required components for ABE programs that are funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Often programs do not integrate these two activities, to the detriment of program improvement. Staff development is often treated as an isolated individual endeavor based only on the needs identified by the individual staff person. It is appropriate for individuals to identify their own needs and to address them. However, program improvement will be more effective if individual staff development goals are set within the context of a program's program development goals. For example, if a program has decided to improve the integration of technology into their curriculum, providing technology training for teachers will be an important component of making that work. The staff develop program ownership when they are involved in making the decision to dedicate resources to that particular staff development need. In addition, research has shown that professional development has greater impact when there is opportunity for professional dialogue at the program level.

One way of implementing staff development could be through participation in a work team that is specifically linked to program development and improvement. In order for staff to effectively implement a plan, they may need special training. For example, let us suppose that an adult education center selected development of written ABE and ESOL curricula as their annual goal for program improvement. In developing an action plan, four teachers from four instructional areas agreed to work as a group, and to write down every step necessary to reach the stated goal of having a written ABE/ESOL curriculum. Some of the steps they outlined in the action plan included such activities as conducting an educational needs assessment, familiarizing themselves with mandates and requirements, reviewing the history of curriculum development, studying the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks, conferring with other ABE/ESOL programs, learning more about alternative assessment and goal setting, and working with SABES to get

technical assistance on curriculum development and issues of learning disabilities. In short, a wide array of staff development activities had to be undertaken to develop the capacity of the team to address the program goal. All were powerful forms of staff development, both individually and collectively, and all were clearly linked to the program goal of having written ABE and ESOL curricula.

Many programs, like the one just described, select goals for program development and improvement that necessitate staff learning and growth. A program might select expansion of citizenship education as their goal and pilot a new citizenship education class. As part of the program's plan, a voluntary task force forms to explore citizenship resources and each member of the task force takes responsibility for particular actions and knowledge to bring back to the larger group. For example, one person agrees to work with an attorney to develop a teacher's guide to the citizenship process. Another agrees to research materials that could be used in the curriculum. Both actions result in significant learning, growth and development for the practitioners involved; they also share their learning with others in the program and contribute greatly to the program's goal of piloting a citizenship education class.

Staff who individually attend training or other forms of staff development and apply that learning in their classrooms for improved instruction also contribute to overall program development, although in a less direct or coordinated manner than the examples above illustrate. Valuing and supporting individual development is a critical aspect of program planning. Many programs require or encourage staff to share professional development experiences with the staff as a whole since time spent on these opportunities is financed by the program. While this requires a careful allocation of team meeting time, such sharing builds ongoing staff dialogue.

It is equally important to integrate discussions about how staff development promotes and supports program development as this encourages staff members to think about the whole program as well as individual classroom and responsibilities. Sharing information about the program with staff fosters a better understanding of all the components of the organization, broadens perspectives about the program, and increases staff ownership of program development. The program, in turn, benefits from the energy, creativity, know-how, varied viewpoints and knowledge of its personnel.

See p. 35 for an example of an individual staff development planning form that encourages integration of staff and program development. See also the Massachusetts licensure standards on p. 56. Even if teachers or other staff are not planning to apply for licensure, these can serve as a useful framework for thinking about staff development topics for individuals or groups of staff members or for the program as a whole. For administrators, SABES has developed a tool, the ABE Administrator Self-Assessment, available at www.sabes.org, which outlines the competencies needed by ABE directors and provides forms for self-assessment and goal-setting.

FORMS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Preparing to Plan

Pre-Planning Questionnaire

Use these questions to help you get ready to start the planning process.

Define the Scope and Timeframe

1. Are you making a plan for the entire agency or some part of it?
2. Are you making a plan for all of the work of a unit or some aspect of that work?
3. What period of time will the implementation cover? (E.g. three months, one year, three years)

Identify Available Data

1. Do you have an assessment of program strengths and needs?
2. Do you have data on student participation and outcomes?
3. Do you have a community assessment of assets and needs?
4. What other sources of information, both internal and external to the program, can be tapped?
5. Are there stakeholders (e.g. community planning partnership members) who should be asked for information?

Decide on the Process

Who to involve

1. Who from within the organization should be involved in the planning process?
2. How will you ensure appropriate representation of categories of people to provide sufficient breadth of input and balance of skills?
3. Are there different ways that people could be involved?
4. How will you involve part-time staff?
5. How will you involve your students?

6. Is there anyone outside the organization who should be involved in the planning process?

Decision Making

1. Will the planning group have the authority to make a decision for the organization or is it making a recommendation to another group or individual?
2. How will decisions be made within the planning group?
3. How will you build trust among the people involved in the planning?

Time commitment

1. How much time will you have to plan?
2. When will you start?
3. What is the time commitment expected from each individual involved in planning?

Initial structure

What structure will you use for planning?
E.g. staff meeting, team(s), ad hoc committee

Resources

1. How much time and money are available for the process?
2. What is the source of the resources?
3. Are there adequate resources for the time expected?

Provide Orientation and Training

1. Is any training needed for people to participate fully and effectively in the planning process?
(E.g. training in facilitation skills, intercultural communication, the content area of the plan, group decision-making, setting goals and objectives, collecting and analyzing data, or formulating questions about data.)
2. Are there any in-house staff who can provide training? Any materials? Is it necessary to hire a consultant?

Preparing to Plan Calendar

July	August	September	October
November	December	January	February
March	April	May	June

Preparing to Plan

Sample Calendar for a Short-term Plan

<p>July</p> <p>Registration for summer classes Assessment Compile program evaluation results</p>	<p>August</p> <p>SMARTT rollover</p>	<p>September</p> <p>Registration for fall classes New student orientation Directors' Meeting Preparing to plan</p>	<p>October</p> <p>Network Conference Planning process</p>
<p>November</p> <p>Planning process</p>	<p>December</p> <p>Finalize action plans</p>	<p>January</p> <p>Assessment Begin action plan implementation</p>	<p>February</p> <p>Action plan implementation</p>
<p>March</p> <p>Action plan implementation</p>	<p>April</p> <p>Evaluate action plan</p>	<p>May</p> <p>Refunding application</p>	<p>June</p> <p>End of year assessment Graduation Program evaluation</p>

The Planning Process

Planning Checklist

Steps	Timeline	Persons Responsible	Progress Report
<p>Convene the planning group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene group members • Set ground rules • Set up communication processes within the group • Set up communication processes with other stakeholders: other staff, students, board members • Set up processes for documentation of the work 			
<p>Decide on program improvement topics or goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at available data • Identify program assets and strengths • List possible program improvement topics or goals • Prioritize and select one or more topics or goals 			

The Planning Process

Planning Checklist

Steps	Timeline	Persons Responsible	Progress Report
<p>Obtain and analyze data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate questions • Identify what data needs to be collected to address the program improvement goal • Compile available data • Identify other sources of data • Identify stakeholders who can provide information 			
<p>Develop an action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write steps to reach the program improvement goal • Identify staff and other resources needed to implement the program improvement plan • Determine staff development needed to implement the plan • Determine how you will evaluate/measure success of the implementation 			
<p>Evaluate the planning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate during the process: adjust, revise process based on evaluation • Evaluate at the end of the process • Document the evaluation • Celebrate the process 			

The Planning Process

Criteria for Selecting Topics for a Plan

It can be difficult to make a decision about what topics to focus on in a plan for program improvement. Here are some criteria to consider when making that decision. You can develop your own criteria to substitute for these or to add to these.

1. Is there evidence of a need for change in this area?
2. Is there an urgent need for change?
3. How important is this topic to the work of the program?
4. Will this have a long-lasting or broad impact?
5. Is it feasible or practical to work on this?
6. Are there staff members with a particular interest in this topic?
7. How much of an impact will this have on student outcomes?

The Planning Process

Matrix for Selecting Topics for a Plan

Instructions: As a group, brainstorm a list of topics. Then individually rank each topic from 1 to 5 on each criterion, with 5 being highest. (*Urgency = how soon the problem needs to be addressed. Importance = how essential the issue is to the organization. Feasibility = how likely that you can effect change in this area.*) Add up the numbers and rank order the top 3-5 topics. The group discusses the individual rankings and agrees on a group ranking of priorities. The top priority may not necessarily be the topic with the highest number. For example, if a topic has top rankings on urgency and importance, but a very low ranking on feasibility, the group may decide that it is not practical to work on it at this time.

Topic	Urgency	Importance	Feasibility	Total	Individual Ranking	Group Ranking

Adapted from *Getting Excited About Data: How to Combine People, Passion, and Proof*, Edie L. Holcomb. Corwin Press, Inc., 1999.

The Planning Process

Sample Data Analysis Questions

Some of these questions can be answered by the data and existing information and some will lead to further data collection.

1. Does the program have a goal or target in this area?
2. Are we meeting our goal?
3. Are we meeting student needs?
4. Do the data match our observations or intuitions?
5. What factors contribute to success or difficulties in this area?
6. Does the program have policies or procedures affecting this area?
7. What are we doing well?
8. What do we need to improve?
9. What additional information do we need?

For example, if you are looking at attendance data:

1. Does the program have an attendance goal?
2. If so, are we meeting the attendance goal?
3. Do our attendance patterns indicate that we are serving students well?
4. Was there anything in the data that was surprising?
5. What factors contribute to good attendance? What factors contribute to attendance problems? If the data is purely quantitative, how can we check our hypotheses?
6. Does the program have an attendance policy?
7. What can we celebrate about our student attendance? (E.g. an improvement over the previous year, a particular class with exemplary attendance.)
8. What do we need to improve about our student attendance?
9. What additional information do we need? (E.g. breakdown of attendance patterns by class, type of class, month, site, student characteristics.)

The Planning Process

Action Plan

Planning and Reporting Form 1

Goal:

Objective 1:

Indicators of success:

Activity	Who	Timeline	Resources	Staff Development	Progress Report

Objective 2:

Indicators of success:

Activity	Who	Timeline	Resources	Staff Development	Progress Report

The Planning Process

Action Plan

Planning and Reporting Form 2

Goal:

Objective 1:

Indicators of success:

Activity 1:

Timeline:

Persons responsible:

Resources:

Staff development:

Progress Report:

Activity 2:

Timeline:
Persons responsible:
Resources:
Staff development:

Progress Report:

Activity 3:

Timeline:
Persons responsible:
Resources:
Staff development:

Progress Report:

The Planning Process

Connecting Staff and Program Development

Individual Professional Development Plan

NAME: _____

The Program's professional development priorities for this year (based on planning and funding priorities) are:

(Complete this section before handing out to staff)

- _____
- _____
- _____

Please answer the following questions for each of your goals for this year.

<i>Goal</i>	What do you want to learn? (topic, skill)
<i>Method</i>	How will you learn? (e.g. workshop, course, observation, research, reading, study circle)
<i>Resources needed</i>	E.g. in-house workshop, peer coach, course fee, technical assistance, substitute
<i>Reason for selecting</i>	How will this enhance your work/the program's services?
<i>Licensure standards</i>	Which, if any, licensure standard does this correspond to?
<i>Sharing</i>	Ideas for sharing learning with other staff, e.g. product, presentation, training
<i>Hours</i>	Approximate number of hours you will spend acquiring this knowledge or skill

Goal 1: _____

Method: _____

Resources: _____

Reason for selecting: _____

Licensure standard: _____

Sharing: _____

This goal fits within our program's priorities for this year? ___yes ___no **Hours:** _____

Goal 2: _____

Method: _____

Resources: _____

Reason for selecting: _____

Licensure standard: _____

Sharing: _____

This goal fits within our program's priorities for this year? ___yes ___no **Hours:** _____

Goal 3: _____

Method: _____

Resources: _____

Reason for selecting: _____

Licensure standard: _____

Sharing: _____

This goal fits within our program's priorities for this year? ___yes ___no **Hours:** _____

Staff development to offer

If you can offer training or facilitation to other staff on a topic or skill, please describe it below.

Topic or skill: _____

Method: _____

This topic fits within our program's priorities for this year? ___yes ___no **Hours:** _____

The Planning Process

Sample Evaluation Questions

Evaluation of the planning process

1. Who was involved in the planning process? How would you evaluate the level of participation?
2. What data did you use in your planning? How complete and appropriate was the data collected?
3. Was there a clear decision-making process? Was it adhered to?
4. How well did communication work in the process?
5. Were there adequate resources for the planning process?
6. What worked well in the planning process?
7. What difficulties did you encounter in the planning process?
8. Were those difficulties resolved? How?
9. Did you make any changes in the planning process based on ongoing evaluation?
10. Were there any unexpected outcomes of the planning process?
11. Did you end up with a plan that is realistic and in tune with the program's mission and organizational structure?

Implementing the Plan

Action Plan

Planning and Reporting Form 1—Sample 1

Goal: To improve the professional capacity of all program staff

Objective 1: To increase the total staff development hours for all staff including part-timers, over the current level, by June 2004

Indicators of success: By July 2005, all staff will have exceeded the DOE required 2.5% rates allocation for staff development. Through a self-evaluations regarding the outcomes of staff development activities, staff will report an increased sense of confidence and capability in their teaching activities.

Activity	Who	Timeline	Resources	Staff Development	What Happened
Review existing staff development activities over the past 2 years	Staff Development Coordinator & Administrative Support Staff	July/ August	Staff personnel files	NA	<i>Report was created indicating all staff development engaged in over the previous 2 years and indicating that staff had not met the 2.5% requirement</i>
Develop and administer a staff needs assessment for professional development	Staff Development Coordinator and all staff	July/August	Create a survey Create discussion questions Staff time to complete the survey and compile the results	Survey development training	<i>Aug: Administered, compiled and analyzed the results from the staff needs assessment. Determined that staff would like more curriculum development training.</i>
Program Director will meet with each practitioner to develop an individual professional development plan	Program Director and all staff	September	To be determined	Depending on surveyed need, may organize or look for staff development opportunities on curriculum development, counseling, participatory ed., etc.	<i>Sept: Professional development plans documented for all staff with timelines for completing and dates for follow-up.</i>
Track all staff development activities for the current year	Staff Development Coordinator	June	Completion certificates, staff training reports	To be determined	<i>June: Staff development hours increased to 10% over previous years. Will continue to discuss ways to improve.</i>
Administer staff development self-evaluation survey to all staff	Staff Development Coordinator, all staff	June	Discussion and sharing time during a staff meeting		<i>June: Staff self-reported benefits acquired through the past year's staff development activities.</i>

Implementing the Plan

Action Plan

Planning and Reporting Form 1—Sample 2

Goal: To improve student retention

Objective 1: To increase the percentage of GED students who complete one 4-month semester

Indicators of success: Increase in the percentage of GED students completing the final 4-month semester of this fiscal year and the first semester of next fiscal year as compared to the past three years.

Activity	Who	Timeline	Resources	Staff Development	Progress report
Chart data for past 3 years on % of GED students completing one semester. Separate by age, gender, ethnicity, time of year	Administrative support staff	November	Student attendance files Student database	NA	<i>Nov: Data was compiled and charted using COGNOS. Patterns seen: average completion rate 30% higher in fall than spring semester; students below age 22 less likely to complete semester</i>
(1) Interview students from past year to find out reasons for staying or leaving. (2) Discuss attendance with current students and solicit ideas	GED teachers and counselor Volunteer classroom aide/tutor	November, December	Create a script for calls Create discussion questions Staff time to make calls if volunteer is not available	Practice calling script	<i>Dec: Reached only 10% of students. Top reasons cited for dropping class: illness, class was boring, change in job schedule Current students said class felt too much like their high school; wanted to work more in groups</i>
Depending on patterns seen, make a plan to address retention	GED teachers, counselors, director	January	To be determined	Depending on patterns seen, may organize or look for staff development opportunities on working with youth, curriculum development, counseling, etc.	<i>Jan: Decided to integrate more engaging activities into class.</i>
Implement retention plan	GED teachers, counselors, director	February-June		Train staff to implement plan	<i>Attended workshop on Multiple Intelligences in ABE and applied ideas to classes.</i>
Evaluate effectiveness of the retention effort by looking at attendance data in COGNOS and discussing with staff and students	GED teachers, counselor, director, support staff person	June	Attendance data		<i>June: Completion rate increased to 50%. Will continue to discuss ways to improve.</i>

Implementing the Plan

Sample Evaluation Questions

Evaluation of the implementation of the program improvement plan

1. Were you able to implement the plan as a whole or in part? What factors affected the implementation?
2. Did you reach your goals and objectives?
3. Did you make any changes in the plan based on ongoing evaluation?
4. What specific changes have occurred as a result of the implementation? (Provide evidence of change.)
5. How have students responded to the changes?
6. Were there any unexpected outcomes?
7. What have you learned that will help you in the future?

SCENARIOS

Scenario—Small Program

Background

The ABC Program has two full-time staff members—the director and a teacher/counselor—and three part-time teachers. It is part of a larger agency that also offers an after-school program and job search assistance for the community. The program offers five ESOL classes in three 10-week cycles. The first two weeks in September, the staff focus on intake, assessment, and placement of new students and lesson preparation. The director, Erica, decided to have a meeting of all staff at the beginning of the first week. She had recently attended a workshop at SABES where she and other program directors filled out an ABE Administrator Self-Assessment form. As a result of that workshop, she became interested in initiating a more systematic planning process in her program. The SABES workshop leader gave her a copy of the Planning for Program Improvement Manual and offered to help with the process.

Preparing to Plan: scope, timeframe, and data

Several days before the staff meeting, Erica reviewed the Preparing to Plan questionnaire with Ruben, the full-time teacher/counselor. They decided to start with a short-term process. The plan would cover some aspect of the ESOL program and would be implemented in the second half of the fiscal year, January to June. The data they had available consisted of attendance records and student assessment results. They had never done a program evaluation. They decided to ask the staff from other parts of the agency if they had any assessments of community assets or needs.

Preparing to Plan: deciding on the process

Since the program is small, all staff could be involved in setting goals and objectives. However, because of funding constraints, they could only afford to pay one or more part-time teachers for about 10 hours of planning time. Some additional funds would be available for implementing the plan.

Ruben pulled together attendance and assessment data from the previous cycle of classes using SMARTT and COGNOS. Erica got some community demographic data and information about local employers from the agency's employment staff. They put this information in staff mailboxes and asked the teachers to look it over before the staff meeting.

Erica spoke individually with the three part-time teachers to see if any of them could put in some extra time doing planning. Tara had a full-time day job and could not spare any more time. Lenore had childcare constraints. Fran said she would be interested if the schedule could be worked out.

At the staff meeting, Erica presented the idea of doing a planning process for program improvement. She suggested that the five of them together would decide on the priorities. Then she, Ruben and Fran could meet to work out a plan. They would bring it back to the whole group to discuss and revise before going forward. Everyone agreed to try out this process.

For ground rules, they agreed that everyone would have an equal voice in setting priorities. When they brainstormed strengths and needs, all suggestions would be listed and people would not criticize each others' ideas.

The Planning Process: deciding on program improvement goals

Erica asked everyone to brainstorm the strengths of the program and of staff members. The items listed included:

- a friendly, relaxed atmosphere
- two staff members who are fluent in Spanish and English
- in-house employment services they can refer students to
- educational counseling
- Ruben is a whiz with spreadsheets
- location near public transportation

Erica and Ruben then summarized the information they had gathered. Erica said that the program was serving primarily students from the Dominican Republic, but the employment services staff said that the neighborhood included an increasing number of Central Americans and Haitians. Ruben said that student attendance was good during each cycle, but many students did not return for a second cycle. As a result, they did not see much improvement in assessment data.

The staff then brainstormed some areas of need. These included:

- time for staff to meet and talk about teaching methods
- outreach to the community
- student retention
- ways to help students who were not making much progress
- evaluations of teachers and the program by students
- translations of counseling materials
- staff handbook

Erica passed out the Criteria for Selecting Topics for a Plan (from the Planning for Program Improvement Manual.) They used the guiding questions to discuss the needs they had listed. After some discussion, they moved to a vote. They decided to use the dot voting process. Each staff member got two colored sticky dots. They placed the dots next to the items that they felt should get the highest priority for that year's program improvement plan.

They found that the dots clustered primarily around student retention and evaluations of teachers and the program. They decided to select retention as a topic, and to use that as a way to get more information directly from students. The goal would be to increase student retention.

Convening the planning group

A week later, Erica, Ruben, and Fran met for their first planning session. They agreed that they would have two meetings, each two hours long.

Obtaining and analyzing data

In order to plan the program evaluation process, they began by brainstorming what information they wanted to get and what were possible sources for that information. For example, they could examine attendance data for the past two years, interview students and former students, and find out what teachers and counselors already knew. They could also talk to other ABE programs about their experiences and strategies. They decided to start by analyzing attendance data using COGNOS. Before the next meeting, Ruben would prepare graphs showing what percentage of students stayed for a complete cycle and what percentage stayed for a whole year. He would make separate graphs for each level of ESOL class.

Making an action plan

At the next meeting, Erica, Ruben, and Fran discussed the data that Ruben had prepared. They noticed that students in the beginning ESOL classes were most likely to come to more than one cycle. The majority of intermediate and advanced level students came to only one cycle. Attendance was worst in the third cycle of the year. After some discussion of these findings, they drafted a more specific goal of increasing student retention in the two intermediate level classes. They came up with two objectives: (1) increase the percentage of intermediate students who continue from the second to the third cycle of classes from 20% to 40% and (2) increase attendance of intermediate students in the last cycle of the year from 60% to 70%. They wrote out a series of steps to reach those objectives. Using the action plan chart in the Planning Guide, they identified staff time that would be needed to carry out the steps and staff development needed to help them do it well.

The planning group brought the draft action plan to the other teachers in the next staff meeting. After some discussion, the steps were revised and accepted by all. They decided that they needed more time to complete them, and Erica promised to find a volunteer or intern to help.

Evaluating the planning process

The group then evaluated their planning process. They looked at how inclusive it was, whether everyone felt heard, and whether the plan seemed doable in the time period available. They felt proud of what they had accomplished so far and excited but a little nervous about the work that lay ahead.

Scenario—Large Program

Background

The XYZ Program, a school department ABE program located in an urban area, offers classes in English as a second language, basic reading, writing, and math, GED preparation, and an Adult Diploma Program. It has a workplace education program located in two local nursing homes, a family literacy program, and special classes for homeless adults in collaboration with two local shelters. Over 1200 students are served each year. The program has 15 full-time staff members and 40 part time teachers and support staff. Full-time staff and representatives of part-time staff meet weekly. The director, Leyla, meets every two weeks with the leadership team, which consists of the ABE and ESOL coordinators and the program coordinators for the workplace, family literacy, and homeless services. Each class elects one representative to a Student Council, which meets monthly. The program also participates in a community ABE Advisory Council which includes representatives of many community agencies as well as some former adult education students.

Each year, XYZ organizes a program evaluation. Students and staff fill out program evaluation surveys. The results are tallied by administrative staff and distributed to staff.

Preparing to Plan: scope, timeframe, and data

The leadership team met to discuss the scope of the planning. Although the program had generally done annual program improvement plans, they felt it would be beneficial to extend the timeframe. They opted for a three-year plan which would cover the full scope of their work, focusing on the areas that needed the most improvement. Having a three-year timeframe would allow them to deal with more aspects of the program without being over-ambitious.

The data they identified included the latest program evaluations by staff and students, attendance records from the SMARTT database, student assessment results, and their community assets and needs document.

Preparing to Plan: deciding on the process

The leadership team wanted maximum input into the plan, but they knew it would be impossible for all staff and students to participate in all meetings and discussions. They had built in enough time in their grants to pay for some staff time for planning. They decided to form a representative planning team of 10 people, 2 of them students. Everyone agreed that the director should be part of the team. For the other 7 team members from among the staff, they decided on several criteria to balance the perspectives of the group: instructional area, time working in the program, part-time or full-time status, race or ethnicity. The team would be 50% ESOL and 50% ABE. There would be at least 3 part-time staff members represented. There would be at least 2 new staff members and at least two nonwhite staff members. They surveyed part-time staff to find out their availability for a series of Friday afternoon meetings. Six people said they were available. All full-time staff members were asked to put their names in the pool. They discussed the process with the Student Advisory Council and asked for volunteers. Students would be compensated for their time on the team.

Eight students came forward. After a meeting to outline the tasks and requirements, three of them changed their minds. The remaining five were interviewed individually, and two were selected.

The program adopted a process of random selection within the specified criteria. The first step was to take the names of the 20 available people and write them on strips of paper. The names were then divided according to whether the person was mostly in the ABE or ESOL department. A name was selected from each pile. Frank's name was picked first. His paper was labeled part-time/new/nonwhite/ESL. The second name was Myriam. Her paper was labeled full-time/white/not new/ABE. They continued in this way with each pile. The final group was as follows: 50% ESOL, 50% ABE, two new staff members, 2 part-time members, and two nonwhite members. In order to reach the desired composition, they needed one more part-time member. The last person full-time person selected was removed. From the remaining names, they took the names of all part-timers and randomly selected one. The team was now complete. Staff members: Leyla, Frank, Myriam, Shanti, Cara, Joe, Nancy, Felipe. Student members: Caye, Chris.

This team would oversee the planning process. However, all staff would be invited to set priorities and to comment on drafts.

Preparing to Plan: provide orientation and training

Since Caye and Chris, the student members, were new to this kind of process, Cara gave them a training on meeting participation and setting goals and objectives and encouraged them to speak up in the meetings. Cara served as a buddy for them throughout the process. She checked in with them before and after each Team meeting to make sure they were comfortable with the process.

The Planning Process: convene the planning group

The Planning Team had their first meeting. The members did an icebreaker activity to get to know each other. Then they set a schedule of six meetings and ground rules for the meetings. They divided up tasks before the next meeting. Nancy and Felipe would summarize the priorities from the staff and student evaluations. Then Caye and Chris would take those priorities to the Student Council meeting for ideas. Frank and Myriam would take selected data from SMARTT and COGNOS and summarize it in graph form so it would be easy for people to understand at a glance. Leyla and Shanti would pull together some resources to get people thinking (Indicators of Program Quality, licensure standards, summaries of a few research studies.) Joe would take responsibility for setting up meeting rooms.

The Planning Process: analyzing the data

Program strengths that emerged from both the staff and student evaluations included the quality and dedication of the staff, the fact that classes were free, the choice of different class times, fiscal management, and record-keeping. Broad areas of need were curriculum, counseling and follow-up, facilities, part timer needs, staff development, and funding.

Program data showed that attendance was highest for the lower level classes and dropped off somewhat as the levels went up. There was a slump in student learning gains at the intermediate ABE level. The community assets and needs report showed a huge unmet need for services, particularly at the lower levels of ESOL. The greatest demand was for evening classes.

In the Student Council meeting, students said that they liked the teachers very much, but they did not feel like there was a plan for the class. Although they had books, they did not use them regularly. They wanted to see a plan for the term so they could feel like they were making progress. They also said that they were very concerned about the waiting lists for classes. Many of them had friends or relatives who had been waiting for many months, and they were desperate to get into class.

Leyla and Shanti reminded the group of the Indicators of Program Quality and gave them summaries of key findings from the NCSALL studies of learner persistence, multiple intelligences, and authentic materials.

The Planning Team met after two weeks to go over the information they had collected. They discussed how they would summarize and present it. They planned the process for a staff meeting to set priorities.

The Planning Process: deciding on program improvement goals

The Planning Team decided that the decision about program improvement goals should be made in a staff meeting so as many people as possible would be involved and would feel invested in the process. They posted the Indicators of Program Quality and the program's mission statement on the wall as references. They also posted the summaries of program strengths and priorities for improvement from the evaluations. Leyla and Cara co-facilitated the meeting, which was attended by all 15 full-time staff members and 20 part-time members. First, Leyla gave an overview of the process. The data and resources had been distributed to staff in advance, but Frank and Myriam gave a quick overview of them. Cara led the group in a brainstorming activity. The group came up with 16 items. Then they used a matrix (p. 29) to rank the items individually. In small groups of 5, they discussed their rankings and arrived at a group consensus. Then the whole group looked at the small group rankings and arrived at agreement on their top 5 areas. The Planning Group took down names of people who volunteered to give input on each area.

The Planning Process: making an action plan

With this decision on the priorities in hand, the Planning Team had their third meeting. They agreed that they had had a very good discussion in the staff meeting. They each selected a priority area which they had the most interest and expertise in. In groups of two, using the action plan template, they did a quick draft of the activities. They showed them to each other for feedback. They then passed on the draft to the staff volunteers for input.

At their next meeting, the Planning Group incorporated the feedback from the other staff into their action plans. They created a large wall calendar and charted the activities on it. They found that they had planned to do almost everything in Year One. They rearranged the timelines so that the activities were more evenly spread over the months and years. They gave each other feedback on the content and wording of the plans.

The next step was to give the whole package to staff for final feedback. This was done in writing, with a deadline of one week for comments. Once those comments came back and were incorporated, the plan was ready to be finalized. The first page of the document was a list of strengths of the program identified through the program evaluation process. Then came a list of the goals, and

then the action plan for each goal. Finally, there was a schedule of dates to monitor progress towards the objectives. This would happen once each quarter.

The Planning Process: evaluating the planning process

Once the plan was finalized, the Planning Team members had a final session which was a combination of reflection on the process and celebration. They discussed the difficult moments they had experienced and how they had dealt with some interpersonal tensions. They talked about how hard it had been to keep focused on the planning when so many other work-related, and sometimes personal, issues were on their minds. Everyone felt they had worked very hard, more than they had expected. But they also felt they had learned a lot and that the program had a solid plan for improvement over the next three years. They wrote down what they had learned about working together so the next planning team could learn from their experience. Then they celebrated with cake and ice cream and some dance music that Chris had brought in.

RESOURCES

Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality

August, 2005

Block	Quality Indicator
Curriculum & Instruction	1. Curriculum development and instruction are aligned with and incorporate learning standards from the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks and contribute to students' progress toward achieving their goals.
Student Progress	2. Students demonstrate gains in literacy and/or English skills and abilities that impact their roles as workers, family members, community members, and as lifelong learners.
Non-instructional Services	3. The program offers services to support instruction and meet students' needs.
	4. The program has developed linkages that connect community assets to student needs.
Management & Leadership	5. Program planning embodies effective organizational structures and processes to serve the needs of adult students.
	6. Exemplary professional development opportunities enhance educator professionalism to provide quality instruction for students.
	7. Program management and accountability are efficient, and effectively address all components of service delivery.

Massachusetts Department of Education Professional Standards for Adult Basic Education Teachers

The Professional Standards for Teachers define the pedagogical and other professional knowledge and skills required of ABE teachers. These Standards are used by ABE teacher preparation providers in preparing their candidates, by the Department in reviewing programs seeking state approval, and by the Department as the basis for evaluating applicants' proficiency.

Professional Standards.

Understanding the Adult Learner

1. Incorporates theories of and research in adult development in designing effective instruction appropriate to the learning environment (e.g., in the classroom, workplace, homeless shelter).
2. Incorporates theories of and research in adult learning and in learning disabilities in designing effective instruction appropriate to the learning environment.
3. Uses knowledge of the factors that influence adult learners' participation and persistence in adult basic education programs to increase learner success.

Diversity and Equity

1. Interacts equitably and responsibly with all learners.
2. Provides learners with strategies and tools to collaborate with other learners, co-workers, and community members.
3. Draws on the range of interests, needs, and approaches of learners in planning instruction.
4. Promotes learner understanding of American civic culture, its underlying ideals, political principles, institutions, procedures, and processes in the design of curriculum.
5. Uses, in appropriate contexts, instructional materials conveying a range of contributions of various immigrant and native groups have made to American society.

Instructional Design and Teaching Approaches

1. Draws on the history, structure, purpose, and critical issues of adult basic education in planning instruction.
2. Uses needs analyses in the design of instruction.
3. Designs curriculum relevant to the experiences, interests, and goals of learners, the particular instructional setting, and the Department's adult basic education curriculum frameworks.

4. Integrates appropriate use of technologies into the adult education teaching and learning process.
5. Sets forth the learning objectives, instructional methods, and their rationale in the design of instruction and makes them available to colleagues and learners.
6. Uses a variety of instructional methods, techniques, and tools that facilitate adult learning.
7. Uses strategies that are effective for learners to develop and use critical thinking and to solve complex problems.

Learner Assessment and Evaluation

1. Creates and uses formal and informal assessments for the purpose of placing learners at the appropriate instructional level.
2. Creates and uses formative and summative assessments to evaluate learner progress.
3. Confers with colleagues, supervisors, and community resources when special assessments are required.
4. Evaluates the effectiveness of instruction and modifies it based upon results and student feedback.
5. Uses data collection systems for program improvement.

Facilitating the Adult Learning Environment

1. Communicates effectively and appropriately with learners.
2. Creates an environment conducive to adult learning.
3. Promotes learner involvement in community and societal issues.
4. Refers adult learners with challenging life issues to the appropriate resources.
5. Uses resources available to learners to develop employment readiness skills.
6. Collaborates effectively with learners, colleagues, and relevant members of various educational settings (e.g., family literacy, corrections, or workplace education) and the community at large.
7. Incorporates the principles of lifelong learning (e.g., modeling self-application methods) to prepare learners for continued education and training outside the classroom.

Professionalism/Continuing Education

1. Reflects critically on the experiences of self and others, such as learners, colleagues, and supervisors.
2. Develops goals for an individual professional development plan.

Insights from Organizational Development Theory

- ❖ Organizations have cultures.
- ❖ Organizations are organisms that have interrelated parts and systems.
- ❖ Organizations need to pay attention to the human needs of those who they employ as well as to organizational needs.
- ❖ People within an organization need to feel that they are a part of the organization.
- ❖ People within organizations have different work styles.
- ❖ Organizations need to balance stability and change.
- ❖ People within organizations need to have a shared understanding of the organization's goals.
- ❖ Change begins with an agreed-upon goal or need.
- ❖ Organizations need to consider both process and product to accomplish organizational change.
- ❖ Organizations don't exist in a vacuum. They interact with individuals, communities, other organizations, socio-cultural systems, and political events.

From SABES Program and Staff Development Process: A Guidebook for Facilitators, 1995

Sources of Data

<u>Sources</u>	<u>Sample Questions:</u>
<p>Surveys (students, staff, former students, board members, community, etc.)</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Community Meetings</p> <p>Focus Groups</p> <p>Observations</p> <p>Samples of student work</p> <p>**Students and volunteers could help collect and distribute the surveys.</p>	<p>What have you been using in the computer lab today? Can you explain [software name] to someone else?</p> <p>How long have you been coming to the ABE program?</p> <p>What has changed for you since you started coming to the program?</p> <p>How has the ABE program helped you?</p> <p>What do you like about the program?</p> <p>What changes would you suggest in the program?</p> <p>What support services do students need?</p>
<p>Commonwealth Communities Website</p> <p>http://www.state.ma.us/cc</p>	<p>Who lives in your community?</p> <p>What is your community of focus?</p> <p>What transportation is available?</p> <p>What are the income levels in your community?</p>
<p>Census Data</p> <p>http://factfinder.census.gov</p>	<p>What is the population of your community?</p> <p>Poverty level?</p> <p>Employment and income levels?</p> <p>Education?</p>
<p>MISER data</p> <p>http://umass.edu/miser</p>	<p>How many parents of school age children in your community are under-educated and/or limited English proficient?</p> <p>Which census tracks or even blocks do these potential students live in?</p>

<p>Mass Department of Health</p> <p>http://masschip.state.ma.us/</p> <p>(This site needs to download a lg. 23 mb. interface.)</p>	<p>Where can ABE/ESOL/ families find health services?</p>
<p>ACLS Web site</p> <p>www.doe.mass.edu/acls</p>	<p>Are there enough ABE services offered to meet the demand?</p>
<p>On the ABE Directory – Agency Mailing labels</p> <p>https://smartt.doemass.org/smartt2/abeDirectoryHome.html</p> <p>Massachusetts ABE Hotline</p> <p>www.sabes.org/hotline</p>	<p>Where classes are being held? What times? What days of the week? Who can be contacted for additional information?</p> <p>How many people are on the waiting list?</p> <p>Are there any programs close to my program where I could refer a student?</p>
<p>SMARTT system – Student list, staff list, waitlist. All can be exported to Excel for labels and used for mailings.</p> <p>http://smartt.doemass.org/smartt2</p> <p>(logon/password needed for your own program.)</p>	<p>Who are the students in our program?</p> <p>Who is on the staff?</p> <p>What students are waiting to attend our classes?</p>

Cognos ReportNet	
https://smartt.doemass.org/cognos	
<p><u>Student Demographics CUBE</u> includes the following data –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fiscal Year 2. Funding Sources 3. States-cities/towns, 4. Primary Assessment Area - ESOL/ABE, 5. Native Language 6. Race 7. Country of Origin 8. Age 9. Gender 10. Measures <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. # of Students 2. Avg. attend hours 3. Goals set & Goals met, incl. % of Set vs. met. 	<p>What cities or towns do my students age 18-24 come from?</p> <p>What is the age range?</p> <p>Which countries did they come from originally?</p> <p>What is the number of goals set?</p> <p>How many of those goals are actually met?</p> <p>What are their native languages?</p> <p>What is the average attended hour?</p> <p>Do attended hours relate to goals being met?</p> <p>How many students are in my program?</p> <p>Are the students coming for GED or ESOL classes?</p> <p>How do I compare to other programs similar in size to my program?</p>
<p><u>Attendance CUBE</u> includes the following data –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fiscal Year 2. Funding Source 3. Class type 4. Hour's category 5. Measures – Attendance %, Planned Hours, Attended Hours, Rate based attendance, Non-Rates based attendance, and Class hours. 	<p>What is the attendance percentage for all my program's classes?</p> <p>Which classes have the best attendance?</p> <p>What is the attendance for classes that are non-rates based?</p> <p>How do I compare to other programs that are similar in size to my program?</p> <p>How does attendance this fiscal year compare to previous fiscal years?</p>
<p><u>Volunteers Cube</u> includes the following data -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agencies/Projects w/Volunteers 2. Monthly Hours 3. Service – ABE+ ESOL 4. Class/ Match 5. Gender 6. Fiscal Year 	<p>How many hours do volunteers give their time?</p> <p>How many volunteers are there is Massachusetts DOE-funded programs?</p> <p>How many hours are the volunteers available?</p>

<p>Adhoc Reports</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enrollment-Wait List 2. Even Start Reports 3. Non Rate Based Class Reports 4. Performance Reports <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Learning Gains by Test (Site) b. Learning Gains by Test (Project) c. Pre/Post by Project 5. SSN Confidentiality Release Reports 	
<p>Federal Reports</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Federal Reports – FY 2001 2. Federal Reports – FY 2002 3. Federal Reports – FY 2003 4. Federal Reports – FY 2004 5. Federal Reports – FY 2005 6. Federal Reports – FY 2006 	

SYSTEM FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SUPPORT (SABES) OVERVIEW



www.sabes.org

Established in 1990 by the Massachusetts Department of Education, SABES, the System for Adult Basic Education Support, is a comprehensive training and technical assistance initiative for adult basic education (ABE) practitioners and programs. The mission of SABES is to promote high quality adult basic education services through training, support, and resources that improve the skills and knowledge of practitioners and strengthen programs.

SABES services are delivered through five Regional Support Centers (RSCs) and a Central Resource Center. Examples of SABES activities include:

- New staff orientation
- Workshops, course, institutes, and conferences on key content areas
- Sharing groups for practitioners
- Training and support on curriculum and assessment
- Training and support on the use of technology
- Training and support on program design and program improvement planning
- Technical assistance for practitioners and programs
- Support for and dissemination of relevant research
- Support for teachers working towards ABE licensure
- Practitioner leadership development
- ABE student leadership development
- Participation in collaborations and system-building activities
- Publication of *Field Notes*

The Boston RSC (ALRI) houses the statewide adult literacy library. Our website at www.sabes.org offers unique material for use in the adult education classroom and professional development, links to several other literacy-related websites, and a calendar of professional development opportunities in each region.

SABES Contact Information



Greater Boston Regional Support Center

Adult Literacy Resource Institute (ALRI)
University of Massachusetts Boston
Wheatley Building, 4th floor, room 04-167
100 Morrissey Blvd
Boston, MA 02125-3393
Tel. 617-287-4070
Fax. 617-287-4080
Web site: www.sabes.org/boston

Central Regional Support Center

Quinsigamond Community College
670 West Boylston St.
Worcester, MA 01606
Tel. 508-854-4286
Fax. 508-854-2732
Web site: www.centernalsabes.org

Northeast Regional Support Center

Northern Essex Community College
45 Franklin St.
Lawrence, MA 01840
Tel. 978-738-7301
Fax. 978-738-7115
Web site: www.sabes.org/northeast

Southeast Regional Support Center

Bristol Community College
777 Elsbree St., L-107
Fall River, MA 02720
Tel. 508-678-2811, x2320
Fax. 508-730-3280
Web site: www.sabes.org/southeast

West Regional Support Center

Holyoke Community College
303 Homestead Ave.
Holyoke, MA 01040
Tel. 413-552-2382
Fax. 413-552-2067
Web site: www.sabeswest.org

Central Resource Center

World Education
44 Farnsworth St.
Boston, MA 02210
Tel. 617-482-9485
Fax. 617-482-0617
Web site: www.sabes.org

SABES Bibliography
Planning for Program Improvement
September 2006

SABES Library: 1-877-605-5400 (toll-free in MA)

SABES Book Collection

The ABC's of Evaluation: Timeless Techniques for Program and Project Managers, John Boulmetis, and Phyllis Dutwin. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
HD31 .B633 2000

Assessment in the Learning Organization: Shifting the Paradigm, Arthur L. Costa, and Bena Kallick. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1995.
LB2822.75 .A87 1995

The Collaboration Challenge: How Nonprofits and Businesses Succeed Through Strategic Alliances, James E. Austin. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000.
HD69.S8 A94 2000

Creating and Implementing Your Strategic Plan: a Workbook for Public and Nonprofit Organizations, John M. Bryson, and Farnum K. Alston. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996.
HD30.28 .B788 1996

The (Help!) I Don't-Have-Enough-Time Guide to Volunteer Management, Katherine Noyes Campbell, Susan J. Ellis, and Susan J. Ellis. Philadelphia, PA: Energize, 1995.
HN90.V64 C353 1995

The Jossey-Bass Academic Administrator's Guide to Exemplary Leadership, James M. Kouzes, and Barry Z. Posner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.
LB2341 .K68 2003

The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership, Jossey-Bass Inc. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
LB2806 .J597 2000

The Leadership Challenge, James M. Kouzes, and Barry Z. Posner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
HD57.7 .K68 2002

Leading in a Culture of Change, Michael Fullan. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
LB2806 .F794 2001

Leading Minds: an Anatomy of Leadership, Howard Gardner, and Emma Laskin. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1996.
HD57.7 .G3 1996

SABES File Cabinet Collection

Addressing Conflict.

Stein, Janet. September 1994.

File drawer: Administration/Program management.

Information on understanding and managing conflict. It includes: setting boundaries; mediation; constructive controversy; and dealing with people who are overcontrolling.

Building an Effective Team That Works.

Stein, Janet. December 1994.

File drawer: General audience/Applications and techniques.

Materials and tools for program directors and others focusing on fostering teamwork by integrating staff with different roles and responsibilities.

Managing Stress in Our Personal and Work Lives.

Stein, Janet. October 1994. Smith, Cristine. 1995.

File drawer: General audience/Application and techniques.

Materials and tools for program directors and others focusing on evaluating your overall level of stress, identifying the key stressors in both your personal and work lives, and devising strategies for managing stress more effectively.

SABES Program and Staff Development Process: A Guidebook for Facilitators.

Smith, Cristine. Boston, MA: World Education, SABES Project, 1995.

File drawer: Administration/Program planning and development.

This guidebook provides a set of tools for planning and implementing program and staff development, soup-to-nuts.

Taking On Dreaded Supervision Situations: Guidelines for Action.

Rindler, Bruce. 1993.

File drawer: Administration/Program management.

Information on how, as a program director or supervisor, one may handle difficult supervisory situations with teachers.

Team Meetings at the Community Learning Center.

Reddy, Mina. 2000.

File drawer: Administration/Personnel-staff management.

Three part-time teachers who had a chance to participate in staff and program development teams provide their overview of their teams' implementation, processes, results and accomplishments.

What Next?? A Quick and Easy Guide to Practical Volunteer Tutor Management.

Riley, Brenda Stone. June 1996.

File drawer: General audience/Volunteers.

A hands-on, practical guide to managing volunteer tutors in an adult basic education program.

Web resources

Adult Basic Education Administrative Standards and Competencies (Kentucky, 2001)

<http://www.morehead-st.edu/colleges/education/leadership/academy/administrativestandards.pdf>

Collaborative Planning Model for Program Improvement and Systems Change, Barbara J. Smith (University of Colorado, 2003)

<http://www.csefel.uiuc.edu/modules/module4/english/h4-6.pdf>

James Madison University: Institutional Effectiveness Practices (2001)

<http://www.jmu.edu/ie/iedocs/InstitutionalEffectivenessNetwork.pdf>

Management Competencies and Sample Indicators for the Improvement of Adult Education Programs (PRO-NET, 2001)

http://www.pro-net2000.org/CM/content_files/63.pdf

Massachusetts Department of Education Adult & Community Learning Services — ABE Teacher's License Home Page

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/abecert/>

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/>

Professional Development Planning Guide 2002-2003 (Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, 2002)

http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/PlanningGuide/planning_guide_2002.pdf

Professional Development is Directly Tied to Program Improvement. Helen Hall. (Pennsylvania ABLE, 2003)

<http://www.able.state.pa.us/able/lib/able/fieldnotes03/fn03pdoverview.pdf>

SABES ABE Administrator Self-Assessment (2003)
<http://www.sabes.org/resources/abeadminsummary.pdf>

SABES ABE Teacher's License Support
<http://www.sabes.org/license/index.htm>

Using Data for Program Improvement (Massachusetts Dept. of Education, 2001)
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/smartt/usingdata.pdf>

Using NRS Data for Program Improvement and Management (US Dept. of Education, 2004)
https://www.oei-tech.com/nrs/reference/data_use_guide

