Quality Standards

Introduction

In July 1997, 30 individuals representing 19 literacy organizations throughout the state met to identify quality indicators for Oklahoma literacy programs. The following standards were adopted in areas of: Governance, Program Management, Program Operations, Volunteer Development, and Student Services. These quality standards are meant to encourage excellence in Oklahoma's volunteer adult literacy programs.

Governance

A. Board of Directors/Advisory Group

A volunteer literacy program should have a system of accountability in the form of a board of directors and/or advisory group. This group would represent a cross-section of private and public sector agencies, business and industry representatives, and the program's learners and volunteers. Literacy programs that operate as part of a government agency or public library may follow the governance procedures established by the governing agency.

B. Responsibilities of a Board/Advisory Group

The role of the board of directors and/or advisory group is to:
• Provide orientation for new board members
• Participate in annual board training
• Create written bylaws and policies
• Provide program oversight and support
• Advise in matters of financial management and participate in fund raising
• Support the program's stated mission and purpose
• Raise public awareness about the program

C. Coordination of Board of Directors/Advisory Group

A program should have a staff member (paid or volunteer) who has responsibility for coordinating the activities of the board and/or advisory group.

D. Organizational Documents

A program should have written organizational documents that are reviewed and updated on a regular basis including:
• 501(c)3 non-profit status
• Non-discriminatory hiring practice in the event of paid staff
• Adherence to Open Meeting, Open Records laws
• Bylaws
• Policies

Program Management

A. Mission Statement

A program should have a mission statement that specifies its goals and objectives and that reflects the needs of the community.

B. Long Range Plan

A program should have a long range plan that:
• Delineates the activities to be carried out
• Identifies program goals and objectives
• Defines program capacity
• Evolves continuously

C. Short Range Plan

A one-year operational plan should be developed annually to move the program toward meeting the goals and objectives set forth in the long range plan.

D. Fiscal Management

A program should have:
• An annual budget that is approved by the board or advisory group
• An annual financial review or audit that is conducted by an external party
• An accounting process that will support a successful audit
• A position and practice regarding insurance including program liability, worker's comp, health, etc.
• A reasonable expense allocation for serving learners diagnosed with disabilities

E. Human Resource Management

A program should have:
• Written personnel policies that are reviewed at least annually, including compliance with non-discrimination and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements
• Written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer staff
• A formal performance review system for salaried employees
• Policies and procedures for employent including signed contract for salaried employees or signed agreement for independent contractor
• Budgeted funds for staff development activities
• A definition for serving the needs of learning disabled students within the program's abilities

F. Resource Development

A program should have:
• A process for recording the actual costs of operating the program
• A fund raising plan that includes budgeted activities and diversified strategies for soliciting fiscal as well as inkind support
• A board/advisory group or other equivalent group that has financial responsibilities and has the necessary training to carry them out

G. Program Evaluation

A program should have:
- A system for collecting ongoing information about program participants, tutor and learner retention rates, and learner achievement.
- A process for analyzing this data, at least annually, in order to assess a program's success and help redesign program activities.
- A process for evaluating the outcomes of specially funded activities.
- Affiliation with the Oklahoma Literacy Coalition and/or nationally recognized literacy organizations.

Program Operations

A. Capacity

Programs should have a process in place to:
- Determine the number of learners that can be adequately served by the program
- Determine when additional resources are required to meet the program's needs
- Determine if screening for learning disabilities is necessary and desired by the learner

B. Partnerships/Information

In order to build and support partnerships, and to keep abreast of the latest literacy information, resources, materials, and training opportunities, programs should:
- Be knowledgeable of local, state, and national literacy initiatives and promotions
- Develop and exchange local newsletters and subscribe to appropriate publications
- Attend conferences and meetings
- Access literacy information on the Internet
- Become familiar with local and area literacy providers and resource agencies such as: health providers, Department of Human Services, courts and law enforcement, children's services, Head Start, Adult Basic Education, local colleges, service clubs, libraries, cooperative extension services, employment offices, and churches

C. Public Relations

A program should promote its activities and services by developing a public relations/awareness plan. The plan should include efforts to:
- Promote public awareness about literacy programs
- Reach a broad range of community groups
- Involve learners in the public relations process
- Communicate with the media on an ongoing basis
- Use a variety of print and nonprint materials

D. Services

The services offered by a program should:
- Be broadbased and address the needs of a variety of learners
- Match the program's objectives and learners' goals, needs, and interests
- Provide for the logical progression of skills
- Address the transfer needs of learners who plan to continue their education

E. Instructional Materials

A literacy program should have instructional material that:
- Is learner-centered
- Uses a variety of approaches that includes an active role for the learner
- Is appropriate for the various learning styles of program participants
- Addresses the needs of culturally diverse adults
- Includes a variety of formats and contexts, using different types of technology where possible
- Includes enrichment materials that can be used to supplement standard program materials
- Provides for appropriate materials for learners with characteristics of learning disabilities

F. Literacy Trainers/Tutor Training

To assure quality tutor training, programs should:
- Have at least one tutor trainer or have access to one through collaboration with another literacy program
- Encourage each trainer to complete a minimum of three hours of continuing education each year
- Be responsible for monitoring the performance of trainers annually
- Analyze training needs and develop a plan for revision of training practices if needed
- Incorporate a process for assessing the training needs of tutors

Volunteer Development

A. Recruitment

A program should have a recruitment plan to:
- Identify target populations of potential volunteers
- Specify strategies for reaching the target population of volunteers
- Use varied approaches to recruit volunteers who are appropriate matches for the program
- Determine the number of volunteers that can reasonably participate in a program

B. Tutor/Volunteer Training

Tutor training should include:
- An orientation and initial screening process for the volunteers
- At least one tutor training workshop per year
- An effective, structured training program that incorporates the following guidelines:

    –At least twelve hours of basic literacy training, with an additional three hours training for ESL tutors
    –Information on the following topics: Learner-centered planning and sensitivity; Learning strategies; Characteristics of learning disabilities
    –At least one in-service training session per year
    –Development of a process for training and monitoring the performance of volunteers who perform non-tutoring functions for the program

C. Tutor Certification

Written certification should be presented by the trainer after volunteer tutors have successfully completed the training.

D. Effectiveness of Training

Programs should determine the effectiveness of training and the quality of instructional activities of tutors by:
• Evaluating workshops
• Conducting follow-up surveys

E. Volunteer Management

A literacy program should have:
• A process for recording all training activities in which volunteers participate
• A communications network for disseminating information to volunteers and getting information from volunteers
• A formal recognition process for volunteers

Student Recruitment, Intake & Development

A. Learner Recruitment

Activities should be varied and include:
• Identification of the target populations of potential learners
• Specific strategies for reaching the target populations of learners
• A process for monitoring recruitment activities to determine whether program participants are representative of the target populations

B. Learner Intake and Initial Assessment

Intake and placement activities are important for assessing a learner's strengths and weaknesses and for developing an appropriate instructional program. In order to place learners in an appropriate tutoring arrangement, a program should have:
• An intake process to determine a new learner's literacy strengths and weaknesses, goals, special needs, and learning styles
• Tools for a formal assessment of a student's reading level; the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) is recommended for use alone or in conjunction with other assessment tools for basic literacy learners or Basic English Skills Test (BEST) for ESL learners
• A process for clarifying the expectations of a learner and the services that the program can offer to meet those expectations
• A system for matching a learner with an individual tutor or group
• An established student orientation procedure
• A process for ensuring an appropriate and effective instructional setting
• A process for reassigning learners and tutors when the relationship is not functional or otherwise requires a change
• A procedure for referring learners whose educational goals can best be met by other programs

C. Ongoing Assessment

Regular reassessment should be conducted to monitor each learner's progress and to determine overall achievement. The program's assessment process should:
- Utilize assessment tools that accurately reflect a learner's progress toward his/her goals and establish new goals as needed
- Actively involve the learner in the assessment process and goal setting
- Reassess all students after 80 hours of instruction or after one year, whichever comes first
- Utililize assessment data to analyze learner progress

D. Student Retention

To address student retention, programs should:
- Try to determine the reason a student leaves a program
- Develop a plan to address identified retention problems

E. Learner Development

The involvement of learners is critical to their motivation and success. A program should have a process for involving students that includes:
- A learner support group or equivalent that provides opportunities for learners to meet together for continuing education and/or personal development
- Opportunities for learners to participate in and evaluate program planning and operation activities
- Documentation of the ways in which learners have participated, including being members of the board of directors, student articles in the newsletter, student speakers' bureau
- Identify and implement a process for acknowledging student progress, achievements and contributions
- Strategies to transition learners to other programs as their skills develop and needs change

Performance Measures

Literacy programs should collect and maintain records and statistics in the following areas:

A. Information on Students and Tutors
Include number of students, student profiles, number of student hours, number of students interviewed but referred or never tutored, number of students assessed at intake, number of students regularly assessed to measure progress, reasons for leaving (students), number of tutors trained, number of active tutors, number of volunteer hours (tutors), reasons for leaving (tutors), and number of non-tutoring volunteers.

B. Information on the Community
Community profile

C. Information on Funding Sources
Donations, grants, contracts, foundations, in-kind support

D. Partnerships
Cooperative projects, outreach

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