

# Tutor Management: Recruitment, Selection, Retention, Motivation and Beyond ... Discussion Questions

Responses from Peer Tutor Coordinators of  
Adult Literacy Programs in Pennsylvania

*Compiled from Attendees' Responses at the  
2012 Tutor Coordinator Strand of the Summer Institute  
by Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth*



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## BACKGROUND

Tutor Coordinators from adult literacy programs throughout Pennsylvania were invited to attend a two day Summer Institute in August, 2012. During one session held for the Tutor Coordinators, (TCs) the TCs were divided into groups and given questions to answer. This document is a compilation of their answers.

## ***QUESTION ANSWERED BY EVERYONE***

### **1) What do you consider the most important thing for a new agency using volunteers to know? An existing agency?**

#### **New Agencies:**

- Build relationships with tutors and with community.
- Let volunteers know requirements right away- and ask "Can you do this?"
- Say thank you again and again and again, and in different ways.
- Have a tutor coordinator (TC) with knowledge and experience that will market the program as a rewarding experience.
- Make the expectations realistic and clear and inclusive.
- Learn how to make good tutor-learner matches.
- Recognize TLC (Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth) as a great resource.
- Know what resources are available.
- Build in professional development expectations from the start.
- Define roles and responsibilities - of the tutors and the Tutor Coordinator, Case Manager, others in the agency.
- Know agency guidelines and policies and resources, and keep up with changes.
- Make all policies clear.

#### Specific to agencies using PDE funds:

- Know how to use MLP. (for programs using funds from PDE)
- Know the state guidelines and policies and resources. Keep up with changes.

#### **Existing Agencies:**

- Keep up with changes in the community.
- Stay open to new ideas.
- Share successes and failures, and look for causes of both.
- Have an open door policy for questions and suggestions.

## **QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY GROUP 1**

**1) If you were to think outside of the box, what do you think an ideal tutor program – one with excellent tutor recruitment and retention – would look like? And how would you make it happen?**

- More money.
- Time to spend with tutors; recruitment as a specific, dedicated job.
- Specialists available everywhere (i.e. clone that great math tutor you have at one site).
- Resources.
- Space (quality and quantity) as requested by each tutor.
- Get data from tutors.
- Have things available when you need them.
- High expectations and clear communication.

**2) What methods have best worked for recruiting tutors for your program? Retaining them?**

### **Recruiting:**

- Public speaking at community events.
- Volunteer fairs at colleges or in community.
- Always have fliers available.
- Newspaper column: look at small, local papers in addition to larger papers.
- Word of mouth.
- Friendships: "Would you like to come to my tutoring session with me?"

### **Retaining:**

- Mentor pairs (existing tutor with newer tutor).
- Keep tutors happy.
- Listen to tutors.
- Keep it personal; remember the little details. ("How was your son's wedding?" "Is your mother feeling better yet?")
- Creating and encouraging positive experiences.
- Tutors feel valued.
- The same things we want tutors to do with students: personalize it, feel valued, create positive experience.

**3) Given unlimited resources, what would you like to be able to do for your tutors?**

- Technology available: laptops, smart boards
- Space: quieter, more private rooms, rooms with walls and doors
- Transportation
- Child care
- Snacks

## **QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY GROUP 2**

### **1) What would your volunteers say it is about your program that keeps them there?**

- Student success; not necessarily EFL gains, but real life goals.
- Volunteers feel part of the agency, they understand the agency, they know what is going on in the agency.
- Especially in ESL, learning from students.
- Volunteers see how they make a difference in the lives of the students.
- They feel part of something.
- They feel supportive of students, and supported by agency.
- They get more than they give.
- They feel appreciated.
- They feel responsible.

### **2) From what do your tutors feel the greatest reward? How can this be built upon? Are their rewards intrinsic or extrinsic? How important are tutors to your program?**

- Student progress.
- [EFL learner thermometer](#) used to show progress with different colors.
- Use student progress as a way to sell tutor PD- emphasize student gains, offer tutors tools to help learners see gains. Dr. Richard Gacka also has tools to chart and show progress, available on the [PDE PDS Learning Differences Resource website](#).
- Varies with the program.
- In large programs, with lots of classes and programs, help tutors to see that they are still an important part of the agency.
- Hire tutors as teachers when there are openings.
- Our tutors are extremely important to our program ~ we couldn't provide our learners with the needed services if we didn't have our volunteer tutors.
- Our tutors seem mostly rewarded by the intrinsic reward of seeing learners make gains and reach personal goals.

### **QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY GROUP 3**

**1) Do your tutors know how important they are? Or what difference they make? How are they shown recognition and appreciation? How are their needs met?**

- Formal volunteer recognition events.
- Volunteers are invited to and included in agency-wide events, possibly mentioned at those events.
- Certificates.
- Regular email to stay in touch (as often as weekly): personalized emails.
- Someone from the agency visits their sessions to see how they are doing.
- Help tutors to see how learners are making progress, keep them aware of test results and gains.
- Help tutors troubleshoot if there are no gains.
- Some volunteers prefer to work quietly without a lot of public recognition. Personalize recognition for each volunteer tutor.

**2) Do you have a tutor job description? Do you feel it is adequate? (*Does the job description meet the formal description in the guidelines?*) (Find tutor job descriptions [here](#).)**

- Yes and no
- Expectations, responsibilities that are agency specific
- Tutors are given this information at a prospective tutor's first inquiry- follow up with "What questions do you have?" and "Are you still interested?"

## **QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY GROUP 4**

### **1) Are tutors clear on their responsibilities prior to working with a learner? And the things that are not their responsibility?**

- More/less yes - there are gray areas.
- Tutors frequently want to help with the personal needs of the learners, such as transportation and child care. They sometimes give rides or allow the learner to bring children to the session (which is not encouraged). They sometimes go beyond their responsibilities, which is not necessarily a good or safe thing- children do not belong at tutoring sessions.
- It is important at the first session to make clear that the agency is not a social services agency.
- Student's needs can be worked into a lesson plan, such as how to read a newspaper want ads column for possible housing.
- Be proactive in providing support.
- Repeat and reinforce expectations. Tutor Coordinator can model expectations for tutor, tutor models them for learner.

### **2) How do you maintain ongoing training for your tutors?**

- Networking, roundtables.
- Individualize tutor training opportunities; know how to approach each tutor.
- Give list of websites for different opportunities.
- Consider tutor curriculum tutor can use for a particular level.
- Keep curriculum/notes of retiring tutors so next tutor can continue with that learner with no gaps.
- Make lesson plans / curricula available on agency or TLC website; share, so each individual tutor doesn't have to repeat research.

### **3) How do potential tutors hear about your program and your need for tutors?**

- Agency website (searched volunteer, found the agency).
- Volunteer matches online or in community (library or Chamber of Commerce lists).
- RSVP.
- Fliers.
- University recruitment fairs.
- Retirement groups.
- [Dollar General website](#) has a site that gives agencies referrals.
- Can find list of agencies that use volunteers.
- Community Reinvestment Act - requires banks to serve the particular needs of their communities in various ways - so check with local employers or Chamber of Commerce to find out which employers pay employees to volunteer; put a flier in those paychecks.
- Make sure to look for smaller local newspapers; they are often more obliging than larger newspapers and may publish articles/notices for free.