

COMPONENT 1:



**National
Urban League**



**Community/Organization
Mobilization for
Adolescent Literacy**

Community/Organization Mobilization for Adolescent Literacy

“It’s hard to imagine a constituency in any community that does not have a stake in literacy development for adolescents. Parents want their children to succeed and be able to explore multiple options. Employers want workers who have solid reading comprehension and communication skills that they can apply to on-the-job learning and performance. Policy makers and elected officials want voters who are able to read and to understand complex issues. Health and human service agencies want people to be able to successfully navigate the complexities of the system to get what they need. Community members want safe neighborhoods where youth are productively engaged. Educators want to be successful at their core mission. These values and desires are important community assets that can be mobilized to turn the literacy crisis – and lives of countless adolescents – around.”

– Excerpt from NUL Mobilizing Communities to Support the Literacy Development of Urban Youth (p. 10)

Commun

In order to address the complexity of the adolescent literacy crisis and to understand the varied conditions in which families and children live, new systems need to be developed that will allow communities to create or enhance their own structures of supports. The often used “one-size-fits-all” programmatic approach will not suffice. In fact, thoughtful coordination and collaboration among schools, businesses, community organizations, and families to mobilize communities goes further to promote positive change in young people’s lives and ensures greater sustainability of programming over the long term.

Traditional community mobilization strategies focus primarily on public awareness, in the guise of rallies, public awareness campaigns, etc. These are helpful in increasing public understanding on an issue, but are limited in actually addressing and eradicating a community problem. Therefore, a useful, comprehensive community mobilization model to address adolescent literacy entails both public awareness and clear mechanisms for the public engagement.

Pre-Requisites for Community/Organizational Mobilization

The research on community mobilization highlights the conditions that are needed to implement and run a successful initiative. There must be sufficient capacity at the community level, the school district level and the lead organization level.

Community Capacity:

A targeted community for this adolescent literacy initiative should have some history of successful collaborative efforts – partnerships: coalitions; and taskforces among schools, businesses, community based agencies, faith-based organizations and citizen groups. Further, there should be a political climate and a level of social cohesion that is conducive for broad participation of groups. Lastly, education reform and student achievement should be widely recognized as a collective concern and shared interest.

School District Capacity:

The school district should have a commitment to education reform and improved student achievement, with literacy as a priority focus, and have a clear plan for engaging parents and community members in supporting student achievement. The superintendent should also have a productive relationship with the lead organization promoting the adolescent literacy

ity/Organization Mobilizati

initiative. Most importantly, there should be a literacy action plan for all grade levels that includes teacher professional development around literacy instruction.

Lead Organization Capacity:

As the Lead Organization, it is important that your organization has a mission that explicitly focuses on youth development and also has literacy development as a programmatic priority. It should be located in a particular community and a track record for “getting things done” in that community. Lastly, the organization’s leadership should have a vision and commitment to community development and mobilization in this area.

A community mobilization model must incorporate (see Anderson’s 8 also):

- A shared vision, a common set of goals, objectives and outcomes among stakeholders.
- A commitment to long-range strategic planning among stakeholders.
- Action plans based on assessments of local strengths and needs (an asset model approach).
- Viable implementation strategies and programmatic structures.
- Restructuring and leveraging local resources.
- Periodic evaluating the model’s effectiveness on communities.

A Shared Vision, a Common Set of goals, Objectives and Outcomes

The National Urban League and the Urban League of Champaign County developed a Community Mobilization on Education Equity framework that has been widely used in the Urban League movement¹. One initial step to creating a shared vision, goals and outcomes among stakeholders in a community mobilization for adolescent literacy initiative is for an organization spearheading the project to have a clear vision about its own goals, objectives and outcomes as an organization. Before engaging in such a large endeavor to enhance adolescent literacy, a lead organization’s Board of Directors, the CEO to the frontline staff must view the initiative as reflecting its organizational priorities, must be educated on the initiative and be willing to leverage organizational resources to that end.

A Commitment to Long-Range Strategic Planning Among Stakeholders

Once an organization is clear on its own goals, objectives and outcomes, it can launch into an effort to interact with other organizations, with businesses, and with schools to build awareness and “buy in” to the initiative. This could entail convening a meeting or an initiating an Education Summit of business leaders, principals, district administrators, school board members, and other key stakeholders to both inform about the adolescent literacy challenge in your community by providing data such summaries of state assessment results, national, state and local comparisons of student performance in reading and writing; and subsequently, promote an action by all those present. One crucial step is generating some outcome targets for the initiative². Subsequently, a series of working groups can emerge from the summit or meetings that can set priorities, develop action plans, and facilitate larger strategic planning around this initiative.

Action Plans Based on Assessments of Local Strengths and Needs (An Asset-Based Approach³)

The action plans that emerge from working groups can entail assessing the local strengths and needs of the community being targeted. In this endeavor, some strengths as well as some glaring needs will certainly be identified in the community. An asset based approach to community mobilization presumes that challenges are present in communities

See the document Urban League of Champaign County, Community Academic Support Network

on for Adolescent Literacy

(i.e. elevated aliteracy rates among adolescents) but also affirms that there are numerous unrecognized, untapped or underutilized assets in a community as well.

A school district, for instance, may have strong parent engagement and/or active community members who could possibly serve as literacy advocates in the school and neighborhood; local business groups may be willing to work together to allocate funds to provide stipends for students who can participate in proposed literacy activities; government officials may be willing to incorporate award ceremonies for youth who demonstrate improved literacy; and religious leaders may be willing to stress the value of literacy through their sermons or in their congregation events. These assets can be identified and strategically planned through the deliberate efforts of the stakeholders involved in the initiative.

Viable Implementation Strategies and Programmatic Structures

The action plans must be converted into viable implementation strategies and programmatic structures. This entails coordinating and aligning existing services by various stakeholders with each other to meet the proposed adolescent literacy goals and outcome targets. For instance, a local women's group asks university faculty to work with teen mothers on literacy development strategies is one example of aligning services. Another example is, a local employer establishes a book club or sends employees to trainings at a local school. His employees, in turn, are required to serve as tutors for younger children in the community. Action plans must incorporate deliberate planning and strategic action!

Restructuring and Leveraging Local Resources

Utilizing an asset-based approach to community mobilization for adolescent literacy requires identifying the assets in a community. These assets (i.e. human, social, educational, environmental, monetary, political, etc) should be leveraged to support your initiative. For instance, the lead organization may discover that there are potential funds available through a local politician's office to support a youth initiative that requires the collaboration with neighborhood schools. Other resources could be restructured and leveraged through neighboring colleges, such as college students serving as tutors for the initiative, or the use of classroom or meeting space on campus for activities. Local colleges and universities tend to have service learning options for students which require students to do community service in turn for academic credit. Many are also open to supporting community-college collaborations. By bringing together various stakeholders, local resources can be discovered and used to impact adolescent literacy in a community.

Periodic Evaluation

Once a lead organization's initiative gets off the ground, there need to be mechanisms for evaluating the efficacy and viability of your adolescent literacy initiative in a community. It is imperative that evaluation be included in the strategic planning and budgeting for a community mobilization for adolescent literacy initiative. Clearly defined outcome targets, solid programmatic structures and effective documentation of activities create fertile ground for evaluating an initiative's impact. More importantly, an effective evaluation can help refine programmatic areas, as well as support fundraising efforts to sustain an initiative over the long term.

² For more on outcomes see "Project Ready College Access Program User's Guide"

³ For more on asset-based approaches to community initiatives see "Project Ready College Access Program User's Guide"



Strategies for Community/Organizational Mobilization for Adolescent Literacy

A community effort to address the adolescent literacy crisis can have a myriad of strategies. Of course, no two communities are alike, nor should the strategies be the same. Below are some suggestions to help galvanize a community to increase literacy development:

Create and Expand Awareness, Understanding and Urgency: Print materials, public information campaigns, religious sermons, billboards and presentations centered on the adolescent literacy crisis nationally and locally help to inform a community about the issue.

Provide Leadership, Take the Lead: A lead organization can take the initial step to organize an education summit, community meetings, and forums to generate momentum for a community adolescent literacy initiative.

Provide Training and Education: Community-based workshops can be sponsored or courses developed that train parents/guardians on literacy. Also, speakers can be invited to address the issue and help inform the community of viable strategies to combat the adolescent literacy crisis.

Develop, Revise, Enhance Programs and Services: Organizations, especially a lead organization, should add a literacy component to out-of-school time programs and youth development activities or seek funding to develop adolescent literacy programming.

⁴See *Mobilizing Communities to Support the Literacy Development of Urban Youth*, pg. 31

Below is a check list of steps that a lead organization should take to develop a community-wide literacy initiative.

Check List

- *As the lead organization, gather and disseminate data on the scope of the adolescent literacy problem.*
- *Meet one-on-one with community leaders, school officials and other stakeholders/organizations to identify shared interests and provide a vision for how literacy can be integrated with other community initiatives.*
- *Convene meetings, forums or summits to further build community awareness and develop partnerships around adolescent literacy.*
- *Develop key partnerships with community leaders, school officials and other stakeholders/organizations that incorporate strategic planning and programmatic outcome targets for an adolescent literacy initiative.*
- *Periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the community mobilization for adolescent literacy efforts.*

Copyright© 2008 by the National Urban League. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in whole or in part without written permission from the National Urban League.

Please contact the **National Urban League** at **120 Wall Street, New York, New York, 10005 USA. T: + 1.212.558.5300, F: +1.212.344.5332, www.nul.org**, for information about reprinting and general information about this publication.