



In this issue, Progress asks five program managers from around the state how they keep their programs going during tough economic times.

Managing Adult Education during Economic Crisis

Doing More with Less

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Bette Sneed
Adult Education
Prince William
County Schools



Linda Allen
Southwest Regional
Adult Education

How has the present economic crisis affected your program?

We've seen a major influx of people coming to our program who are trying to obtain a high school credential – and we're not talking just young people, we're talking about people who have had a job for many, many years and realize that now, in order to keep their job or move up in their job, they need further education, even just that high school credential.

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How has the present economic crisis affected your program?

The current economic climate has caused us to look carefully at our expenditures and how we are serving our clients as far as number of class offerings. We have met with our teachers to look at enrollment and success rates to determine our best strategy, whether it's to keep classes open, to change locations, or to look at scheduling.

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PROGRESS

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Elizabeth Hawa

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A Few Words on *Progress*

The economic crisis that we have been experiencing for more than a year has challenged all of us personally and professionally. Small and large businesses in our communities have closed or downsized. Most of us know at least one person whose job has been eliminated. Schools, colleges and universities, and governmental agencies have experienced significant cutbacks as a result of low tax revenues. Our retirement funds have been ravaged. It seems as if in every area of our lives we must find ways, if not to do more with less, then at least to move onward without losing too much ground.

Finding ways to cope with these challenges has meant having to focus on what is important—our values, our goals—and deciding what to keep and what to jettison.

In our programs, many of us face the specter of lower funding and unexpected reorganizations while at the same time having to accommodate increased student enrollments. The program managers interviewed in this issue have worked to determine the most cost effective means of providing services, combining classes and closing sites if necessary. They have worked with their teachers to support them in continuing to provide high quality instruction while at the same time reducing costs where possible. The theme that runs through all of these interviews is that careful planning and management has helped to prepare the programs for difficult times.

As I was thinking about writing this letter, I was reminded of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond. The museum, one of the first state-supported museums in the South, opened its doors during the Great Depression. Today, VMFA is one of the nation's finest regional art museums, and it is currently completing a \$150 million expansion. VMFA's experience shows us that hard times need not stop growth and innovation.

Like VMFA, adult education programs can overcome the challenges presented by the recent downturn in the economy to achieve more than they ever imagined. In fact, sometimes austerity forces us to weed out the unproductive and retain that which really works. As a result, we can build stronger organizations capable of providing higher quality services to the adults who seek our help.

Barbara E. Gibson



Calendar

November

5-6

Summit on the Future of Adult Education in the New Digital World
Richmond, VA

12-13

Annual Program Managers' Meeting
Richmond, VA

16-17

National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education
Providence, RI

29-December 1

Southeast International Reading Association Regional Conference
New Orleans, LA

February 2010

25-26

VLLC Conference for Community-Based Literacy Organizations
Richmond, VA

March

15-19

COABE ProLiteracy Joint Conference
Chicago, IL



A Letter from OAEL Director **Elizabeth Hawa**

During my years at the Virginia Department of Education, there have been a number of budget crises. However, the current financial situation appears to be more pervasive in its impact on state and local resources. It is timely that this edition of *Progress* addresses strategies for responding to the crisis.

I am impressed with the creative ways that local programs are dealing with the situation. The ideas and strategies set forth by Janet Booth, Linda Allen, Susan Utt, Bette Sneed, and Elaine Callahan are helpful during tight budgets but also are great suggestions for efficient program management during more robust economic times. Let there be no doubt that our adult education and literacy program managers know how to do as much, and even more, with less when challenged by a crisis. I am inspired by Janet Booth's comment that "tough times aren't going to stop us."

Moreover, it is a fact that adult education services are needed even more in difficult economic times. Program managers are telling us that the demand for services has surged. That's positive because it means that adults affected by the depressed economy are preparing for their futures. Susan Utt mentions that registration is the largest in ten years and that adult students are more motivated and committed. I was pleased to hear Bette Sneed say that Race to GED® funds made outreach possible not just for the short term but also affected enrollments beyond the year for which funding was provided. Both Linda Allen and Elaine Callahan understand the importance of community partnerships in lean times. A great example is that Linda was able to access grant money to continue PlugGED In for another year. I could not agree more with Elaine's outreach strategy to recruit GED non-completers.

I believe the current economy will have an impact on state policy, especially decisions related to distance education for our adult learners and professional development for program managers, instructors, and other practitioners. For example, distance education could alleviate expenditures such as travel and child care. At the Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL), we will release our distance education policy in the near future. I expect more services to be delivered remotely once local programs understand how they will receive National Reporting System credit for distance learners. As for OAEL's delivery of professional development and training, much of it through the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, we anticipate more online opportunities and increased use of webinars and similar platforms to keep the field informed and up-to-date.

It will not be easy to make some of the changes required at both state and local levels, but I am confident that our adult education programs will continue to flourish and learn more efficient ways of providing quality services. We are a strong-willed, creative, and diligent group; and we know how to make the most out of what is available, find untapped resources, lead the way for others, and soar to new heights!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Hawa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Writing an Outstanding Competitive Grant

by Victoire Gerkens Sanborn

Just a few weeks ago, I had a conversation with a perplexed program manager, who wondered why her EL/Civics grant proposal was not funded for a second time. “I wrote the same grant this year as last year,” she assured me. Therein lay the problem. Competitive grants are chosen because they are the BEST among a crop of truly outstanding grants. With a competitive grant, the details that made it good last year might not make the grade this year or next year. Money is tight and competition is keen, and grant writers, some of whom attend grant writing workshops yearly, are getting demonstrably better at meeting funders’ criteria. The days of receiving grant money because your program has always been funded are long gone, and, as soon as WIA (Workforce Investment Act) reauthorization passes (and, yes, this will happen in our lifetime), the competition will become even stiffer. Had the program manager studied her data and changed her grant to reflect how that data influenced her planning and decisions, she might have successfully updated her old grant.

Another manager felt so confident in her NRS (National Reporting System) Table 4, which demonstrated a remarkable increase in the number of students that had progressed to the next level, that she failed to pay equal attention to the other sections of her grant or tie them cohesively together to show how the necessity for increased staff involvement was reflected in the budget. Grant readers are not mind readers, and thus her program’s proposal lost a number of crucial points and placed below the fundable cut-off level.

These two mistakes are rarely made by competitive grant writers, who leave little to chance. With the knowledge that securing adult education and literacy grants will become tougher as funds get tighter, I would like to share a few *Dos* and *Don’ts* of competitive grant writing:

1 Do read the RFP (Request for Proposal) closely to determine if your program has the capacity to meet the grant guidelines. Then FOLLOW the funder’s format EXACTLY as outlined, using the funder’s terminology. Make a note of deadlines and create a timeline, taking care to schedule ample time for proofreading and editing.

2 Do not wait for the RFP to come out before taking action. Competitive grants are written from a strategic plan. Knowing that RFPs are announced each spring, a savvy program manager will assemble a grant writing team at the start of the fiscal year to brainstorm several proposals. These projects should be the clear result of internal needs (as demonstrated by student performance data, professional development requirements, or instructional needs, such as integrating technology into instruction) and pressures external to the organization (such as a sudden shift in population demographics or massive layoffs in the community). When the RFPs are finally announced, a prepared team has already done its research, solicited possible partners, and gathered all the elements to write a well-crafted grant.

3 Do not write the grant alone. The lone grant writer faces stiff competition from teams that have identified several key people to help with re-

search and writing. Teams (consisting of the finance director, project evaluator, marketing/outreach person, and staff responsible for delivery of services, etc.) can help the director define key ideas, fact check, edit, and use others’ strengths in compiling the best grant proposal possible. Someone in your organization might be quite familiar with facts and statistics, for example, while another is comfortable working up a budget. For smaller programs, remember that two people can make an effective team.

4 Do write for impact. These days, funders are looking for outcomes, impact, and how you plan to measure what you promised to do. Your proposal gains points if you can show that your staff examines data regularly and is willing to make mid-course adjustments; that evaluations are both summative and formative; and that staff, as well as students, are evaluated. Ask yourself these questions: Are the instruments you use appropriate for the performances being assessed and are they tied to student achievements? What are the indicators of success and how are they measured? What are the immediate results? What are the long-term effects? How many clients will be served successfully? If a previous project demonstrated poor results, discuss what steps your program will take to change this year’s outcomes, and describe how data will drive your decisions. A table outlining the *what*, *who*, *when*, and *why* for each phase of evaluation scores

*The lone grant writer
faces stiff competition from teams
that have identified several key people
to help with research and writing.*

more points than the general statement, “We will follow NRS guidelines for pre- and post-testing, and evaluate the results in June.”

5 Do collaborate and form partnerships. If your project requires expertise that your program cannot readily provide, turn to one of the partners that you have already approached. Funders are looking for the biggest bang for their buck. The easiest way to increase your capacity to serve your clients is to find other agencies with similar missions who can fill in those gaps in service, expertise, or location. Include your MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) and letters of support.

6 Do not write from neediness. Concentrate on stating a compelling case that focuses on your CLIENTS not your program, and describe how you intend to address the client and community needs using positive terms. Find local statistics to demonstrate your need, and use state statistics only to show how your locality compares to the overall situation. Although the need statement section in a grant is extremely important, be relevant and concise, and introduce only enough information to justify the need for your project and why yours is the best organization to address the problem. State your case using information based on adult demographics. For example, a rise in K-12 ESOL school registration describes the adult situation only peripherally. You will need other more relevant statistics to back up your claims.

Although the need statement ... is extremely important, be relevant and concise.

7 Do be clear about your goals and what you intend to achieve. Do not assume that the grant reader can fill in the gaps. In fact, assume nothing, and be explicit in stating measurable goals, objectives, and outcomes. Your methodology should be a comprehensive description of how you will achieve the objectives. Instead of depending on long paragraphs of exposition, give the grant readers’ eyes a rest and create tables that state each goal, the objectives required to reach that goal, who will perform the tasks to achieve each objective, what they will do and the materials they will use, when these activities will be accomplished, and the benchmarks for success.

8 Don’t twist your program into a pretzel to fit funder requirements, or go chasing after grant money just because it is there. Do tie your project in with your mission statement and strategic plan, and make sure your funder is interested in supporting your project. Craft your grant carefully and look at the overall picture, connecting each grant element together logically. Your budget should tell in monetary terms the same story as your proposal narrative. The mistake of not tying in the various grant elements is a common one, which often causes the

grant reader to pause. Remember, if grant readers have to guess HOW an increase in the budget for teacher salaries will influence student outcomes, they might guess wrong. It is better to be explicit and repetitive than to assume that the grant reader can recall a salient point that was made several pages back.

9 Do describe how your project will be sustained. Funders are loath to fund programs that disappear once the grant period is over. Some questions for consideration include: What other funders will you be soliciting for this project? Will your organization be charging a fee for service and, if so, how much? What are some other long-term plans for the project?

10 Absolutely, positively, and indubitably DO use a “fresh eye.” To put it bluntly, grant writers are not objective enough to edit and proof their own writing. Let me restate this important point: The person who proofs her own grant is more likely to send in a mistake-riddled document than the team that uses a “fresh eye.” This new person’s task is to read the RFP, making sure that the proposal has answered each section clearly and concisely without using jargon, and taking note of sections that are missing. Do give the fresh eye ample time to perform this important duty, or else the benefit of such a useful service will be negated.

Grant writing is demanding work and few program managers can set aside the required time to devote to grant writing. For this reason, it is crucial to begin planning your projects early, and to adhere to a strict grant writing schedule. Precise, jargon-free language is a necessity. Tables and graphs are welcome and can clarify a point more quickly and accurately than a paragraph of exposition. The grant writer who has a gift for making a project seem exciting and interesting will make her proposal stand head and shoulders above the competition. One thing is assured: those who wait for the RFP to appear in their inbox before they begin to think about their grant, who write in a hurry and in isolation, or worse, polish off last year’s grant, changing only the dates and numbers, will most likely be left with the short end of the funding stick. In conclusion, I would like to share a magic formula for grant writing success: Proof, edit, proof, edit, proof, proof, proof. ■

Victoire Gerkens Sanborn is Literacy Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

Resources *on the* Cheap

by Lauren Ellington

In today's world of budget cuts and level funding, it can be a challenge to keep our classrooms interactive and stocked with materials.

Try a few of these ideas to help with your own budget crunch!

Whiteboards

Would you like to have a whiteboard for your classroom but have been told they are too expensive? Follow the instructions that John Murch has laid out on his [blog](#) or [Kevin Kelly's variations](#). If you are looking for less permanent options, [Kevin Kelly's Cool Tools website](#) also gives you ideas for temporary solutions. And if you are looking for ways to clean those inexpensive whiteboards, take a look at Tyler Akins' rather scientific test of [which products make the best cleaner](#).

Explore the Cool Tools [website for even more innovative ideas](#) for how to create materials, for inside or outside of the classroom, on the cheap.

Phone Books

We all have extra phone books laying around. Well, put yours to good use and ask others to donate theirs to you for classroom activities. Phone books are handy for work on alphabetizing skills and looking up community resources.

Page Protectors

Page protectors, when used with dry erase markers, make your reproducibles reusable. Just slip the page into the page protector and students can write on the protector with the dry erase markers. When they are done, just wipe it with a damp cloth and reuse!

Dried Beans and Popsicle Sticks

Trying to teach numeracy skills in a more experiential way? Use a variety of dried beans or plain popsicle sticks as counters. You can also use plain popsicle sticks to show

Making the Most of Online

by Hillary Major

The Internet is a cornucopia of learning opportunities – for instructors as well as learners. Whether simply Googling a subject of interest, searching for lesson plans and videos from adult education classrooms around the country, reading a blog or online journal, or attending a webinar, you can discover more about the topics that matter most to you from the convenience of your home, workplace, or any location with Internet access. Taking an online course can be an ideal way to reflect on your own practice, familiarize yourself with new concepts, focus on the practical applications of research-based instruction, or delve into the details of a subject or technique you'd like to explore.

Online courses come in a variety of packages, both synchronous (offerings held in “real time,” such as a live webinar or a chat) and asynchronous (classes in which

participants access the course materials at different times as convenient to them). Courses may be scheduled during a specific time block or available at any time; they may be independent and self-paced, with little or no interaction among learners, or they may rely on discussions with peers, colleagues, and instructors. While there are pros and cons to the different types of online trainings, the Resource Center has developed a model for its facilitated online courses that aims to provide the richest possible online learning environment by taking advantage of the benefits of online learning.

Online professional development is affordable. Most online courses are less expensive than their face-to-face counterparts, and the facilitated courses offered by the Resource Center are free to Virginia's adult educators.

Online learning connects you with your col-

fractions: take a set of popsicle sticks and, using a marker to write on the sticks, divide them up into halves, thirds, fourths, sixths, etc. You can also use Play-Doh to teach about volume.

Bandanas

For new ESOL learners, grouping can be difficult and confusing due to a lack of English language skills. Make grouping easy by using colored bandanas that each student can tie on to easily identify his or her group.

Financial Literacy

If you are wanting to teach your students about financial literacy, you can order a free comic book series from the Federal Reserve System. Just go to: <http://app.ny.frb.org/publications/result.cfm?comics=1>.

Freecycle

Check out [Freecycle](#) to see if anyone is giving away materials that you can repurpose for classroom use.

Classroom Supplies Drive

Hold a local event to serve as a classroom supplies drive. Post flyers, send emails, and post the event on Facebook to get the word out. You can also ask local businesses if you can place donation boxes in their business to get patrons to donate supplies.

Books

Check out Book Closeouts at <http://www.bookcloseouts.com> or Dover Publications at <http://store.doverpublications.com/index.html> as sources for inexpensive books.

Reward Programs

Sign up for store rewards programs like Staples Teacher Rewards Program that gives you up to 20% back in rewards for purchases. Check it out at: <http://www.staplesrewardscenter.com/SORC/UserManagement/Login/LearnTeachersRewards.aspx>.

So, you can see that there are many resources and materials that you can use for your classroom that are also budget friendly. Do you use other inexpensive classroom resources? Do you have ideas for other cheap resources? If so, please send your ideas to Lauren Ellington at lellington@vcu.edu – and you may see them in future issues of *Progress*. ■

Lauren Ellington is Online Training and Learning Disabilities Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.

Professional Development

leagues. With travel budgets tight, online courses can bring together practitioners from around the state to share their experiences. Hearing from peers can be particularly rewarding for teachers, who normally work in isolation. The Resource Center also provides an experienced facilitator to help guide and encourage discussion among participants and provide feedback.

Online learning lets your voice be heard. While a few vocal participants might dominate a face-to-face discussion, an online Discussion Board allows everyone's perspective to be communicated.

Online learning allows you to learn at your own pace. While the Resource Center's facilitated courses require weekly participation, this can take place at any time and from nearly any location – at nights, on weekends, or at home in your pajamas! Links in the course docu-

ments to additional resources allow participants to choose to investigate in greater depth the topics that capture their attention.

Online learning provides an opportunity to become more familiar with web-based technology. Participants not only learn the content of the course they are taking, they also learn to navigate in the online environment. VALRC provides a technical facilitator for every course to answer technical questions and help support participants through the initial learning curve.

The Resource Center offers eight facilitated, six- or eight-week online courses, including four new courses that are being piloted this fiscal year. See the back page for more on these excellent learning opportunities! ■

Hillary Major is Specialist for Publications and Communications at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center.



Elaine Callahan **Henrico County** **Adult Education**

How has the present economic crisis affected your program?

We're finding that we've really got to pay attention to our part-time salaries, so we're having to increase class size. Last year, we began an attendance policy requiring a minimum of 70% monthly student attendance for every class. The days when we could run a class with four or five students are over. We had a huge in-service last year and followed up again at the beginning of this year, talking together about how we're all going to have to do more with less – all of us, not this class or that class. We didn't go to VAACE this year, because we didn't have the money.

My leadership team and I have sat down and come up with a plan, and we've put it out there to our teachers. We've let them know that we're in this together; we're going to do what we have to do together. All said, my staff have really stepped up to the plate to pick up wherever we're lacking. Many paid their own way to VAACE this year.

How has the crisis affected your enrollment? Have you changed the way you recruit learners?

Our enrollment has increased; business closings and layoffs have had a real impact. For example, Viasystems and Qimonda just shut down. Most of those people don't have a high school diploma or secondary credential, but many of them were making excellent money. Now, they're finding that jobs they once could have gotten are going to people with college or sometimes Master's degrees.

Our enrollment hasn't slacked off. Being inundated: that's a good/bad problem to have. Again, our teachers have really stepped up. I haven't heard any complaints about having more students in the classes.

Recruitment-wise, since we've got plenty of new folks coming in, we're shifting towards bringing non-completers back in, hunting them down, finding them, getting them back. We've been partnering with Cox radio and NBC 12, focusing on free GED testing, especially during GED Week, and paying for people who need partial testing.

Where have you been able save money or forced to make cuts?

I just came from a budget meeting, and we have to cut our budget by 10%. We're looking at publishing our catalogue only once a year instead of once a semester as we usually do. That should save us \$20,000; we will also have to cut all of our travel.

We're watching our paper, how many pencils we give out. We provide these to our clientele, but now we're very conscious of how much we're providing. Another example of what's impacting us is H1N1 intervention; we've been reallocating some of our county budget funds toward purchasing hand sanitizer, etc., because they've told us to and because we don't want to close down.

When a class has to be cancelled, or another emergency requires a change to the budget, how do you re-allocate the funds?

Well, if we had, for example, to close down because of H1N1 for any substantial amount of time, we would reschedule our classes. So, instead of holding a class, say, on Monday and Wednesday, we might hold it Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday. We're going to do everything we can instructionally, and cut elsewhere if we have to cut.

Have you been able to find any additional funding sources? form new partnerships?

Our partnership with Cox radio and NBC 12 has really helped our recruitment. We also have a new site out at Noelle Apartments: they give us classrooms and the computers, and we provide a teacher and a classroom set of books. We have the same arrangement with the Brookhill Goodwill.

Henrico County does give us a budget, and that makes a difference. I don't have to pay rent, and I can also use resources within the county if I need to. We've found, too, that we do have some waste we can cut.

What tips do you have for other programs trying to do more with less?

I don't think it hurts to go out and canvass for volunteers and supplies. Ask, "Are you willing to partner with us?" and say, for example, "We need a classroom set of books." I think there are people out there who want to be a part of us. At the end of last year, we got a check from a woman none of us knew; she knew someone who went through our program and decided to make a donation. Outreach works, and word of mouth from clients works. ■



Susan Utt Northern Shenandoah Valley Adult Education

How has the present economic crisis affected your program?

There's always been a need, for GED programs in particular, in our area; 23% of the population has need for a GED or high school credential, but we haven't had the demand that we're now experiencing. Now there's demand to equal the need.

How has the crisis affected your enrollment? Have you changed the way you recruit learners?

This year we had the biggest registration I have ever seen in my ten years in regional office. Traditionally, we have high ESL enrollment, and our ESL numbers still surpass our GED numbers, but we have had the largest-ever number of GED students pre-test and register this year. We have a waiting list for GED classes at our largest, main center, and we are referring students to an open learning center where they wait.

When we TABE the students at our open learning center, we're finding a large range of skills. For those with the high adult secondary scores, we are offering Official Practice Tests once a month. We voucher our students as they pass sections of the GED Tests; they can go ahead and take the tests they are ready for and concentrate their studies on the place where they need help, usually the math, until classes open up. We do offer a class that is GED-math specific.

I have also noticed more motivation and follow-through. Now, when our students say they'll be there on Monday night, they're there.

Where have you been able save money or forced to make cuts?

Well, it's interesting: because of large demand, money currently budgeted for outreach is not needed for outreach; we are looking at doing a budget adjustment to put more of that money into instruction.

When a class has to be cancelled, or another last-minute change affects the budget, how do you re-allocate the funds?

We haven't had to cancel a class; that's a non-issue for us. When it comes to classes occasionally being cancelled due to bad weather and so on, it gets a little complicated: as I wrote my ABE budget, to make my dollars stretch, I budgeted for less class time than I expected. I budgeted for a 33-week year but am anticipating 35 weeks, knowing that, in those 35, we're going to miss a couple. So bad weather is calculated in at the beginning as I plan my allocations.

Have you been able to find any additional funding sources? form new partnerships?

I haven't gotten any new funding, but the City of Winchester and its city council have taken a great interest in the program and are partnering with us, more in the sense that they are giving us their support, especially philosophical support. For example, at the end of the summer (before I knew about our large enrollment numbers), they gave me address labels, already addressed to the residents of some of our neighborhoods with the highest percentage of need. We used these on outreach postcards. The city council has also helped in bringing the attention of the community to the need for GED and adult education programs.

What is your guiding philosophy for program management in tough economic times?

I thought about this one. Adults are calling me now; so many of them are desperate adults. They may have lost jobs they got twenty or more years ago, when that job really didn't need a high school credential. Now they're thrust into the unemployment pool, competing with people with high school and greater credentials. Our logo is "empowering adults through education": I want them to learn all there is, but so many of them now are more interested in just the credential because they need it to meet basic needs. For them, knowledge is not a luxury but a necessity: they want the GED certificate, and they want it now, and I can understand this since it's about their livelihood.

I'm always aware of not having diminishing returns by not trying to do too much for too many. I think everyone's really taking seriously our part in the economic recovery, in terms of helping adults get back on their feet. It's an awesome responsibility. It really is. ■

Bette Sneed, Prince William County (continued from front cover)

So, I would say we're trying to serve more of that population with less money. We're looking at class size; we may increase class size. We are trying to give the GED Tests on demand, so we can get people taken care of quicker. We're also looking for additional ways to obtain funding.

How has the crisis affected your enrollment? Have you changed the way you recruit learners?

As far as the ABE/GED side of things, since Race to GED took place, we have been doing much more outreach and we're much more visible in the community. We haven't needed to do anything necessarily new this year because the information is all out there.

As far as ESOL, we have found that population is affected as well. They may have to add an additional job, which keeps them out of our classes. Even if they don't have to work, they may not be able to spend the money that they were spending on education. You go over Maslow's hierarchy, and when you don't have shelter and food and water, you don't look to get educated. So we have found that our ESOL numbers are down some.

As a result, we sent a couple of our people out in person to actually hand deliver our brochures to ethnic businesses we normally wouldn't target; normally, we would hope that those people would see our brochures in the libraries or the government centers or community agencies. The businesses were very receptive, and many of them said they did not know about our program. Adult education is our lives: we work so hard to get the message out there all the time in so many different venues, it's always strange to hear people say that they didn't even know the program was there.

Have you been able to find additional funding sources?

We try to apply for every grant that we can. That's number one. Whether you get the grant is another story, but you know the answer if you don't apply. We have worked very hard to develop grant-writing teams within our own teaching staff and the lead teachers because we're learning the importance of presenting a good grant as they become more competitive.

We also are looking at community monies. For example, for the last five years, we've been applying for Walmart Good Works grants. That has helped us a lot because the GED grants run out at the end of May, when we still

have June to go. The Walmart grant is a one-page grant and it's not a line-item grant; it fills in pockets where we would otherwise not be able to offer services.

Have you formed any new partnerships? or leveraged old but significant ones?

Yes. We partner with many many many agencies, but one of the great partnerships that we've developed is with the Department of Social Services. They wrote a grant that lets us offer our supportive adult intensive learning classes, a curriculum that we in Prince William County developed. We have this agreement where our teacher is there five days a week to help low-income people to take a sales course that has three components: technology, GED preparation, and job readiness skills.

Also, we're very involved with our One-Stop. We plan to have our grand opening for our comprehensive One-Stop in December, and as a result, I've had a lot of interaction with many other agencies, including the VEC.

The third thing that comes to mind is that we've had, for maybe fifteen years now, our Adult Education Advisory Council. That's been a great way to pull in key players and get the word out to other agencies about adult ed. On our Advisory Council, we have people from the community college, VEC, and BEACON, which is our literacy agency. We have former students; people from our workplace programs, our local extension office, and our adult detention center; and someone from our county government. Just to be able to have a voice with those people has really been good for us. They may be aware of some opportunities out there for us that we're not aware of, and that's what the partnership is all about.

When a class has to be cancelled, or another emergency requires a change to the budget, how do you re-allocate the funds?

Without a doubt, my number one consideration in whatever decision I make is: will it maintain a quality program? If maintaining that quality program means we have to serve less people, then that's what has to take place. And there have been several years when that has been the case. I've been here almost twenty years and, in the past, people came to class and you just did what you did; there was not a lot of accountability. Now, with the accountability, we may be serving less, but, hopefully, they're getting more.

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Fall 2009 **PROGRESS**

Linda Allen, Southwest Regional (continued from front cover)

We have made some pretty drastic changes: relocated several classes, hired tutors where we had an influx of literacy level learners, and closed several sites. We're trying to get the most out of the funding that we have through our efforts at program improvement. The process has worked remarkably well because we have kept the communication lines open with our teachers.

In our community, people have been leaving the area for a number of years. Because we are a rural program, we have to go where the people are. Now, we commit to six to eight months in a location, and if we have success, we extend our time, but if we don't, we relocate that class.

For example, we went into a housing project, did a survey of residents, found there was need, and made a commitment to stay for six months. We had some early success in the first months, and then it just dwindled off. We ended up staying eight months altogether; we didn't leave until we had a new site in reasonable driving distance for those who might want to continue their classes.

Have you changed the way you recruit learners?

We have had an aggressive marketing plan since the 2004 Race to GED initiative, and we have been fortunate enough to have TV commercials, billboards, and radio and newspaper ads. We do flyers that we distribute in school systems and in business locations; we've printed banners and displayed them at events we've attended. Now we're seeing the payoff. In the last year, we have received more calls inquiring about our program than ever before. We've seen an increase in the number of referrals from agencies, small businesses, and private individuals. We're also promoting online GED preparation with eLearn Virginia.

When a class has to be cancelled, or another emergency requires a change to the budget, how do you re-allocate the funds?

Well, it's helpful to now be on an eighteen-month budget. Often, when those things happen, we can use that funding for our summer program. Even though we live in the mountains, we cancel as few classes as we can.

Have you been able to find any additional funding sources? form new partnerships?

I can't say enough about our local public school systems. We have an advisory board with representatives from

each of the schools, and they give us 100% support.

In regards to the PlugGED In program, the pilot was funded with money from the Governor's Productivity Fund and Race to GED funds from OAEL. We worked with Southwest Virginia Community College, which received a CEED grant to participate. After the pilot, there was no funding set aside to replicate the program, yet great encouragement to do so. In fact, our partnership with the community college was so successful, they were awarded a second CEED grant to support replication.

Through our aggressive grant writing, Southwest Regional Adult Education secured funding to replicate PlugGED In in 2009-2010. We received a CFO grant, a GAE grant, and a grant from the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB). We were also awarded ARC funding for the Dickenson County cohort.

We first received WIA funds in 2005 for the Race to GED. We went back for funding to replicate PlugGED In. This involved a lot of pre-work – going to meetings, sending newsletters, making sure the board knew about the pilot, sending out the video success stories that our PlugGED In students had created, and generally doing a lot of pre-planning before asking for money.

The local WIB awarded us a \$49,900 grant, which we plan to use to fund PlugGED In cohorts in two locations. Our Russell County class began on November 2nd, and our Dickenson County class will start in February 2010. Both counties have state-of-the-art technical centers that will serve as our host sites. Our area has two community colleges; Southwest Virginia was our pilot partner, but as the word spread, Mountain Empire was also eager to become a partner, and they will provide the IT staff for the Dickenson County cohort. With PlugGED In, we have a great concept and we've done a good job of marketing in our region and promoting our success: the result is that other agencies are clamoring to work with us to do it again. It's extremely exciting.

What is your guiding philosophy for program management in tough economic times?

We try to have the most efficient, effective program that we can offer for the amount of funding that we have. Also, we are constantly looking at program improvement; it's an ongoing process.

My advice for other programs is: Build partnerships and relationships with the folks in your community; they can be the best support you have when times are tough. ■



Janet Booth Eastern Shore Literacy Council

How has the present economic crisis affected your program?

It's affected the funding that comes in from our community as well as from our grant. We have seen a decrease in our local funding, as have all of the nonprofits here on the Eastern Shore; since we're in such a small rural area, many organizations are vying for the same dollars. Some of our donors who have given larger sums in the past have had to cut back. On the flip side, two of our three major fundraisers have gone over their targets this year, which has been outstanding: it goes to show that people are still willing to give.

Can you tell me more about your fundraisers?

Well, there's our annual Spell Rite; that's our adult spelling bee. The words usually have a theme (one year, for example, the theme was words that sound dirty but aren't). We also have a dinner and silent auction. It's a lot of fun; teams look forward to competing, and the event has its own following and has continued to grow. This year, we grossed over \$4000 versus our usual \$2500 or so. We moved the venue to a country club to accommodate more people.

In June, Feed-A-Mind is a nine-day event with our local restaurants, who either donate directly or contribute a percentage of sales on a particular day. Some restaurants will have celebrity wait staff working for tips or hold silent auctions. This was our biggest event this year, raising \$6800. It's been highly supported by our community. I discovered in our archives that, when it started about fifteen years ago, this event would make \$2000 or \$3000 but almost half of that would go toward paid advertising. Now, a combination of word of mouth and free publicity from local media yields major savings: this year, three radio stations did interviews and promotion and one of our local newspapers provided a schedule and write-ups. Total expenses this year were \$40.

In October, we hold our annual golf tournament, Drive for Literacy, which usually attracts about ninety golf-

ers. The most that has been raised by this event is \$20,000 gross, but the golf tournament is the fundraiser that has been most impacted by the economic times; some of our sponsors haven't given their usual \$1000 sponsorships.

In addition to the big events, we also send out an annual solicitation letter in November.

How has the crisis affected your enrollment? Have you changed the way you recruit?

A lot of our recruitment is now word of mouth. Recruitment seems to be going well, but realities are having an impact. Here on the Shore, we don't have good public transportation and folks have been affected by economic times in that they cannot afford gas. More so than before, our adults have other priorities in life they have to focus on; they cannot meet as often as they'd like to.

We are doing everything we can to assist with transportation; we even have bus passes that we hand out when necessary. A blessing here on the Shore has been the support of local churches and businesses, which provide space for our learners and tutors to meet so they don't have to come to our center: we have two dozen sites spread over an eighty-mile radius.

We've also begun thinking about technology and on-line learning. I am trying to think of strategies to target a different type of volunteer, one who would enjoy and have the skills to be effective in online tutoring.

Where have you been able save money?

I have been trying hard to watch mileage. Our centrally located office serves two counties. Traditionally, I have gone to our sites to match students to tutors; now, I'm trying to prepare tutors to handle those match meetings, so my travel doesn't affect our expenses. Whenever possible, I try to consolidate my trips to any given area.

Resources are a large expense for us, so I check eBay and look for sale items.

When a last-minute change or emergency requires a change to the budget, how do you go about re-allocating the funds?

I think that's a better question for Linda Richardson, our Administrative Director, to handle. According to Linda:

"We have taken several steps to ensure that we don't actually face an 'emergency.' Shortly after I began working for the Eastern Shore Literacy Council, I prepared a 'risk analysis' for the Board that weighed the probability of substantial reductions in income or significant pro-

gram disruptions, such as loss of a major grant, having to cancel our annual golf tournament, unanticipated loss of staff, etc. Further, our planning is complicated by the fact that we operate on a January - December fiscal year, while most of the grants are based on a July - June fiscal year.

“Based on the risk analysis, I recommended that the Board develop a formal policy on maintaining a reserve balance that would allow us to continue operations for a year with minimal adverse impacts. The Board approved establishment of a reserve of approximately 45% of our annual expenditures. (In general, it is recommended that non-profits maintain a reserve of at least 3 months of expenses. Given the state of the economy these last two years, that level may not be sufficient.)

“So far, this approach has served us well, even though we have faced a 300% increase in rent over the past five years; lost a \$25,000 grant one year; and, one year, an electrical storm fried my computer and printer.”

Have you been able to find any additional funding sources? form new partnerships?

We did get a Dollar General grant this year and, for the second year in a row, we have applied for small funds through United Way. We also got a National Book Fund scholarship. We felt very fortunate to get these grants.

One new way we're raising funds is Brownies for Literacy: I make gourmet brownies and sell them at the local bookstore. People make their contribution by buying a brownie when they buy coffee or tea at the bar. This has been a great little fundraiser, with \$50-\$100 per month in proceeds after expenses, which is perfect for matching grant funds. It has also helped raise awareness. People will say, “What’s the literacy council about?” People passing through the area also have a chance to hear about us.

As far as our partnerships, most are in-kind.

What is your guiding philosophy for program management in tough economic times?

I don't know: business as usual, I think. I'm certainly aware that all of these economic factors come into play, but the priority is our learners.

I look at it this way: the Shore is an area with a high percentage of poverty, and people are accustomed to hard times. For many of them, these times may be more difficult, but not unusual. As a community-based organization, our job is to do what we can to assist those who want to improve their literacy skills to improve their quality of life. As long as our doors are open, we'll do everything we can to work with our community to its benefit. Tough times aren't going to stop us. ■

Bette Sneed, Prince William County (continued from page 10)

You can try to foresee the future, but you can't. I have monthly meetings with my lead teachers, and, if it gets to the point where we say, “Hey, we're running out of money,” we will ask: what can we cut that will not affect the integrity of our program? I don't want to say that we can't offer a class. So we look for other solutions. For example, last year we didn't receive some funding we thought we were going to get and we had to back-peddle. I conduct an all-staff meeting in January, and then we also have an ABE/GED and an EDP meeting. We decided not to have the all-staff meeting; instead, I came to the individual staff meetings and did a condensed version of what I would have covered. That saved two hours of pay per instructor. It's not big chunks of money we're getting back, but we take a little chunk here and a little chunk there.

What tips do you have for other programs trying to do more with less?

The first would be to seek additional funding. Each community is going to have something different; you just

have to be aware of what your community has to offer.

The second would be to prioritize your current program offerings to determine what can be streamlined that would have the least effect on your program quality.

If you're going to have a quality program, I think that it's extremely important to have staff development built into your budget piece, because our teachers come from all avenues of life. Some of them are teachers but some of them have never taught before, and it's very difficult to just literally throw somebody in the classroom without some staff development.

It's also important, if you have the money, to provide teachers with as many resources as you can. Our students deserve the best, and if we can provide teachers with a resource library, even, say, something as simple as sentence strips, it can make a real difference. You know, our teachers aren't paid that much to begin with and buying classroom resources can be a real burden. If that money can be put in the budget, it will help the teacher to provide a more exciting and engaging classroom for our adults. ■

Using Technology to Do More with Less

by Jason Guard

When economic times are tight, it is the programs who adapt to the new conditions that maintain and even expand their services.

Emergent technologies continually offer opportunities for improvement in the quality and efficiency of adult education services. Innovation assists agile organizations in completing the work they already do and can eventually bring about an evolution in our approach to adult education.

Relatively recent developments in information technology can have significant impacts on how a program communicates and collaborates that can help further promotional efforts, resource sharing, and internal cooperation. Technology can make learning more accessible to adult students and professional development more readily available to both staff and agency partners. Although each individual educator cannot realistically stay up to speed on all of the latest technological tools, a program's staff can develop areas of specialization that will help inform the organization and galvanize with the ethic of innovation.

Using IT for Outreach

Your program's website could be your biggest outreach tool. There are fewer sound investments than the minimal expenses involved in buying a concise web address, updating your site with timely announcements, and connecting it to the sites of your partners and stakeholders. At this point in the information age, the public is rapidly embracing the web as its phone book. However, unlike the Yellow Pages, which require an organization to pay for the size of the ad, the effectiveness of a web page depends on time more so than money.

Promoting your program online is an act of educational public service and consumer advocacy. Credible adult education service providers must increase their online profiles in order to establish themselves as the authoritative sources of classes and credentials. If we don't supersize our online efforts, the web will be dominated by scam artists, and our potential clients will keep falling prey to opportunistic education predators. Providing a comprehensive overview of your program's process of

credentialing is also a way to use your website to reduce time spent going over these details on the phone and in person.

Efficient Collaboration through Wikis

Innovation often springs from the creative process of collaboration, so getting your instructors and staff together to share ideas frequently will be a crucial part of negotiating and responding to change. However, the time, effort, and expense involved in coordinating face-to-face meetings can be prohibitive. Another way to bring people together is to work on collaborative documents that are hosted on the Internet.

Jenny Bolte, in New River Valley, routinely uses wikis to develop curricula, course schedules, and other documents of mutual concern to her staff.

"Ultimately it will save you time and money as you will not find yourself repeating the same information to numerous staff and colleagues," says Bolte. "Keep in mind that when people are more in the 'know,' they have greater buy-in, and I really believe that you will see a difference in your program outcomes as I have seen in my own program." There are a variety of easy-to-use websites that can make creating a wiki a matter of minutes; one educator-friendly platform is [PBworks](#) (formerly PBwiki).

Another collaboration tool that is growing in popularity is Google Docs. Like wikis, these documents are hosted online and will save the trouble and expense of burning disks or using flash drives to transport files. The spreadsheet, word processing, and slideshow presentation tools are FREE and may save your program the prices of expensive software suites and periodic upgrades. Learn more about [Google Docs](#).

Distance Learning

Due in large part to online programs offering dubious credentials, adult learners today have developed an expectation that they will be able to "do it online." After clarifying that the GED Tests are not available over the

Be patient but persistent ...
Staff members who are willing to adapt make up an agile organization that can thrive in any circumstance.

Internet, adult education programs can offer online learning modules to meet this growing need. By marketing distance education options as a supplement or as a comprehensive course of study, programs can expand their offerings and their capacity.

All Virginia adult education programs are encouraged to craft and control their own slate of distance education courses. Getting started might involve identifying a flexible mix of free online tools and web-based curricula that charge modest subscription fees. In the absence of a local option, learners can be referred to eLearn Virginia for online GED preparation. Either way, distance education can be used to help learners accelerate toward their goals and make up for time missed during episodic attendance.

Tune In to Online Professional Development

It behooves educators and program managers to stay informed about best practices and innovative techniques. When national conferences and expensive consultants are not an option, program staff can take a social media approach to networking and resource sharing. Sites like Twitter and Ning connect people to other practitioners around the country and even the world. In these networks, helpful links are routinely shared, along with research findings and teaching tools. As you cultivate a

social network for your professional purposes, fellow correspondents may prove to be useful sounding boards for new ideas, a supportive group you can query for diverse perspectives. Exploring the avenues of social media takes time, but the return on investment is limitless.

Many publishers and education support organizations publicize free webinars on the latest curricula and instructional resources. VALRC also offers a range of online trainings. Educators who attend these sessions enhance their capabilities and their ability to introduce new approaches in their classrooms. Not only are online professional development events generally cost effective, they're also a good way to keep all staff members in the habit of using technology to better themselves.

Although not all staff may be accustomed to the new web-based communication tools, they should be able to learn these new skills and model the growth that we expect of the learners we serve. "It does take time to lead your staff in this direction," says Bolte. "Be patient but persistent. The payoff will happen." Staff members who are willing to adapt make up an agile organization that is ready to thrive in any circumstance. ■■

Jason Guard is GED Specialist at VALRC and manages eLearn Virginia.

Adult education websites should:

Follow Search Engine Optimization (SEO) guidelines: To increase the profile of your website, make sure the keywords that your potential clients are likely to search for are prevalent on your site. Include tags in the code that supports your site, as these are accessed by most search engines like Google. And don't forget to link to partnering agencies and ask them to do the same for you. This will increase the number of times your site comes up in searches, improving your site's "relevance" in the eyes of the search engine.

Address frequently asked questions: Many adult learners have one or two very basic questions on their mind when looking for their local adult education program. If your website can answer those questions, this will save time and energy for your support staff. However, many learners will still want verbal confirmation of your program's processes before visiting to register.

Prominently display contact info, hours of operation, and physical location: A clear statement of location and business hours is often all a learner or referring agency needs from your website. If it's well placed, it will cut down on phone calls asking for basic information.

Share FREE resources: Conventional wisdom about online marketing shows that free content draws people in and builds the client base. Giving useful content away is a good way to build confidence in your program as a benevolent and authoritative source of adult education services. For example, students can watch the narrated Test-taking Strategies slideshow developed by Cumberland Regional Adult Education on their own before GED testing. The 39 episodes of *GED Connection* are hosted at eLearnVA.com, available to all Virginians, and the number of credible FREE adult education websites is growing. These tools can help you hold your learners' attention while they wait to enroll or during gaps in attendance.

New Online Courses from the Resource Center

The Resource Center is excited to debut four new facilitated online courses this year.

Registration for these new offerings, along with the popular Adults as Learners, ESOL Basics, Adults and Learning Disabilities, and Beyond Basics: ESOL Lesson Planning courses, begins in December for the Winter 2010 session.

For the course and registration schedule, go to: <http://www.valrc.org/trainings/onlinecourses.html> (Each course requires a minimum of 15 registrants.)

ABE/GED Lesson Planning

The successful Beyond Basics: ESOL Lesson Planning course has been re-worked for ABE/GED instructors. Join other experienced ABE/GED instructors to study and create lesson plans that will enable your learners to efficiently meet their goals and help you maximize your time, resources, and skills.

Beyond Basics: ESOL Beginning Literacy

Teaching adult English language learners who have

problems with reading and writing—perhaps because they never went to school in their home country and are not literate in their native language—may seem like an intimidating prospect. This course, designed for ESOL instructors with some teaching experience, will help you better meet the needs of your literacy level students.

Beyond Basics: Multilevel ESOL Classes

Designed for ESOL instructors with some teaching experience, this course will help you better meet the needs of your multilevel classes. Learn about promoting interaction in multilevel classrooms, conducting needs assessments with multilevel groups, using grouping strategies, developing lesson activities and materials, and more.

Developing Writing Skills in Adults

This course will help you guide your learners through the writing process, from just getting words on paper (or screen) through pre-writing, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation. Along the way, you'll learn instructional and feedback strategies and do some writing of your own.