

*Report of the
Goal Setting Workgroup*

By describing and counting the goals named and achieved by program participants, a richer picture emerges of who participants are, what they are doing, and how broad the impact of funding is on the lives of participants, their families, and their communities.

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Introduction

Setting goals with students is an important process that can, unfortunately, become lost in the day-to-day mechanics of program and classroom management. By understand the importance of goal setting; however, both students and instructors can make this process a valuable educational experience to facilitate teachers' understanding of their students as well as the students' understanding of themselves.

Funders may require grantees to describe and count the goals named and achieved by program participants as a way of documenting the needs and interests of those served by programs.

By adding the data of goals set and met; the hours spent in programs; and gains measured by test scores; we create a truer picture of the impact of funding and program effectiveness than any one of those measures alone would provide.

The Goal Setting Workgroup

The Goal Setting Workgroup was convened on January 20, 2003 and worked through May, 2003. The goals of the workgroup were to:

1. Identity the challenges of genuine goal setting as well as meeting the SMARTT reporting requirements.
2. Offer guidelines for goal setting.
3. Articulate the advantages of genuine goal setting to students, programs, and funders.
4. Offer Goal Setting Lesson Plans along with examples of program material and activities.
5. Develop recommendations to the Department of Education/ACLS to support and facilitate the work done in the field.

Given the unique nature of our programs and communities, it has not been our intention to create a one-size-fits-all set of mandates. Instead, we hope to help unify the field by providing uniform guidelines, while offering sample activities which programs can implement according to their individual needs.

We have been impressed by the variety of creative methods that programs are using to address the issue of student goal setting. We appreciate the willingness of many programs to share their experiences and material for the benefit of the entire Massachusetts ABE field.

How does goal setting benefit our students?

Goal setting serves to establish a partnership with the students. The goal setting process:

- Promotes learner ownership by establishing the student as an agent in learning.
- Helps students become aware of the differences between short-term and long-term needs.
- Provides students with opportunities for success.
- Helps students set realistic expectations as they realize that everything they set to accomplish will not happen overnight but rather in a more realistic time frame.
- Helps low self-esteem students gradually develop into new, rekindled, high self-esteem learners.
- Helps students become self-motivated and persistent in the pursuit of life-long learning.
- Allows students to learn that goals can and do change.
- Helps students learn to reflect of their progress or lack of progress toward goals and modify and set new goals, as needed.

What is the teacher's role in student goal setting?

Student goal setting allows teachers to specifically target their classroom instructions. When the instruction comes directly from the learners' goals, instructors give the students exactly what is needed to promote their success. As a result:

- Authentic goal setting should inform curriculum development.
- As students begin to “own” their learning the teacher becomes a facilitator.
- This ownership and progress encourages students to learn outside the classroom.
- Both students and instructor measure student progress as it relates to the achievement of short-term and long-term goals.
- Staff involved in goal setting can connect students with outside resources that open up other educational choices and more goal setting opportunities.
- Students are equipped with a skill that enables them to learn and grow beyond the classroom.

How does student-centered goal setting benefit our programs?

The quality of adult learning improves when programs work with their students toward defining and achieving both individual and group goals. Knowing what is important to students helps programs to:

- Define their purpose, which in turn leads to efficacy in planning the curriculum and selecting appropriate instructional materials.
- Raise awareness on the part of instructors and other staff of the needs of the students.
- Reinforce for the program what its priorities should be.

Student retention improves when the students have sense of purpose for their participation. This creates an encouraging cycle because:

- When attendance improves, so does staff motivation.
- When both students and staff focus on accomplishments, the entire atmosphere is positive.
- Students feel satisfied that the program is working for them.
- Staff feel satisfied that they are helping students to meet their needs.

Reviewing the goals and achievements of each student:

- Offers opportunities for evaluation and celebration.
- Provides encouragement and identifies areas for improvement.
- Enables the program to demonstrate its successes and needs in applying for funding.

How does student-centered goal setting serve our funders?


The ability to support and document the achievement of student goals is as important to ABE funders as it is to programs and students. By incorporating the achievement of student goals into our accountability system, funders send a message to programs, policymakers, and the wider community that honoring the many reasons that adult learners seek ABE is fundamental to our system.

Currently, the Workforce Investment Act, the federal legislation that authorized adult basic education, requires that states collect information about student outcomes primarily related to workforce participation.

Our experience tells us that students participate in ABE programs with purposes beyond workforce participation I mind. To honor this belief:

- It is imperative that as a system, we demonstrate the achievement of goals beyond those required by current policy.
- Goal-related data must be collected to help establish the need for and value of adult basic education services.
- Inclusion of a broad range of goals and related data can influence the development of public policy that supports the many reasons that adults come to our programs.

Guidelines for Goal Setting



The process of setting goals with students should not be limited by the SMARTT system.

- ❖ Goal setting is an important part of learning, and should be integrated into instruction time. Information about student goals should help inform curriculum development.

- ❖ There are a variety of procedures for setting goals with students.
Goal setting may take place on an individual basis, in small groups, or as a whole class. It can be done during a one-on-one conference, or as part of instruction.

- ❖ Goals are determined by the students and negotiated with the staff person.
Students may need guidance in understanding the difference between realistic long-term and short-term goals.

- ❖ Goal setting may be facilitated by teachers and/or counselors.

- ❖ There are advantages to having a staff member who will have an ongoing relationship with the student facilitate the goal setting process.

- ❖ Students' goals need to be communicated to their instructors, regardless of who records the goals. Goals can be set, met, and reset at any time of the year.
It is important for programs to update changes in students' goals and to regularly document and record student achievements.

- ❖ Student goals and achievements need to be communicated to the SMARTT coordinator in each program in order to provide an accurate picture of student accomplishments.

- ❖ SMARTT is only one of the reasons why we collect student goals. Goals should not be limited by SMARTT.

- ❖ Programs can use the Department of Education SMARTT Goals Form or another goal setting tool.
Whatever tool programs decide to use, it should align with SMARTT or be translated to the SMARTT form so that student goals can be captured there.

- ❖ Students need to be informed about how their goals will be tracked.
Students are entitled to know how the goals they have selected will be monitored, including data matching, documentation that will be required, etc.

Recommendations

Based on our discussions, research, surveys, and information from the field, we have Submitted the following recommendations to ACLS:

- ❖ Reconsider documentation required, and allow teachers to sign off on having seen various required items, rather than copying them and keeping them on file.
- ❖ Research the legality of asking for and copying immigration and naturalization documents.
- ❖ It would be beneficial to the field if ACLS were to separate staff development and training on goal setting from SMARTT training.
- ❖ Clarify how and when to record unanticipated goals that are met by learners.
- ❖ When ACLS evaluates goal attainment across programs, they should look at:
 1. The percentage of students who achieve their primary goals,
 2. The percentage of students who set more than one goal, and
 3. The percentage of students who achieve two or more goals.
- ❖ The field would benefit from further clarification and explanation about the meaning and significance of Countable Outcomes.
- ❖ ACLS should consider adjusting goals for programs in correctional facilities. This should be done in conjunction with staff from correctional facilities.