

# **USING DATA FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT**

**Annual ABE Directors' Meeting**

**Presenters: Donna Cornellier, MDOE  
Anne Serino, Program Director, Operation Bootstrap**

**October 4 - 5, 2001**

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## AGENDA

- 1. Connecting Program Planning With The Indicators of Program Quality** **15 min.**
  - Why do we need a program planning process?
  - Why do we need performance standards?
  - How can the Indicators of Program Quality be used?
  
- 2. Using A Program Profile To Look At Data** **10 min.**
  - Review program profile
  - Review Indicators of Program Quality - #1 and #8
  - Review data provided - attendance and student progress
  
- 3. Small Groups Review Program Profiles** **30 min.**
  - How do we read and use the data?
  - What additional data is needed to help programs make decisions?
  - How can programs spot data trends?
  
- 4. Feedback/Discussion** **30 min.**
  - Review how data can be used to determined success
  - Understand how data can be used to identify areas that need improvement
  
- 5. Wrapup/Evaluation** **5 min.**

### Handouts:

**Program Profile**

**Indicators of Program Quality**

**How To Use Data To Improve Your Program**

**Data Analysis Chart**

**Attendance Data For Program XYZ**

**Educational Gains By Functioning Level Data For Program XYZ**

**Massachusetts Performance Measures Verified By USDOE**

**Overview of the SABES Integrated Program and Staff Development Process**

**What Works Literacy Partnership: Making Data Work For You**

**Organizing Your Program's Data to Tell a Story**

# PROGRAM PROFILE

## The XYZ Program

**Congratulations!** You are the new director of the XYZ Adult Learning Center. Your first task is to gather information that will help you to get to know your program better. You have decided to use the Indicators of Program Quality as a guide.

The Learning Center is a community-based organization located in a city of 50,000. The city has a large immigrant population that includes Hispanics, Haitians and Asians. The Learning Center offers a sequence of both ABE and ESOL classes during the day and in the evening. The center receives \$252,000 from the Department of Education.

The center is centrally located and is accessible by public transportation. There is no day care.

You are a part time director (28 hours per week). There are 3 full time staff members. One is a full time teacher. One teaches and does the program's intake and counseling. This staff speaks Spanish. One teaches and is also the community planner and technology coordinator. There are three part time teachers. The full time staff participates in many staff development activities but the part time staff doesn't.

The ESOL staff and the ABE staff meet separately once a month. They primarily discuss enrollment and attendance issues. Because of logistics, the whole staff meets only 2 times a year.

ESOL intake is done individually. Students are placed on a waiting list based on the initial interview and are given the BEST Oral test before enrollment. ABE intake is done once a month. In a group, students are given the overview of the program and the TABE locator. After the locator is completed, each student meets individually with the counselor and appointments are made to take the TABE.

The program has found that administering the BEST test three times a year takes a great deal of time.

The Basic Literacy class uses the Wilson Reading System. Because the demand for ESOL exceeds the community's capacity, there are many advanced level ESOL students in the ABE classes.

The program has received one Curriculum Frameworks grant. The curriculum is several years old and not used consistently by the staff. Coordination from level to level seems informal.

The program has received several technology mini-grants.

A Board of Directors governs the program. Planning is done informally.

## INDICATORS OF PROGRAM QUALITY

***Indicator 1: Student Educational Progress***

*Students demonstrate progress toward the attainment of literacy competencies and/or ESOL skills that support their individual goals.*

***Indicator 2: Family, Career, & Community Impact***

Students demonstrate gains in literacy and/or ESOL skills and abilities that impact their families, jobs and the communities in which they live.

***Indicator 3: Professional Development***

Exemplary professional development opportunities enhance educator professionalism to provide quality instruction for students.

***Indicator 4: Program Planning***

Program planning embodies effective organizational structures and processes, staff development, curriculum and materials development, and community linkages to serve the needs of learners.

***Indicator 5: Program Management & Accountability***

Program management and accountability processes are efficient and effectively address all components of service delivery.

***Indicator 6: Data Collection & Evaluation***

Data collection and evaluation inform program planning and operations.

***Indicator 7: Instructional Support Services***

Services to students include instructional and support services that to the extent possible, meet the needs of students, such as counseling/advocacy services (accessible and in an appropriate language), child care, and transportation.

***Indicator 8: Curriculum Development & Implementation***

Curriculum development and implementation contributes to progress toward the goals of students.

***Indicator 9: Instructional Methods***

Instructional methods reflect a variety of instructional approaches to implement the curriculum.

***Indicator 10: Community Linkages***

Community linkages are developed to connect the program and students with the larger community.

**Quality Indicator 1: Students demonstrate progress toward the attainment of literacy competencies and/or English for Speakers of other Language (ESOL) skills that support their individual needs development and implementation contribute to progress toward student goals.**

<b>Areas Addressed</b>
<b>Learner Assessment</b>
1. Does the program formally measure student progress?
2. Does the program have an approved assessment crosswalk?
3. Does the program conduct initial, mid-year, and final assessments for each student?
4. Do the assessments identify the following area(s) of learner progress:
• improved communication in English?
• improvement in reading?
• improvement in writing?
• improvement in math?
• improvement in other areas? (Please specify.)
5. Do the assessments show learner advancement within one educational level (e.g., SPL or GLE)?
<b>Learner Outcomes</b>
1. Do the learners demonstrate progress in any of the following ways:
• advancement to a higher educational level?
• receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent? (e.g., GED or ADP/EDP)
• transition to further education, training, or employment?
• other aspects of life-long learning? (Please specify.)

**What data would you need to answer some of the above questions?**

**Learner Assessment:**

**Learner Outcomes:**

**Quality Indicator 8: Curriculum development and implementation contribute to progress toward student goals.**

<b>Areas Addressed</b>
<b>Instructional Process</b>
1. Do learners evaluate the curricula?
2. Does the curriculum address diverse educational and cultural backgrounds?
3. Is the curriculum developed with participation of staff and students?
4. Does the curriculum utilize materials generated by staff and students?
<b>Technology and Instruction</b>
1. Does the curriculum utilize technology assisted learning whenever possible?
2. Does the curriculum address computer literacy and other emerging technologies to the best extent possible?
<b>Curriculum Frameworks</b>
1. Does the curriculum build on ABE Curriculum Frameworks?
2. Has the program received a Curriculum Frameworks grant? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If yes, please attach the checklist.</li></ul>

**What data would you need to answer some of the above questions?**

**Instructional Process:**

**Technology and Instruction:**

**Curriculum Frameworks:**

# **HOW TO USE DATA TO IMPROVE YOUR PROGRAM**

## **1. Identify the Problem or Question You Want Answered**

- ◆ **What question(s) do you need answered?**
- ◆ **How will answering this question improve your program?**
- ◆ **What data is currently collected that will help answer the question?**
- ◆ **What additional data do you need to collect to help answer the question?**

## **2. Collect the Data**

- ◆ **How will you collect the data?**
- ◆ **Where will you get the data?**
- ◆ **Who will be responsible for getting the data?**
- ◆ **Is the data measurable?**
- ◆ **Is the amount of data realistic?**
- ◆ **Can you collect the data within a reasonable amount of time?**

## **3. Analyze the Data**

- ◆ **What does the data tell you?**
- ◆ **Do you see any trends?**
- ◆ **Are there any patterns?**
- ◆ **Is there missing information?**
- ◆ **Can you look at data over time and make comparisons?**

## **4. Develop a Program Improvement Plan**

- ◆ **Did the data analysis answer you question?**
- ◆ **What changes need to take place in your program as a result of the analysis?**
- ◆ **What steps need to be taken to improve your program?**
- ◆ **Who needs to be involved in implementing the program improvement?**

## DATA ANALYSIS CHART

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>WHAT</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHERE</b>	<b>WHEN</b>	<b>HOW</b>
<b>Identify the Problem or Question You Want Answered</b>					
<b>Collect the Data</b>					
<b>Analyze the Data</b>					
<b>Develop a Program Improvement Plan</b>					

## ATTENDANCE DATA FOR PROGRAM XYZ

Class	Day Night	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Avg
101	Day	56%	88%	83%	79%	70%	64%	60%	73%	63%	57%	68%	75%	69%
102	Night	52%	54%	68%	71%	69%	61%	60%	61%	68%	70%	71%	68%	64%
201	Day	48%	53%	65%	67%	65%	57%	61%	59%	68%	67%	65%	57%	61%
202	Night	52%	44%	64%	66%	67%	56%	60%	59%	66%	63%	65%	57%	61%
301	Day	83%	85%	81%	74%	63%	63%	50%	62%	76%	65%	61%	57%	65%
302	Night	70%	52%	70%	60%	60%	50%	38%	48%	50%	47%	38%	35%	49%
501	Day	68%	65%	79%	81%	83%	84%	75%	77%	74%	81%	82%	80%	77%
502	Night	84%	75%	77%	78%	86%	84%	80%	82%	81%	79%	78%	79%	80%
601	Day	70%	73%	88%	77%	80%	85%	74%	76%	69%	80%	80%	71%	77%
602	Night	87%	83%	82%	75%	78%	75%	79%	82%	91%	82%	86%	90%	82%
701	Day	69%	74%	87%	76%	81%	84%	75%	76%	71%	78%	80%	84%	80%
702	Night	85%	82%	81%	76%	78%	76%	80%	81%	80%	83%	79%	76%	79%
		68%	69%	77%	73%	73%	69%	66%	69%	71%	71%	67%	69%	70%

	1999	2000	2001
DOE Average Class Attendance	63.63%	66.31%	67.16%

**EDUCATIONAL GAINS BY FUNCTIONING LEVEL DATA  
FOR PROGRAM XYZ**

<b>Entering Educational Functioning Level</b>	<b>Total Enrolled</b>	<b>Number Completed Level</b>	<b>Number Completed Level and Advanced 1 or More Levels</b>	<b>Number Separated Before Completed</b>	<b>Number Remaining</b>	<b>Percent Completing Level</b>
<b>ABE Beginning Literacy</b>						
<b>ABE Beginning Basic Education</b>	15	4	2	4	7	27%
<b>ABE Intermediate Low</b>	5	2	1	0	3	40%
<b>ABE Intermediate High</b>	3	1	0	1	1	33%
<b>ASE Low</b>	5	2	1	1	2	40%
<b>ASE High</b>	12	5	0	4	3	42%
<b>ESL Beginning Literacy</b>	3	1	0	1	1	33%
<b>ESL Beginning</b>	7	2	1	3	2	29%
<b>ESL Intermediate Low</b>	8	3	1	2	3	38%
<b>ESL Intermediate High</b>	15	5	2	4	6	33%
<b>ESL Low Advanced</b>	13	5	2	3	5	38%
<b>ESL High Advanced</b>						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>35%</b>

## MASSACHUSETTS PERFORMANCE MEASURES

FY 2000 PERFORMANCE VERIFIED BY USDOE	<u>Target</u>	<u>Actual</u>
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE I – Demonstrated Improvement in Literacy Skills</b> <b>Sub Measures</b>		
1. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Beginning Literacy level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level. (1999-2000)	20%	29%
2. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Beginning Adult Literacy level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level (1999-2000)	30%	26%
3. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Intermediate Adult Basic Education level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level (1999-2000)	30%	32%
4. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Beginning Literacy English Literacy education level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level. (1999-2000)	20%	36%
5. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Beginning English Literacy level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level (1999-2000)	30%	34%
6. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Intermediate English Literacy level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level (1999-2000)	30%	36%
7. The percentage of adults enrolled at the Advanced English Literacy level who acquired the basic skills (validated by standardized assessment) needed to complete that level (1999-2000)	30%	29%
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE II – High School Completion</b> The number of adult learners who earned a high school diploma or GED	1,090	1,478
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE III – Further Education and Training</b> The number of adult learners who entered postsecondary education and/or training	261	487
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE IV - Entered Employment</b> The percentage of unemployed enrollees (in the workforce) who gained Employment. [This measure is for <i>all</i> students, not just those with an employment related goal.]	20%	29%
<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE V – Retained Employment</b> The number of adult learners who retained their job or advanced on the job.	698	2,418

## OVERVIEW of the SABES INTEGRATED PROGRAM and STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The SABES Integrated Program and Staff Development Process is a set of tools accompanied by a process designed to help ABE program plan and implement an integrated program and staff development component. The process consists of the following steps:

### 1. Assessing Needs and Strengths

#### Program Development

##### Tools

- Indicators of Program Quality

##### Steps

- Identify program strengths and needs
- Chart results

#### Staff Development

##### Tools

- Practitioners' Knowledge and Skills Checklist/Core Staff Development Topic List

##### Steps

- Each staff member identifies his/her own strengths and needs
- Chart results

### 2. Prioritize Goals

#### Program Development

##### Tools

- Posted chart showing program strengths and needs

##### Steps

- Present criteria for choosing priority needs - urgency, importance, "do-ability", impact on students
- Conduct inclusive discussion
- Dot vote to determine 1 - 3 priority areas

### Staff Development

#### Tools

- Posted chart with result of individual staff strengths and needs

#### Steps

- Analyze chart for any staff development themes
- Analyze chat to note matches between strengths and needs

### 3. Developing Action Plan to Achieve Goals

#### Program Development

- Clarify policies about resource allocation (paid time, purchasing materials)
- Determine who will do what by when and what resources are needed

#### Staff Development

- Clarify policies about resource allocation
- Create individual action plans to achieve staff development goals

### 4. Implementing Action Plans

#### Program Development

- Follow steps in action plan
- Check in and adjust as needed

#### Staff Development

- Assist staff in following staff development plans
- Adjust as needed

### 5. Document Activities

- Program and staff development activities should be tracked, step by step
- Staff can maintain portfolios/folders for documentation

### 6. Evaluating Results

- Use concrete indicators and action plans to determine how much progress has been achieved

## ***What Works Literacy Partnership:***

### ***Making Data Work For You***

**Diane Rosenthal**

Literacy Partners, New York, NY

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SABES/World Education, Boston, MA, Copyright 2001.

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**A**dult basic education programs collect large amounts of data. In many instances programs tend to collect more data than they know what to do with. Most often this data is used for reporting purposes and has limited impact on a program's day-to-day operations. However, as adult educators we recognize that accurate, complete data is essential to remaining a viable and credible organization. We also know that it takes time, financial support, committed personnel and patience to create a data system that informs and is fully integrated into an agency's day-to-day operations.

The What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), led by Literacy Partners in New York City, was founded in 1996 with a grant from the Wallace-Readers Digest Funds. It brought together 12 exemplary adult literacy programs from across the country who were interested in building their capacity to collect, manage and analyze data, before results and accountability became the driving forces behind educational policy in the United States. WWLP represents a discerning and proactive response by national leaders in adult education, the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and local programs to launch a state-of-the-art effort to dramatically improve the ability of adult education programs to collect data and report on student achievements. Over the past five years these programs have worked diligently to identify effective practices that lead to using data for program improvement and decision-making. These programs believe in the fundamental power of quality data.

The programs that comprise the Partnership represent the diversity of adult education providers. They are urban, rural and somewhere in between. Budgets range from \$250,000 to \$4 million. Together the partners engage the services of 1,837 volunteers and employ 270 paid part-time and full-time teachers. The programs include eight that are community-based, two school district-operated, and two community college-based. They are located in Illinois, Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin, Arizona, Ohio, Vermont and Montana. The total number of students served by Partnership agencies exceeds 28,000.

For the past five years the WWLP Partners have been on a journey, sometimes frustrating sometimes exhilarating. When Partners joined WWLP they were at various stages in their data collection practices. Some had been collecting data for years as part of centralized urban networks and had sophisticated management information systems in place. Others lacked even rudimentary databases and many had no uniform assessment practices. All were committed, however, to making substantial changes in their programs and to improving their approaches to collecting, using and analyzing data. They were eager to find out how their students were doing by employing more uniform assessment practices; they were willing to administer standardized tests as well as performance based measures. Furthermore, they were convinced that, if they began asking better questions about their programs and collected appropriate data, they would uncover new and vital information that could lead to improved instructional and administrative

practices. The challenges that each program has faced have been uniquely its own. The "lessons learned" as a result of this collaborative effort, however, have begun to create a remarkably consistent picture of just what it takes to make data "work" for an agency.

As WWLP enters its final year, the Partners are writing case studies to document and share their "lessons learned" with the field. One Partner writes,

"Prior to joining WWLP we had been providing educational services to adults seeking to increase their basic academic skills, increase their English language proficiency and find sustainable employment. We were providing these services largely without a system of student assessment, which resulted in inaccurate data, no reliable system to assess the cost of specific outcomes, and few opportunities to reliably promote and advocate for the organization in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness.... Today our program has worked quite diligently to create a system of assessment that meets external requirements yet is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of staff and students. From the identification of assessment tools, to training instructors, to revamping the database system entirely, to creating all new forms that capture essential information, we believe we are now better equipped to meet the challenges that adult education faces in the 21st century."

The What Works Literacy Partnership represents a unique model of professional development that merits examination and replication. Partner programs have had opportunities to receive training from expert researchers and educational evaluators; they have been able to experiment with the development of their assessment systems and have had the benefit of sustained interaction with colleagues around shared goals. Another Partner states,

"Our early association with the What Works Literacy Partnership brought the issues of assessment and evaluation to the forefront. By interacting with other agencies throughout the country, we were able to see the benefits that involving teachers and learners in creating a formal assessment process would have. The importance of systematizing and standardizing assessment processes was revealed through our interaction with the partners and from the expert training that we received. We learned from WWLP the importance of asking the right questions and analyzing the correct data to present a rich and detailed picture of our agency, its programs and accomplishments to funders, trustees, staff, and learners."

WWLP has identified key findings for developing assessment and data collections systems, including:

- Understanding the multiple purposes for assessment -- including documenting program impact, finding ways to improve programs and monitoring individual student progress -- will help in designing an effective system;
- Involving staff in every stage of assessment and achieving staff buy-in are key ingredients to the success of any evaluation and assessment plan;
- Investing in staff development is essential;
- Administering standardized assessment measures correctly yields valid and reliable data;
- Program managers, students, tutors, funders and policymakers share the responsibility to provide high-quality adult literacy programs and to gather the evidence necessary to demonstrate that these programs actually work;
- Students need to be involved in and understand each phase of the assessment process; and

- Asking good questions and gathering good data enable a program to analyze successes and to make improvements when necessary and desired.

Out of the WWLP effort will come project materials that can help others design effective and efficient assessment and evaluation plans. The products include:

- **Self-Assessment Survey of Agency Resources and Skills**  
This instrument is designed to assist programs in identifying current data collection procedures and areas that need improvement.
- **Indicators of Data Proficiency: Three Stages of Growth**  
This model identifies three levels of program proficiency with corresponding descriptors assigned to each level. Programs can use this document to assess what systems and practices are currently in place that support the collection and to determine what needs to be done to move the organization to the next level.
- **Data Bytes Guide Sheets**  
This series of information sheets answers the most frequently-asked questions about data collections, management, and analysis. Sample sheets respond to questions such as: How do I build a data collection system? How can I train teachers and tutors to collect data? How do I involve students in data collection and assessment?
- **Model Data Reports**  
Sample reports from WWLP agencies will provide models for effectively using data to tell an organization's story.
- **Case Studies**  
Each WWLP agency tells the story of how it resolved an issue related to data collection and assessment. They represent the "lessons learned" from the field.

## Conclusion

The past five years have been an exciting time of discovery and challenges for the WWLP initiative. Through a process of support, training, and experimentation, the partners have developed a broad body of knowledge about what it takes to build data collection systems and develop effective assessment practices. Agencies have been able to identify the skills they need and to focus on honing those skills. They have learned what they can do with the new knowledge they have gained and are sharing that knowledge with funders, policymakers, and adult educators across the country.

For more information on the What Works Literacy Partnership or on its upcoming publications, contact 212-802-1113 or go to its newly-designed Web site at: [www.wwlp.org](http://www.wwlp.org)

Diane Rosenthal is the director of What Works Literacy Partnership at Literacy Partners in NYC.

# ***Organizing Your Program's Data to Tell a Story***

**Heidi L. Fisher, Carol L. Gabler**

Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley, Eau Claire, WI,

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## **The Challenge**

A program with a tendency to collect too much data needed to develop a clear and concise data plan that would allow meaningful articulation of its successes and challenges.

## **Who We Are**

Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley (LVA-CV) is a non-profit organization that began providing services in 1986. Our main office is located in Eau Claire, WI, but we serve a tri-county area. Because of the multiple rural areas served, it remains a constant challenge to meet the needs of adults and families while remaining a cohesive organization.

LVA-CV provides services through several programs: one-to-one tutoring, jail instruction, workplace education, citizenship, and comprehensive family literacy. During the 1999-2000 fiscal year, 246 adult students and 96 children were served through LVA-CV programs, with a total of 13,701 instructional hours. Ours is primarily a volunteer-based program, but direct teacher instruction takes place at our family literacy sites located in two counties.

## **Our Story**

At LVA-CV we knew that everyone was working hard to collect the data necessary to satisfy a long and varied list of partners and funders. At year's end, we found our selves floundering in long, detailed reports from the ten individual programs spread out over three counties. What was worse, all were using slightly different recording systems to collect data. Each submitted a variety of reports to our executive director. This made it particularly challenging to compile program and organization-wide evaluations, analyze the data, to share with our funders and board of directors. The sheer quantity of data was obscuring the essential information and impeding our progress and ability to share successes and challenges of the students served in our programs.

Our challenge was to pull consistent pieces of information from all segments, record that standardized data accurately in a computerized collection system, consolidate the findings, and produce a report. Our involvement with the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP) led to improvements in our approach. By asking the right and same questions of every segment, we were able to determine what information we needed at the beginning, thus avoiding a lot of wasted time and energy.

## Recommendations

Developing an efficient data plan involves a cycle of collecting, analyzing, organizing, revising, and articulating. We recognize that our work has only just begun, but based on what we have learned, we can recommend these steps when developing a data plan. See also the flow chart at the end of this article.

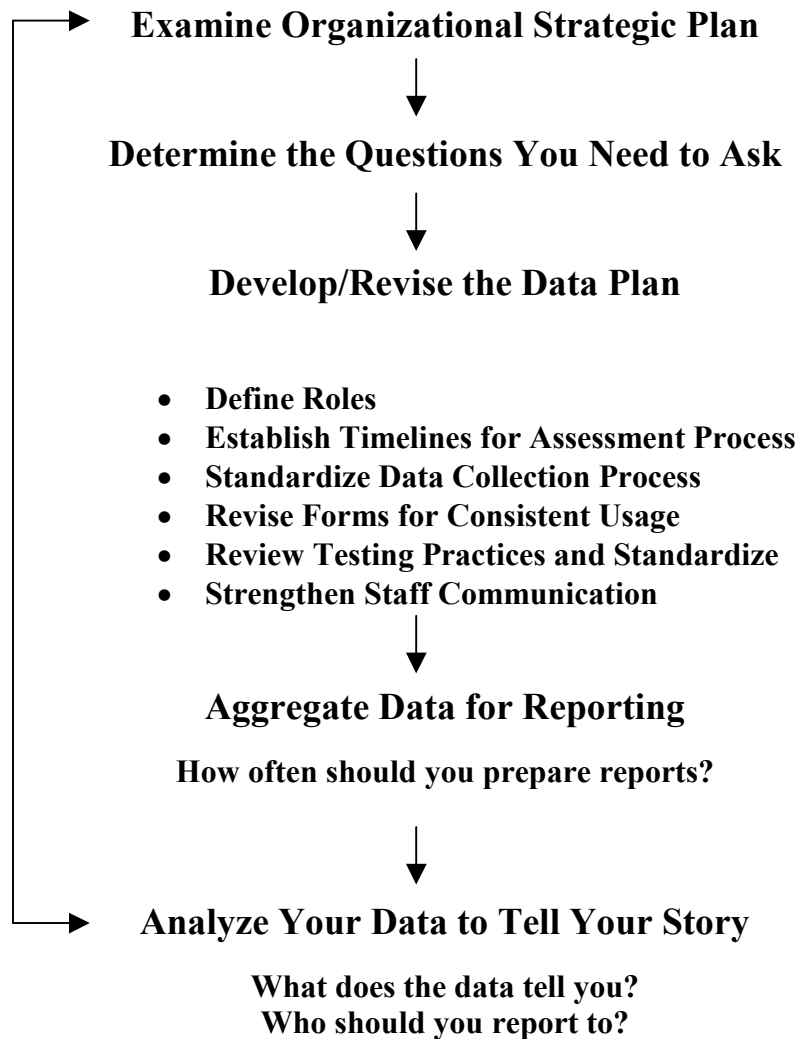
1. Examine your organization's strategic plan
  - Clearly define your program goals through strategic planning. LVA-CV's strategic planning process involves both staff and the board of directors. The strategic plan incorporates a healthy cycle of planning, reviewing, and evaluating at all levels. Each staff member also develops an annual action plan as a focus for his or her individual staff goals.
2. Determine the questions you need to ask
  - Include your staff at all stages to ensure staff "buy-in" and thoroughness. The staff is in touch with information that can be easily gathered and has an awareness of what will be required for consistent data collection.
  - General questions guide the early stages, but evolve and become more sophisticated with time. Examples of general questions: What do we need to show learner progress? What do we need to accurately measure outcomes? What do we need to guide program planning?
  - More specific questions help pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in individual programs. Examples of more advanced questions: Are family literacy students making progress after 50 hours of instruction?  
By asking what we need to know to become more effective, we are better prepared to determine from our data such factors as the percentage of students who make gains on standardized tests, the percentage of tutors who have completed the competencies for training, and the percentage of students who have achieved one or more persona goals. By including the staff in creation of the questions all data can then be gathered in an efficient way.
  - Changing needs affect question selection. We must schedule time to review and assess what we have learned from collected data at the end of each semester. This analysis helps us ask better questions and then adapt our programming to best meet students' needs.
  - Questions need to support strategic plan. This cycle does not always flow in a step-by-step manner. For example, you may discover that data questions do not support your strategic plan. In this case it would be important to revise questions to ensure that the organizational needs are being addressed.
3. Develop/revise the data plan
  - Define roles. Determine who is in charge of data (e.g., the data person, the teacher, and/or coordinators). In our program it was decided that educators and technical personnel should share responsibility for data decisions. As a group they determine how they will collect, process, manage, and analyze data.
  - Establish a timeline for the assessment process. Determine when testing will need to take place. In our program it was decided that we need at a minimum to pre/post-test annually. The data questions we ask help to determine the timeline.
  - Standardize the data collection process. We incorporated a computerized data collection system to provide consistent data recording. All teachers receive training and are expected to follow the same collection procedures. We

discovered that not all teachers were assessing in the same manner, so we reviewed time guidelines and appropriate assessment procedures.

- Revise forms to reflect the questions. This streamlines data entry. Revised forms have helped us to ensure that we were collecting all information up front and we did not need to go back and "fill in blanks."
  - Define terms for consistent usage. We provide time in monthly staff meetings to ensure that terms such as "on hold" and "waiting to be placed," mean the same to all working with data and assessment. We also discovered that individuals from our three counties used different definitions for "full-time" employment, which resulted in inconsistent data.
  - Review and standardize testing practices. When we formalize how tests are given, we can more accurately measure the outcomes. At the start of every year we review our test practices to assure consistency in timing and administration of assessment tests. We make sure students receive the same pre-test as posttest. We revise inefficient strategies, such as our original decision to administer standardized tests after 50 hours of instruction, which proved to be too soon. We now do pre- and post-testing every year with approximately 80% of our students. We have also come to realize that not everyone who comes into our program is going to benefit from the standardized assessment process.
  - Strengthen staff communication. Monthly staff meetings designed to deal with issues of data collection provide an opportunity to share information and ask questions. They foster a supportive environment in the team effort to do things right, as do occasional staff lunches geared to staff interaction time. Bringing in experts who can help clarify the crucial questions and assist with technology now can save time and money later.
4. Aggregate data for reporting
    - We had to decide what information would be collected, and when. Should reports be made monthly, every six months, yearly, or a combination?
  5. Analyze your data to tell your story
    - With continual program improvement being our focus, it is critical to take the time to interpret the data that has been collected. Without this crucial step, a data collection cycle is not maintained; rather, it is a beginning and an end with no connection to the following year. We need to have the courage to make changes in our program, curriculum, and/or strategic plan based on insights, trends, strengths, and weaknesses in the data in order to continue the cycle.

Recognize that you are probably never going to achieve the perfect system, but efficient standardized data collection is essential to continuous program improvement. The answers are there if you ask the right questions. With a focus on the needed elements to collect, it has helped our director and staff to be able to analyze and clearly share our story with the board of directors, funders, and other organizations.

## YEARLY CYCLE FOR SYSTEMATIC DATA COLLECTION



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