

Staff Involvement:

Better Decisions, Better Results



National Adult Education
Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC)



Center for Literacy, Education & Employment



Original Content Developed by Dr. Lennox McLendon and Kathi Polis

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Making the Case.....	2
A Sample Framework.....	5
Preparing for Staff Involvement.....	6
The Trident.....	8
Assessment Tasks: Structure and Process.....	9
Planning Tasks.....	11
Testing/Documenting Tasks.....	11
Integrating Tasks.....	12
Finding the Time.....	12
Sample Timeline.....	13
Endnotes.....	17

Introduction

“Giving staff the opportunity to think and work differently to solve old problems in new ways is a great way to promote continuous improvement. Staff members need to be involved in decisions which effect service delivery.”

**Lennox McLendon, Former Executive Director
National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium**

In 1998 with the passage of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, Congress made a move to give us what we asked for – to move away from statutory requirements and replace them with more flexibility and a focus on quality programming. Instead of statutory requirements, Congress substituted performance indicators. We could choose the best way to structure and deliver program services as long as performance improved. We had to get better every year at helping adults to:

- improve their basic skills,
- earn a high school diploma or GED,
- obtain or retain a job, and
- enter postsecondary education or job training.

So our lives changed from checking boxes that indicated, “Yes, we did what Congress asked us to do,” to asking “How do we continually get better at helping adult learners succeed?”

To do this, your adult education program needs to have a structure and process in place for supporting continuous improvement. You need to be able to:

- Identify the parts of your program that need to be improved,
- Identify promising alternative strategies,
- Pilot test new strategies,
- Integrate solutions program-wide, and
- Evaluate the impact.

As a local program manager, continuous improvement is an important responsibility, but it is not yours alone. It is the shared responsibility of all staff. Your job is to provide the **structure** and **process** to engage all staff appropriately in making recommendations regarding continuous improvement and turn staff involvement principles into reality.

Staff involvement

Staff involvement is about involving staff in all decisions that affect their working lives and the educational services that they deliver.

The aim of this resource packet is to help you promote and implement staff involvement in the continuous improvement process. The resource packet includes information to:

- Demonstrate the sound case for staff involvement and
- Explore structure and process options to make it work.

Getting better every year takes time and effort– but by involving all staff in planning and delivering services, your program improvement efforts will pay off.



1

Making the Case



Staff Involvement: Better Decisions, Better Results



Making the Case

Embracing a culture of involvement and participation

There is substantial evidence that shows how staff involvement is crucial to organizational success. Research has also shown that by involving staff in the management of change, a much more productive, flexible, and committed workforce is created.

A team of NCSALL (National Center for Study of Adult Learning and Literacy) researchers, led by Cristine Smith and Judy Hofer, investigated how adult education teachers changed after participating in one of three different models of professional development. The study also investigated the most important individual, professional development, program, and system factors that influenced the type and amount of teacher change. One of the key findings from the NCSALL study addressed staff involvement.

Teachers who had more say in the decisions at the program level were able to take more action after participating in professional development.

- NCSALL Program Administrators' Sourcebookⁱ

It is critical that teachers, tutors, and other staff members are provided opportunities and mechanisms to have a say in decision making about improving the quality of services.

Professional wisdom in our field supports these research findings. Our experienced colleague, Ron Froman, reminds us that staff members who are involved in decision making are 1) more likely to accept and use the new strategies and 2) are less likely to criticize new strategies they helped create.

Research in other fields, particularly health care, has established additional evidence for the effectiveness and impact of staff involvement. Research has established:

- There is a significant relationship between:
 - Shared influence over decision making in teamsⁱⁱ and
 - Staff involvement and improved job satisfaction.ⁱⁱⁱ
- A more emotionally engaged employee is also more productive, more customer-focused, safer, and more likely to be retained as part of the workforce.^{iv}
- An inclusive culture is a vital ingredient in the way people work together to be productive and flexible enough to meet challenges.^v

The common thread which links the best reforms is the know-how and commitment of staff who work together to solve problems. James Surowiecki in his book entitled “The Wisdom of Crowds” proposes that a group of people are smarter than a few experts, no matter how brilliant – better at solving problems, fostering innovation, coming to wise decisions, and even predicting the future.



Lastly, professional wisdom tells us that involving staff means that you, the program manager, do not have to do all the work. Your job is to “manage” the work. That means you give up a little control but the “wisdom of the crowd” produces richer decisions, staff support and acceptance, and less work for you.



2

A Sample Framework



Staff Involvement: Better Decisions, Better Results



A Sample Framework

Preparing for Staff Involvement

Successful program managers embrace the new opportunities created by the Workforce Investment Act. They work in partnership with staff to shape the staff involvement approach, reshape their roles, and lead the associated change process.

You may want to formalize the process by adopting a policy that provides the guiding principles for building a culture of staff involvement.

The policy should include:

- A simple definition of staff involvement
- A statement of intent about involving the staff, including a locally-agreed joint statement of staff rights and responsibilities
- Identification of key groups and individuals and their roles and responsibilities
- A description of your involvement infrastructure including
 - Agreed time for staff involvement,
 - Stipends or provisions for part-time staff to participate
 - Time off or cover arrangements for full-time staff
 - Other relevant factors.
- A process for reviewing the staff involvement activities to determine necessary adjustments in the future.

This document provides a framework that can help support the development of staff involvement. It is one example of how an involvement approach may be designed and the steps that it may contain. Every adult education program, however, should develop its own staff involvement approach that fits its unique circumstances. You will want to adapt this framework to your program's capacity and needs.

Achieving our vision will involve enabling staff to use their skills and knowledge to develop innovative services with more say in how services are delivered and resources are allocated.

One of your primary tasks as a program manager is to create **structures and processes** for program improvement to happen. Program improvement does not occur in a vacuum. You need to create opportunities for staff members to get together and determine what is working and what is not and, based on that assessment, plan and carry out activities that will fix problem areas.



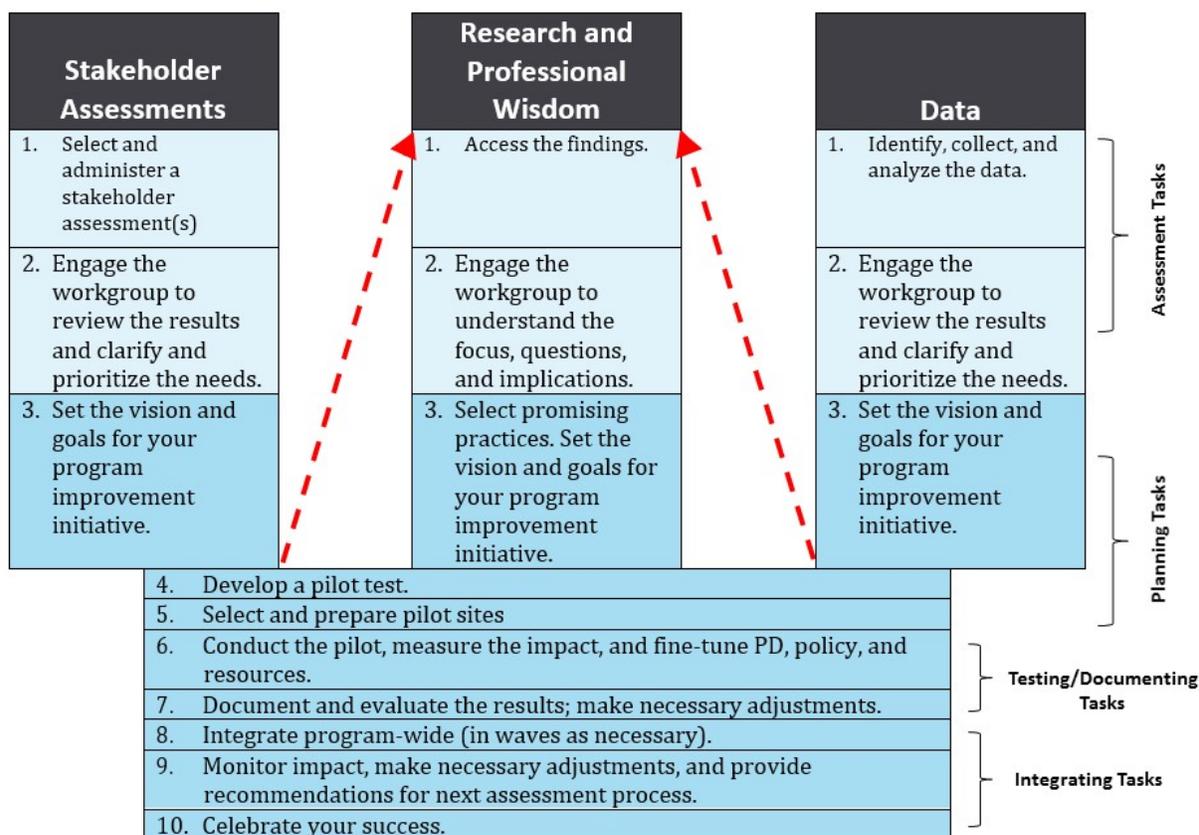
We know from Cris Smith’s research at NCSALL that the way to get teachers to change behavior and improve services is to provide opportunities for them to work together to solve problems and to engage them in decision making.

The program improvement process provides a variety of options for engaging staff in decision making. The Trident, a sample continuous improvement process outlined on the next page, illustrates the tasks involved in assessing, planning, testing, and integrating a program improvement initiative. As you will see, the Trident offers many opportunities for staff involvement.



The Trident

Three Starting Points for Program Improvement



The Trident tasks offer a number of opportunities for staff involvement. Let's take a look at some of them.

The Trident depicts three starting points for program improvement: stakeholder assessments, data analysis, and research. Each can help you and your staff members identify areas for program improvement.

We will cover all of these in detail in the Academy. At this point, let it suffice to say that in the area of stakeholder assessment, we have tools for you and your staff members to adapt that include teacher self-assessments, program manager self-assessments, program components self-assessment, student surveys and focus groups, and partner assessments. As you can imagine, these stakeholder assessments point out what seems to be working and what does not for individuals and for the program. Thus, you get clues as to where you need to work.



In data analysis we will explore options for analyzing performance data, other program data, as well as census data. Again, each of these analyses will give you clues as to where you need to work.

Research provides us with “new knowledge” regarding what works in our programs. By reviewing those findings and identifying promising strategies, you get clues as to where you can improve your program services.

Sounds like a lot of work!!! Remember our opening discussion in this resource packet. **Giving staff the opportunity to participate has many benefits.** Let’s look at how some of your colleagues around the country have developed structures and processes to involve staff in the Trident and the three starting points.

Assessment Tasks: Structure and Process

Data Analysis: Some of your colleagues have solicited staff members who like data and have inquisitive, analytic skills to serve on a data task force or workgroup. They are paid regular salary from professional development funds for these services. Other colleagues have joined with other programs in the region to contribute one staff person each to comprise a regional data workgroup. In quarterly or bi-annual meetings, they examine census, program, and performance data. They use their findings to develop standards and measures for “what is good enough” for program services. Based on their analysis, they make recommendations on what needs to be fixed. It should be noted, however, that every teacher and tutor should be trained on how to analyze their own data and make class-specific improvements.

Research Findings: Similarly, staff members who are always looking for better ways to do things or perhaps are engaged in research for a post-graduate course are solicited to participate on a program or regional research task force or workgroup. Based on their review of the research, they make recommendations on which findings to recommend for consideration and integration into the program. In some states, the state office or the professional association establish a state-wide workgroup to make recommendations to all programs.

Stakeholder Assessments: Lastly, the entire staff will be involved in completing the teacher or program manager self-assessment, in addition to the program stakeholder assessment annually. These instruments are sent out and tabulated electronically. Either you or a stakeholder assessment workgroup analyzes those results and makes recommendations as to what needs to be fixed.

Look back at the “Assessment Tasks” bracket on the Trident. You will see that TASKS 1 & 2 for each of the starting points begins the process.



To this point, you have not done a lot of work yourself, but you have created a structure and process that enables the work to be done. But, what do you do with all of those recommendations? Let's look at a structure and process for dealing with them.

Planning/Testing/Integrating Tasks: Structure and Process

The Yearly Evaluative Staff Meeting

Some states require in their applications that each program conduct an annual evaluation of program services and results. One structure that is quite effective in accomplishing this task is the yearly evaluative staff meeting (YESM), usually held during the beginning of May. The purpose of the YESM is to create the opportunity to engage the staff in identifying areas that need improvement and planning how to go about fixing them.

Here's a brief overview of the activities involved **before and during** the YESM.

- Prior to the YESM, the program director establishes a stakeholder assessment workgroup (in small programs, this may be your entire staff) to review and/or adapt the stakeholder assessments that will be used during the assessment phase. These may include the program, teacher, program manager, student, and/or partner assessments.
- Prior to the YESM, each teacher and program manager completes a professional development self-assessment and identifies the areas she/he wishes to work on for the next twelve months. Based on the assessments, each proposes a professional development plan and develops it with the program manager. At the YESM, the program manager can create workgroups around similar professional development needs.
- Prior to the YESM, the program director sends the staff an electronic survey of the program self-assessment asking the staff to rate each program component.
- Programs may also desire to conduct student focus groups and partner assessments prior to the YESM. The results of the assessments along with recommended priorities are prepared for presentation at the YESM by the stakeholder assessment workgroup or program director.
- Prior to the YESM, the data workgroup:
 - analyzes the performance, program, and community/census data
 - identifies and prioritizes program improvement needs based on that assessment. Those priorities are prepared for presentation at the YESM.
- Prior to the YESM, a research workgroup reviews the latest research findings. A summary with priorities are prepared for use at the YESM.



During the YESM, the staff assesses the priorities from the stakeholder assessments, the data analysis, and the research recommendations. As a result, they prioritize the issues that would have the most impact on improving program services. They select a manageable number of the priorities to address in the coming year. Each of the selected priorities is used to develop pilot projects to prepare new strategies for integration into the system of services.

In addition to the annual evaluative meeting, the structure of the YESM provides a variety of additional options for staff involvement throughout the year.

Planning Tasks

Look back at the Trident. You will note a “Planning” bracket that includes TASKS 3, 4 & 5. Let’s talk about those.

Once you have engaged staff in assessing needs and identifying priorities, you are ready to set a vision and goals, explore solutions, and plan the pilot-test. Once again, there are multiple opportunities to get the staff involved in decision making.

- You can conduct the visioning and goal-setting tasks during the Yearly Evaluative Staff Meeting, or you can form a representative Program Improvement Team to accomplish these tasks.
- The Program Improvement Team, the research workgroup, or other staff can assume the task of exploring promising solutions to address the identified priorities. Use of the Internet and particularly LINC (www.nifl.gov/lincs) – an electronic collection of adult education resources – can be very helpful in getting the staff connected to the best options. Other helpful sources include NCSALL (www.ncsall.net), and CAELA (<http://www.cal.org/caela/>) or TESOL (www.tesol.org) for ESL issues.
- Designing your pilot testing plan for your program improvement project includes the selection of pilot sites; necessary staffing, materials, and staff training; establishment of benchmarks to measure success; and a budget. By involving the Program Improvement Team or other staff in the design of the pilot test, you will benefit from their collective wisdom and get greater buy-in from the rest of the staff when you begin implementation program-wide.

Testing/Documenting Tasks

Look back at the Trident again at TASKS 7 & 8, the Testing/Documenting Tasks.

Conducting the actual pilot(s) will give the staff members involved an opportunity to try out new strategies and collect important evaluative data to share with their peers. The other



charge of the pilot process is to 1) develop the professional development that other teachers will need to implement the new strategies; 2) identify the resources (financial and material) the program manager will need to secure to support going to scale with the new strategy; 3) recommend policy changes that will be necessary to support teachers using the new strategy; and 4) develop guidance regarding how the new strategy will “fit” with what you are doing now.

Making sure that the pilot sites feel a sense of ownership and pride in their work is important. Be sure to give them opportunities to share updates on their progress and lessons learned with the other staff members. The pilot sites can be your best “cheerleaders” for change if they are fully vested and involved in decision making throughout the pilot testing period. Don’t forget to publicly recognize them for their efforts and celebrate their success!

Integrating Tasks

TASKS 9, 10, & 11 in the Trident are the Integrating Tasks at which time you finally get to successfully integrate the new strategies program-wide. After the Program Improvement Team has made necessary adjustments to the new initiative based on evaluative data from the pilot sites, you are ready to begin integrating the new strategies program-wide. Depending on the size of your program, you may want to phase in several classes at a time. At staff meetings or at the next YESM, celebrate the work of the workgroups and the pilot staff.

If a significant number of your staff members have been involved in one or more phases of the continuous improvement process along the way, you will find that program-wide integration will run more smoothly.

Remember: people don’t argue with what they help to create!

Finding the Time

We know what you’re thinking. This all sounds fine but where in the world will I find the time to establish these workgroups, support their progress, and organize an annual evaluative staff meeting? By placing the tasks into a month-by-month timeline, the organization of the staff involvement process becomes manageable.

The sample charts on the following pages illustrate what the entire continuous improvement cycle would look like over time, including the staff involvement. Because continuous improvement is exactly what the name implies – continuous, you will actually be conducting pilot tests and initiating a second continuous improvement process at the same time. It may sound confusing but once you have your structure and process in place, the activities will become a routine part of program operations. Let’s take a look at the sample timeline.



It's All About Program Improvement

Sample Timeline

Vision: *By 2012-2012, we will have a structure and process in place for using research, data analysis, and teacher, program manager, and program self-assessments on an annual basis to identify program improvement needs, plan appropriate solutions, pilot test new strategies, integrate them program-wide, and evaluate the impact.*

Key:

Stakeholder Assessment activities indicated in regular font.

Research activities indicated in bold font.

Data analysis activities indicated in italic font.

Month	2010
July	The Research Workgroup is organized.
August	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
September - December	The Research Workgroup accesses research. The program director establishes the Stakeholder Assessment Workgroup to complete the adaptation of the teacher, program manager, program, student and/or stakeholder self assessments to fit the needs of the local program and staff.
October	The Research Workgroup holds conference call to discuss and judge findings.
November	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
December	The Research Workgroup accesses research.

Month	2011
January	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
February	The Research Workgroup holds conference call to discuss and judge findings. The program director distributes the teacher and program self assessments (online or hard copy) and directs the staff to complete each. (Student focus groups and partner surveys can be conducted at this time as well.) <i>The Data Workgroup is organized and convenes to analyze performance, program, and census data.</i>
March	The Research Workgroup recommends findings to program director that hold promise to improve program services. <i>The Data Workgroup recommends program improvement priorities to program director.</i> The Stakeholder Assessment Workgroup analyzes the results of the program self assessments (and student surveys and/or partner assessments, if conducted)



Month		2011
		and recommends program improvement priorities to the program director. Individual teachers (1) review the results of their teacher self-assessments, (2) propose a tentative professional development plan to the program director, and (3) negotiate a final professional development plan. The program director and other program managers, if applicable, (1) review the results of their program manager self-assessments. (2) propose a tentative professional development plan to the program director, and (3) negotiate a final professional development plan.
April		Spring Program Improvement Staff Meeting to (1) prioritize needs identified in the stakeholder assessments, data analysis, and research findings; (2) recommend pilots; (3) select the program improvement areas for the coming year; and (4) set the vision and the evaluation criteria for each.
May		Gather and select promising practices.
June		Develop a pilot testing plan. Select and begin preparing pilot sites.
July	Pilot preparation	The Research Workgroup organizes.
August	Pilot preparation	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
September	Pilots	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
October	Pilots	The Research Workgroup holds conference call to discuss and judge findings.
November	Pilots	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
December	Pilots	The Research Workgroup accesses research.

Month		2012
January	Presentation of pilot results to the staff.	The Research Workgroup accesses research.
February	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.	The Research Workgroup holds conference call to discuss and judge findings. The program director distributes the teacher and program self assessments (online or hard copy) and directs the staff to complete each. (Student focus groups and partner surveys can be conducted at this time as well.) <i>The Data Workgroup is organized and convenes to analyze performance, program, and census data.</i>

Month		2012
March	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.	The Research Workgroup recommends findings to program director that hold promise to improve program services. <i>The Data Workgroup recommends program improvement priorities to program director.</i>
		The Stakeholder Assessment Workgroup analyzes the results of the program self assessments (and student surveys and/or partner assessments, if conducted) and recommends program improvement priorities to the program director. Individual teachers (1) review the results of their teacher self-assessments, (2) propose a tentative professional development plan to the program director, and (3) negotiate a final professional development plan. The program director and other program managers, if applicable, (1) review the results of their program manager self- assessments. (2) propose a tentative professional development plan to the program director, and (3) negotiate a final professional development plan.
April	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.	Spring Program Improvement Staff Meeting to (1) prioritize needs identified in the program assessment, data analysis, and research findings; (2) recommend pilots; (3) select the program improvement areas for the coming year; and (4) set the vision and the evaluation criteria for each.
May	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.	Gather and select promising practices.
June	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored. Celebrate success!	Develop a pilot testing plan. Select and begin preparing pilot sites.
July		Pilot preparation
August		Pilot preparation
September		Pilots
October		Pilots
November		Pilots
December		Pilots
January		Presentation of pilot results to the staff. Recognize pilot staff.

Month		2013
February	The program director distributes the teacher and program self assessments (online or hard copy and directs the staff to complete each. (Student focus groups and partner surveys can be conducted at this time as well.)	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins Implementation impact is monitored.
March	The Stakeholder Assessment Workgroup analyzes the results of the program self assessments (and student surveys and/or partner assessments, if conducted) and recommends program improvement priorities to the program director. Individual teachers (1) review the results of their teacher self- assessments, (2) propose a tentative professional development plan to the program director, and (3) negotiate a final professional development plan. The program director and other program managers, if applicable, (1) review the results of their program manager self-assessments. (2) propose a tentative professional development plan to the program director, and (3) negotiate a final professional development plan.	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.
April	Spring Program Improvement Staff Meeting to (1) prioritize program assessment findings (and other findings from data analysis and research), (2) recommend pilots, (3) select the program improvement areas for the coming year, and (4) set the vision and the evaluation criteria for each.	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.
May	Gather and select promising practices.	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored.
June	Develop a pilot testing plan. Select and begin preparing pilot sites.	Professional development is provided, and implementation of the new strategies begins. Implementation impact is monitored. Celebrate success!

When the program manager creates a structure and process for program improvement, he/she creates a learning culture where all staff members are looking for ways to improve service. He/she does not “do” the work but creates opportunities for staff to engage in doing the work—which research shows is the way to get staff to actually implement needed changes.

Endnotes

ⁱ Smith, C., Hofer, J., Gillespie, M., Solomon, M., Rowe, K., (2003). How teachers change: A study of professional development in adult education. NCSALL Reports #25a.

ⁱⁱ West, M.A. et. al. (2002) The link between management of employees and patient mortality in acute hospitals. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 13:8.

ⁱⁱⁱ Borrill, C.S, West, M.A., Shapiro, D. and Rees, A. (2000). Team Working and Effectiveness in Health Care. *British Journal of Health Care Management*. Vol 6, No 8.

^{iv} Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L., Hayes, T.L. (2002) Business-unit leveling relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement and business outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol 87 No 2.

^v Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., and Hutchinson, S (2003) School of Management, University of Bath. *Understanding the People and Performance Link*. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development