Funding Barriers for Adult Education Programs

Tajullah SkyLark

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, Higher Education Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss3/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership: The Online Journal by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository.
According to the U.S. Department of Education, each day nearly seven thousand high school students become dropouts, adding up to 1.3 million students annually. In October 2007, approximately 3.3 million 16- through 24-year-olds did not earn a high school diploma or alternative credential (Cataldi Et Al, 2009).

The high dropout rate coupled with the influx of immigrants looking for work, some of whom have educational challenges, and language barriers, has intensified the need for adult education programs in communities throughout the nation. Empirical research has shown that the rising high school dropout rate directly affects the economy. When students do not obtain a high school diploma in their compulsory years, there is a higher risk for incarceration, or the need of public assistance all at cost to the government and the tax payers. When this growing segment of the population is overlooked or disregarded as important, it creates increased unemployment, poverty, broken families, civil unrest, high crime, discrimination, and economic down fall. Adult education programs are vital to the process of reforming education and rejuvenating the economy, and the dignity and prosperity of all people.

The amount of people on public assistance and incarcerated due lack of education or literacy could be reduced significantly if more funding was made available to adult education programs. Research done on “The Social Costs of Inadequate Education” presented during a symposium at Teachers College, Columbia University revealed that the United States could potentially save between $7.9 to $10.8 billion dollars annually by improving the educational attainment of all public assistance recipients (Garfinkel, et al, 2005).

The high percentage of adults who lack high school diplomas or below average literacy and basic education skills is not just a local problem in disenfranchised communities, but a national one. It is a high visibly recognized crisis that is growing in part due to failed education reform, and the lack of accommodation for the rapidly growing immigrant population.

The percentages of high school drop outs and illiteracy continue to grow, and instead of allocating more funding for adult education programs to empower people, the government contributes to generational dependency of people on public assistance. More government funds need to be ear marked to address the root causes of such services, which when identified will require the assistance of adult education programs to help eradicate illiteracy, increase percentages of GED graduates, and increase a skilled labor force of those who are no longer eligible for public education. According the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) over 30 million adults have below-basic levels of literacy with another 63 million reading English at the basic level.

The need for adult education programs is really not in question, what has always been the question is how to fund these programs. In 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act created the first Adult Basic Education program which later became incorporated into the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, now called the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (NAEPDC, 1999).
The federal government distributes approximately $575 million in WIA Title II funding to the states for adult education (Chisman, 2002). The state agencies that receive these funds are required to provide the minimum 25 percent match in their state or local funding for the amount requested which still leaves many programs under funded. The difference is usually sought out thorough partnership with local business, in addition to applying to local and national foundations, and corporations.

What are the challenges with relying on funding programs from these sources for adult education programs? This dependency on funding potentially creates a problem for agencies that are located in rural, or small towns, localities that lack industry, and low income communities. In communities where there are more than one resource providing similar programming, it is difficult for secure matching funds on the state and local government levels due to several organizations competing for those limited funds.

Most funding from foundations and corporations in the area of literacy have been ear marked for students under the age of 18 who are completing compulsory course work, programs with citizens over the age of 16 that have dropped out of high school or are no longer in high school are not the focus of funding of these grant making organizations leaving most literacy, TESOL, ESL, ESOL, GED preparation, remedial education, and workforce service training programs under funded and staffed by under paid part time professionals and unpaid volunteers.

The funding that is available many times stipulate that funds can not be allocated for salaries. Most adult education programs require teachers to posses a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and in certain instances a state teaching license for publicly run programs. These positions are usually part time without benefits and usually unstable due to limited funding periods. Many of these programs are staffed with a skeletal paid staff and reliant upon the recruitment of volunteers.

With national and local government funds lacking, what can adult education programs do to finance their services? Chapter 7 of “Grant writing in Higher Education” by Kenneth T. Henson suggest tapping into smaller hidden resources and gifts that can arise through creating programming like teacher-in-resident programs, collaborative problem solving ventures, and letters of inquiries to foundations (Henson, pp. 108-109). Another avenue could be involving local industries to see the value in a joint effort in creating training programming and providing funding to support that facilitation. Teachers could also look into developing research projects that will address some of the issues in adult education and solicit financial support from universities, corporations, and private foundations.

Funding adult education programs has become more complex over the years; however, with the demands for a skilled labor force with equal opportunity for employment, collaborative programs and partnerships are becoming a successful means of securing funding. With communities taking more responsibility in the education of their residents and becoming more aware of how inextricably education is tied to the strength of the economy, and how the education of all people directly impacts its prosperity and well being, more and more funding opportunities will be found locally and in the private sector to supplement government funding. However, if economic disparities, inequities in education, lack of resources, and under prepared teachers of multi-cultral classrooms continue, the high school graduation rate will continue to plummet directly impacting the country’s economic stability and sustainable future.

References


Funding Barriers for Adult Education Programs,