

Strategic Enrollment: Connecting with Prospective Adult Learners

*North Carolina Community College System Office
Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)*



Introduction

A successful engagement plan for adult learners directly correlates with effective outreach efforts. Outreach serves as the bridge that connects your organization's programs with the target audience, which generates interest and encourages enrollment. In this section, we will explore the importance of outreach and provide key strategies for connecting with prospective adult learners to AEFLA programs.

Understanding Target Demographics

Before initiating outreach efforts, program staff must gain a comprehensive understanding of the demographics that they wish to target. Additionally, program staff members should identify their preferences, needs, and pain points to tailor outreach messaging accordingly. This knowledge will enable staff to connect authentically with prospective learners.

Leveraging Multiple Channels

Program staff should diversify outreach channels to reach a broader audience and population. Typically, programs choose to utilize traditional methods, such as direct mail and phone calls to engage with potential program participants. Simultaneously, program staff are encouraged to embrace digital channels, including email campaigns, social media platforms, and online advertising to connect with tech-savvy program prospects.

Personalized Communication

Adult education programs must craft personalized outreach messages that speak directly to the prospective program participant's aspirations and goals. Addressing prospective students by name and tailoring content to their specific preferences enhances the likelihood of engagement and enrollment. Furthermore, personalized communication demonstrates that the organization values the unique journey of each adult learner.

Hosting Information Sessions and Workshops

Programs must organize information sessions and workshops with multiple modalities to include in-person and virtual platforms. These events provide an opportunity for prospective students to ask questions, interact with faculty and staff, and gain valuable insights regarding the benefits of the organization's program offerings. Additionally, virtual platforms allow prospective program participants to view the organization's facilities, classrooms, and student support services with the click of a button. Virtual experiences enable prospective students to explore your institution from the comfort of their homes, making it accessible to a wider audience.

Engaging Alumni and Student Ambassadors

A promising practice for student enrollment is through the power of alumni and student ambassadors' engagement. Both alumni and student ambassadors can serve as outreach liaison for marginalized and hard to reach populations. The role of the alumni and student ambassadors is to share their success stories and experiences with adult education programs. Prospective

learners often find the perspectives of those who have walked the same path highly influential in their decision-making process.

Collaborating with Community Partners

Adult education programs are encouraged to forge partnerships with community organizations, local businesses, and industry leaders. Collaborative efforts can result in joint events, internships, and community engagement opportunities, which in turn will broaden the organization's exposure and relevance within the community.

Follow-up and Relationship Building

Consistent follow-up with prospective learners is essential to keep them both engaged and interested. Program staff should intentionally establish a relationship-building approach that correlates with outreach, nurturing connections, and considerate decision-making support.

Tracking and Analyzing Outreach Performance

It is important to implement a comprehensive system to track the performance of various outreach and program recruitment efforts. Adult education program staff should analyze data on engagement rates, conversion rates, and enrollment numbers to identify areas of improvement and successful implementation practices.

Emphasizing Student-Centric Benefits

Through outreach messaging, programs are encouraged to highlight the student-centric benefits of adult education programs, which may include flexible scheduling, personalized support, and relevant curriculum. Additionally, programs should clearly communicate how the organization can meet prospective students' educational and career aspirations.

An effective outreach is the linchpin of any successful student enrollment and engagement plan. By implementing the strategies contained within the document, organizations can connect with prospective adult learners. Moreover, a highly effective student enrollment plan demonstrates the value and impact of the organization's educational offerings, which leads to increased enrollment and a thriving educational community.

Things to Consider

1. You can only do what your leadership allows you to do.
2. Do you have the bandwidth and resources to accomplish your goals?

Strategic Planning Consideration Worksheet

1. **Establishing a vision:** know your department's vision: One of the fundamental pillars of creating a successful engagement plan for adult learners is to align it with your department's vision. The vision serves as a guiding light, providing clarity on the department's long-term aspirations and the role it plays within the larger institutional framework. When crafting your engagement strategies, keeping the department's vision in mind will foster coherence, consistency, and a sense of purpose in your initiatives.

- What is the vision for your area? Please keep in mind the types of adult learners your program serves (ABE, ASE, ESL).

2. **Clear Objectives and Goals:** Define clear and measurable objectives for the plan. Determine what outcomes the program aspires to achieve with its engagement efforts.

3. **Target Audience Analysis:** Understand the specific needs, preferences, and challenges of adult learners. Conduct research and gather data to inform the planning process. Items to keep in mind as you plan:

- Who on your staff understands how to analyze CCR data?
- How often do you review your data? Remember, as a promising practice, state data should be reviewed weekly.
- Where is your data coming from (ADVANSYS, Colleague, other sources)?

4. **Alignment with Institutional and Organizational Mission:** Ensure that the plan aligns with the organization’s mission, vision, and values. The engagement strategies should support the overall goals of the institution.

- What is your organization's mission, vision, and values?
- How often do you revisit the mission, vision, and values to ensure your programs are in alignment?

5. **Feasibility Assessment:** Evaluate the feasibility of the proposed strategies, considering available resources, budget, and personnel. Focus on initiatives that are realistic and achievable.

- What resources are available to help support your enrollment strategies (human capital, liquid assets, community partnerships)?
- What is one strategy that you have implemented to meet your enrollment goals? Have you seen any benefits or dividends from the goal?

6. **Collaborative Approach:** Encourage collaboration among different departments, organizations, and stakeholders within the organization. Successful engagement plans often involve input from various teams, including admissions, marketing, faculty, and student support services.

- Do you have a working relationship with other stakeholders within your organization? If so, please jot down a few areas that you can contact to support student success.

7. **Risk Assessment:** Identify potential risks and challenges that could hinder the success of your enrollment plan. The prompts below will help you develop contingency measures to mitigate enrollment management risks:

- What are the potential barriers to enrollment for adult learners?
- How might changes in the job market or economic conditions affect enrollment numbers?
- What are the main competitors in the region offering similar programs (online programs etc.)? How might their actions impact your enrollment?
- What financial risks are associated with implementing the plan, and how will they be managed?

8. **Timeline and Milestones:** Develop a timeline for the plan's implementation with clear milestones and deadlines. This helps to keep the team focused and on track. Items for consideration:

Backwards Program Planning Sample Toolkit

- Date of implementation
- Committee Development (Selection of enrollment members)
- Meeting dates to check milestones and timeline.
- Periods of implementation review (weekly, once a month, quarterly etc.)
- Reports to staff members and senior administration implementation progress.

9. **Continuous Improvement:** Plan for ongoing evaluation and improvement. Please note, engagement strategies may need adjustments over time to address changing needs and market dynamics.

- Does your program have a plan for continuous improvement and evaluation? If so, how often is it reviewed and used in the program?

10. **Sustainability:** Consider the long-term sustainability of the engagement plan. Will the strategies continue to be effective and relevant in the future?

What is the length of your enrollment management plan? For example, do you plan to continuously work on the enrollment management plan for multiple program years?

11. **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity:** Ensure that the plan considers the cultural backgrounds and diversity of the target audience. Avoid assumptions that may not align with the experiences of adult learners from various backgrounds.

12. **Marketing and Branding:** A crucial aspect of engaging prospective adult learners and increasing enrollment in adult education programs is directly correlated to crafting an effective marketing and branding strategy. By building a compelling identity for your programs, you can attract the attention of your target audience and differentiate yourself in a competitive educational landscape. Here is a short section on the significance of marketing and branding:

- Do your marketing materials match your community demographics?
- Has your organization implemented the use of tech tools such as social media, auto dialers, and text messaging campaigns?
- How does your institution market fee-waived classes that exhibit a high Return on Investment (ROI)?
 - Specifically, how are you marketing career pathways and placement into jobs upon completion of the program?

13. **Test and Pilot Programs:** Before fully implementing the plan, consider testing and piloting specific strategies to gather feedback and adjust as needed.

14. **Communication Strategy:** Develop a clear communication plan to inform all stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and external partners, about the engagement initiatives.

- Please list at least one communication strategy that includes multiple stakeholders.
- List areas within your organization that may need communication improvement.

15. **Professional Development:** Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in supporting adult learners.

- Does your organization have a required threshold of professional development hours for faculty and staff?
