

AMERICA READS

*Principles and Key
Components for High
Quality America Reads
National Service
Program Initiatives*

CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

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This booklet was developed by the America Reads Task Force of the Corporation for National Service in support of the goals of the America Reads Challenge program. A sub-committee of the task force reviewed the literature and consulted with experts in the field, including the staff of the Department of Education.

The National Service Resource Center at ETR Associates was responsible for the production of the booklet.

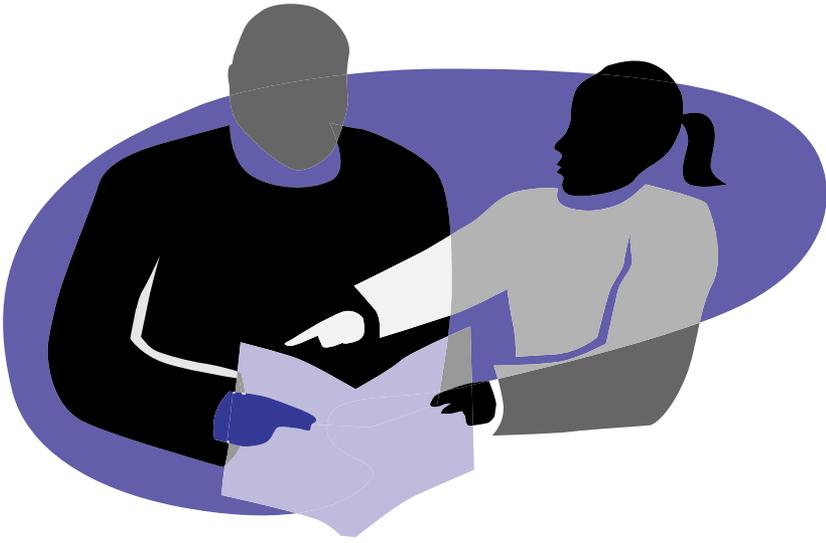
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Principles and Key Components for High Quality America Reads National Service Program initiatives

The **America Reads** challenge that all children read well and independently by the end of the third grade will require an unprecedented mobilization of appropriately trained reading tutors from all walks of life, working closely with teachers and schools to enhance children's learning. The following outline provides a framework for the planning, implementation and evaluation of quality national service programs to meet the **America Reads Challenge**. The outline is a supplement to another publication of the Corporation for National Service, "Principles of High Quality National Service Programs," and reflects the Corporation's current thinking about effective practices in national service programs addressing the literacy needs of young children.

The document has been divided into two sections: principles, which provide general guidelines about the overall integration of **America Reads** activities within national service programs; and key components, which outline the standards of quality tutoring activities.

Principles

- Quality national service **America Reads** programs incorporate clear and measurable outcome objectives that address the **America Reads** goal. These projects show how the activities of national service participants contribute to specific outcomes related to reading/literacy achievements for children, birth through third grade. Outcome objectives also address project expectations for community volunteers, schools and teachers, parents and the community at-large.
- America Reads** volunteers are involved in service activities that play key roles in working with individual children, supporting classroom activities, supporting families, and serving as catalysts and organizers of community-level reading initiatives. Their activities provide a direct benefit to children that is valued by the school or community-based organization. Examples of such activities include: tutoring in the classroom; tutoring in after-school programs, extended day programs, school-age care centers; tutoring preschool children in Head Start, child care or other early childhood programs; reading with children at home or at school; helping with homework; coordinating others (e.g., volunteers) who provide a direct benefit to children; coordinating volunteer recruitment and placement; training tutors; coordinating parent involvement projects; organizing a book drive; or leveraging resources to build a reading room or to refurbish a school library or reading room. Activities that do not provide a direct benefit to children, such as curriculum development or research on reading, are only considered as an **America Reads** program if they are in support of activities that provide direct benefits.
- Quality **America Reads** programs include activities and mechanisms that provide for the involvement of families, parents or guardians.
- Quality **America Reads** programs incorporate intentional and appropriate adaptation of proven effective practices that address the specific needs of the child, the school and the community and that reflect the resources available to the program.
- Quality **America Reads** programs comply with national, state and/or local regulations and standards regarding the care of a child. Many state and local governments regulate child care standards by requiring accreditation and/or licensing. School districts have policies and procedures for

involving students in enrichment activities. Volunteer tutor screenings and parental consent forms are often among the requirements to operate volunteer tutoring programs. Project staff ensure full compliance with all regulations governing their programs. In addition, projects are strongly encouraged to adhere to nationally accepted standards for quality regarding the care of a child that are published by organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National School-Age Care Alliance.

📖 Quality **America Reads** programs apply principles of service-learning, an educational method: under which participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and addresses challenges facing a community; that recognizes the assets, strengths, and valuable experiences that service recipients as well as providers bring to a service relationship; that helps foster civic responsibility; that is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, and/or community service program, and with the community; that enhances the academic curriculum of student participants, or the educational components of a community service program; and that provides structured time for the students and other participants to reflect on the service activity, both to enrich the experience for them and to improve the quality of service in the future.

📖 In particular, quality **America Reads** programs recognize: that tutors generally have much to learn, particularly from those they tutor; that there are a wide variety of effective learning styles; that non-academic knowledge and experience can contribute to learning reading; that tutoring is a collaboration between the tutor and the person being tutored, not a "pouring" of knowledge or skill from one vessel to another; that the person being tutored may have had a very different experience with (and view of) school authorities from that of the tutors; and that an effective learning relationship should take account of cultural differences, including concepts of self, community, and authority.

Key Components of Quality Tutoring Activities

America Reads national service programs should consider the following key components when planning, implementing and evaluating quality tutoring activities:

1. Use of research-based elements to produce reading achievement. With a plethora of current research materials on the effectiveness of volunteer tutoring programs, project staff no longer have to start from scratch when designing and implementing tutoring activities (e.g., Bender, Giovanis, and Mazzone 1994; Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik 1982; Madden and Slavin 1989; Pinell, DeFord, and Lyons 1988; Topping and Whitley 1990; Warger 1991; Wasik 1997; Wasik and Slavin 1997). Staff are familiar with these resources and actively incorporate research-based elements through:

A demonstrated reading approach which effectively uses volunteers; appropriate and effective adaptation of the approach; consultation with trained reading specialists; and consultation of research resources throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation of the program.

2. Well-structured tutoring sessions in which the content and delivery of instruction are carefully planned. Some research suggests that structured tutorial programs result in greater academic achievement than unstructured programs (Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik 1982; Wasik and Slavin 1993). There is a wide range of successful structured approaches ranging from homework assistance to specially designed lesson plans and materials. Quality tutoring programs should plan structured sessions to insure:

Tutors are well prepared and equipped with a variety of tutoring strategies, materials and supplies; activities have consistency and continuity; instruction must be appropriate to the student's current performance level and should move the student forward from this level in a cumulative fashion; and sessions have room for flexibility to meet the individual needs of the student.

3. Close coordination with schools, school administration, the classroom and/or reading teacher, day care provider, pre-school, and/or Headstart center. There are significant advantages, both academically for the student and

logistically for the program, in developing effective linkages between schools and the tutoring activities. Research evidence suggests that when tutoring is coordinated with good classroom reading practices, students perform better than when tutoring is unrelated to classroom instruction (Venezky and Jain 1996). Minimally, quality tutoring programs coordinate with schools in the following three ways:

Establishment of a formal/contractual relationship with school administrators that recognizes their role as valuable stakeholders in planning, implementation and monitoring of the program; designation of a school liaison/contact person to facilitate on-going communication with the school and to assist in the application of regulations, policies and procedures related to implementation of the program; and access to school reading specialist(s) to help facilitate communication among tutors, students and teachers.

4. Intensive and on-going training and supervision for tutors can contribute significantly to the overall success of the program (e.g., Jenkins and Jenkins 1987; Reisner, Petry, and Armitage 1990; Warger 1991; Wasik and Slavin 1993). The tutor training and supervision components of the program should encompass:

Pre-service orientation that includes training sessions/information in reading curriculum and materials, principles of child development, classroom management/behavior management, learning disabilities and diversity issues;

School and program staff should provide an introduction and welcome to tutors, as well as an explanation of the needs and skills of the students;

On-going formal and informal in-service training opportunities;

On-going access to and supervision by a reading specialist/teacher and program staff; and

Specialized training and supervision for tutors who serve populations of children with severe reading difficulties. For example, tutors may need to become trained in early reading instruction or bilingual instruction to accommodate a child with severe reading difficulties (U.S. Department of Education 1996).

5. Frequent and regular tutoring sessions. Some research suggests that in order to have an impact on achievement, there is an optimal frequency and duration of tutoring sessions. For instance, in one study, tutoring programs in which tutors met with tutees at least three times a week were more likely to generate positive achievement for tutees than programs in which tutors and tutees met twice a week (Reisner, Petry, and Armitage 1990). Rigorous evaluations of tutoring programs have also reported positive results from programs in which tutoring sessions ran from 10 to 60 minutes in duration, and that longer sessions did not necessarily result in better outcomes (Brailsford 1991; Jenkins and Jenkins 1987; Robledo 1990; Warger 1991). Quality tutoring programs incorporate age appropriateness of the session's duration, content and variety of activities.

6. Careful evaluation, assessment, monitoring and reinforcement of progress. The Corporation strongly believes that effective evaluation is essential to program success. In this context, evaluation should be viewed as a dynamic process which sets goals and objectives, applies lessons learned, and reports results. Programs look at themselves critically in order to continually improve quality (Corporation for National Service 1994). Evaluation of tutoring programs includes:

Assessment of students' knowledge or skills in order to inform instruction and determine progress;

Surveys completed by all program stakeholders (students, staff, parents, teachers, volunteers, etc.) on the strengths and weaknesses of the program;

Evaluation of additional factors which may show improvement as a result of the tutoring program such as school attendance, classroom behavior, grades, self-esteem, etc.;

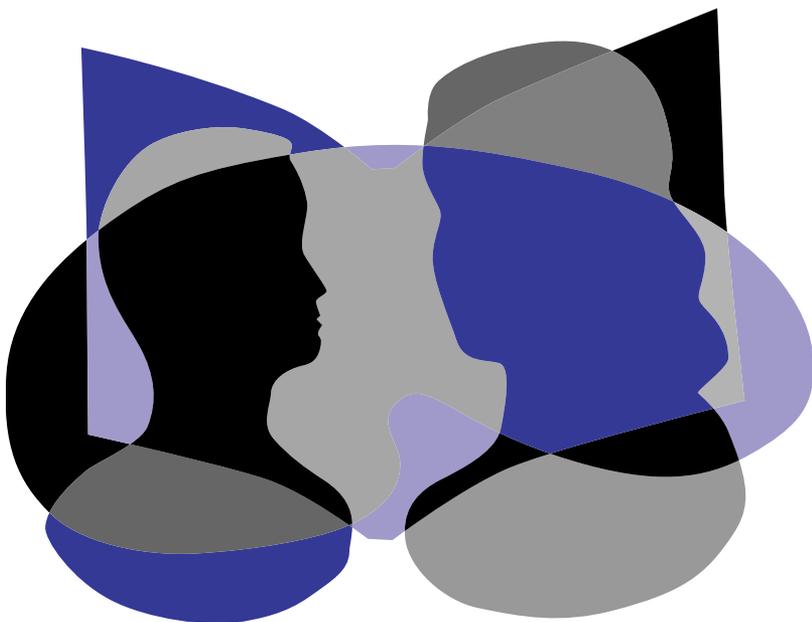
A daily tutoring log which records the activities of the student and tutor during each session; and

Quality control measurements for program staff and management.

7. Access to training and technical assistance resources. In addition to having resources available for volunteer tutors, program staff also have access to on-going training and technical assistance opportunities for continuous quality

improvement. National service programs have available a wide variety of training and technical assistance (T/TA) through the America Reads listserv and related websites, national service T/TA providers, local school systems, and institutions of higher education.

8. Engendering positive, caring relationships among students, staff and tutors. Some research has shown that the single most important factor contributing to the success of student enrichment programs is the positive, caring relationships among children and staff/tutors (Vandell, Shumow, and Posner, in press). Quality tutoring programs insure consistency in tutor/tutee pairs, so that students meet regularly with the same tutor. Adult staff and tutor volunteers are aware of the critical importance of building positive, caring relationships with students. Information on child development, discipline problems, and the needs of at-risk youth are built-in to the pre-service and ongoing training components. In many cases, the relationship developed between tutor and student may lead to a mentoring role—just as many mentoring programs may also involve tutoring. Tutoring programs present a unique opportunity for developing effective mentoring relationships by providing a common activity to foster the relationship and by offering tutor training components as ongoing support for mentors. ♦



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