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## Developing a Tutoring Program

### Getting Started

Developing a tutoring program begins by convening the key stakeholders who will contribute to and benefit from the program. Stakeholders might include:

- administrators, reading specialists, and teachers from the public school system;
- teachers and other staff from child care, Head Start and other early childhood programs,
- Even Start staff and administrators;
- staff from community organizations such as a library, Seniors for Schools initiative, or youth serving agency;
- families of children likely to be enrolled in the program and representatives of family organizations;
- volunteer tutors;
- tutor recruiters and coordinators;
- work-study program administrators and students; and
- AmeriCorps members and other national service program participants, directors, and staff.

The stakeholders collectively represent the community's experience and expertise.

#### In this chapter:

- An Eight-Step Approach to Developing a Tutoring Program
- Characteristics of Effective Tutoring Programs

This chapter covers the following topics:

- An eight-step approach to developing a tutoring program:
  - 1 assess the need;
  - 2 define the mission;
  - 3 set goals and objectives;
  - 4 create tutoring program partnerships;
  - 5 design the program;
  - 6 select or adapt a reading curriculum;
  - 7 provide support for tutors; and
  - 8 implement the plans.and
- Characteristics of effective tutoring programs.

## An Eight-Step Approach to Developing a Tutoring Program<sup>17</sup>

### *Step 1. Assess the Need*

The first task of a planning group is to assess the need for a tutoring program. The community may already have assessment information such as test scores, retention rates, and anecdotal reports from families and teachers. The community assessment should include an inventory of current reading initiatives, with an indication of their nature and scope, in order to measure existing services against need, and to pinpoint the gaps to be filled by the new program. The inventory will also serve as a checklist to ensure that stakeholders identified in preliminary planning are expanded to include all those who have been working to promote children's reading in the past. This will minimize duplication, build on experience, mobilize resources, and avoid the tensions that can arise when groups who may see themselves as the "real" pioneers are left out of new program initiatives.

This information will help the planners focus on the children who are most in need of tutoring. Research indicates that four out of ten children, on average, are at risk in terms of their literacy development. The needs assessment should identify target groups of children and areas of the community at greatest risk. Special attention should be given to Title I public schools and to neighborhoods served by Head Start and Even Start. Planners can use the assessment results to design a program that builds on children's skills and interests and provides activities of direct benefit to children.

### **JUMPSTART TO LITERACY: LINKING CHILD CARE, HEAD START, AND WORK-STUDY STUDENTS**

Jumpstart was founded in 1993 by two students at Yale University to engage young people in community service, while fostering the literacy development of children enrolled in child care and Head Start programs in low-income communities. Through programs in New Haven, Boston, New York City, and Washington, DC, Jumpstart provides training and support to college students—called Jumpstart Corps members—who work one-on-one with young children and their families. More than half of the college students receive work-study wages for their work with Jumpstart. Jumpstart Corps members work part time during the academic year, thereby extending the child care day for participating children. A full day of care is provided during the summer months in classrooms that would otherwise be closed. The Jumpstart model includes a comprehensive training curriculum that integrates child development topics with emerging literacy.

## **Step 2. Define the Mission**

The next step is to define the tutoring program’s overall mission. In developing the mission statement, planners should consider the important contributions to supporting children’s literacy development made by families and community institutions such as Head Start, child care, and other preschool programs; the public schools; and libraries, museums, and out-of-school time community programs. This brief statement should describe what the program intends to do to address the identified needs. The mission statement guides planners as they design, implement, and evaluate the program. For example:

*The mission of the Kaleidoscope Tutoring Program is to motivate children to want to read for pleasure and to learn, to help children become engaged readers and writers, and to make sure children have access to high quality books and reading and writing materials.*

With a mission statement such as this, planners can proceed with setting goals and objectives that the program expects to achieve.

### Step 3. Set Goals and Objectives

The goals for the program will be written in general terms. The America Reads Challenge—all children will read well and independently by the end of third grade—is an example of a goal. Objectives are clear and measurable descriptions of specific outcomes related to the reading and literacy achievements of children. They might address the ages or grade levels to be served, how reading specialists will be involved, how many children will be enrolled, the roles of AmeriCorps members, how many volunteer tutors will be recruited, how schools and community groups will be involved, where tutoring will take place, and how success will be measured. For example:

*The Kaleidoscope Tutoring program will enroll and offer tutoring services to 25 children in grades 1 through 3 at each of 5 sites.*

All of the program's services, policies, and practices will be based on the mission statement and the proposed goals and objectives.

### Step 4. Create Tutoring Program Partnerships

The tutoring program partnerships should include two or more organizations with extensive experience in encouraging children's literacy. One partner should be a school or school district. Other partners might include:

- a Head Start agency or child care center;
- an Even Start program;
- an AmeriCorps project;
- an after-school program;
- a Senior Corps project (e.g., a Foster Grandparents Program or a Retired and Senior Volunteer Program);
- parents' associations;
- the local library;
- a museum;
- a community college, college, or university (through academic departments and the work study office);
- a business;
- a literacy group;
- a youth-serving agency; or
- a Tribal Government.

An existing program could add tutoring to the array of services they already provide to children and families. Tutoring activities could operate at the same site or at satellite sites such as a housing complex, library, or religious organization.

In some instances, a partner might be a new organization, formed to operate the tutoring program. Such an organization will need to form strong linkages with the school and/or child care program, private sector, and other community groups that support literacy for children and families. When appropriate, these linkages should be formalized through written agreements that define each partner's roles and responsibilities. For example, an agreement with the school should specify:

- how the school administrators and staff will participate in planning, implementation, and monitoring of the program;
- who will serve as the liaison with the tutoring program to ensure ongoing communication and to provide information about applicable school regulations, policies, and procedures; and
- how the reading specialist will support classroom teachers and tutors in their work with children and families.



The partners must form strong linkages with other groups that support literacy development.

### Step 5. Design the Program

The program design describes how the tutoring program will carry out its mission and achieve its goals and objectives. Planners can use the chart, Characteristics of Effective Tutoring Programs, later in this chapter as a checklist for designing the program.

In designing the program, planners will need to discuss and answer questions such as the following:

- How will children in need of tutoring be identified?  
*Teachers will refer children to the program whose reading skills are below those of their peers (the lowest 50% or the lowest 25%).*
- How and when will the program conduct pre- and post-testing?  
*The program will use the \_\_\_\_\_ reading skills assessment to measure children's skills at entry and at one-month intervals.*
- How will the program ensure that children who need special education or other services, in addition to or in place of tutoring, will receive such help?  
*Children suspected of having special needs will be referred (with written parental permission) for screening and/or evaluation through the local education agency. The tutoring program will participate in planning and implementing follow-up strategies and services.*

- Where and when will tutoring take place?  
*Tutoring will take place at school, two afternoons per week.*
- How will the program ensure that tutoring services delivered to school-age children during the regular school day are beneficial and outweigh missing regular classroom activities?  
*Tutors will communicate regularly with families and teachers to track children's reading progress and net educational gains. In general, tutoring sessions will **not** be scheduled at times when the child would otherwise be participating in reading activities in the regular classroom.*
- How will the program track children's progress?  
*Tutors, families, and children will work together to create and maintain portfolios that document children's progress.*
- How will the program recruit and screen volunteer tutors?  
*The program will work with \_\_\_\_\_ University to recruit work-study students who are majoring in education or a related field. The school system will handle screening through its existing agreement with state authorities.*
- How will the program support the tutors?  
*All tutors will take part in a three-day initial orientation and attend biweekly workshops conducted by the program's reading specialist. Tutors will participate in a minimum of 36 hours of training on reading and literacy development. The reading specialist will observe tutoring sessions at least monthly and provide feedback and technical assistance.*

Family involvement is another key area to be addressed in the program design. Planners can build in strategies for involving families, establishing partnerships with families, and encouraging family literacy. (See Chapter 4, Involving Families in Tutoring Programs, for more information on this topic.)

Other parts of the program design include:

- a communication system for reading specialists, teachers, tutors, families, and program staff;
- initial and ongoing training and supervision for tutors (see Step 7 below);
- policies and procedures;
- recordkeeping requirements; and
- a plan for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the program's effectiveness in meeting specified goals and objectives.

Useful resources for program developers are *Help America Read: A Handbook for Volunteers* and the companion *Coordinators Guide* by Gay Su Pinnell and Irene C. Fountas.<sup>18</sup> The authors are experts in reading development and knowledgeable about how AmeriCorps and other national service programs can partner with community-based literacy programs.

Having designed an overall framework for the program, planners can review the appropriateness of different reading models.

### A FEW QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING AN INTERVIEW WITH VOLUNTEER TUTORS

- What is there about this position that appeals to you the most?
- What is there about working with children that makes you enjoy it?
- How do you imagine your relationship with your students?
- Tell me about your understanding of the challenges these children face?
- Are there any types of children you feel you may have a hard time working with?
- Can you tell me about any experiences you may have had working with members of ethnic groups?

*Chattanooga Family Service Corps in Chattanooga, Tennessee, shared the above interview questions through the America Reads listserv, July 23, 1997.*

## Step 6. Select or Adapt a Reading Curriculum

Planners might develop their own curriculum or, more feasibly, select a specific research-based reading curriculum that has been proven successful with children whose reading skills and needs are similar to those of the children to be targeted through the tutoring program. A research-based curriculum is one that is consistent with existing knowledge about how children learn to read. Reading One-One, Reading Recovery, and Success for All are widely-used curricula (see Chapter 5, Examples of Reading and Tutoring Programs, for descriptions of these and other curricula).



The reading curriculum should be research-based and compatible with the reading or literacy development approach used by the school or preschool.

Tutoring programs can involve their reading specialists in adapting the chosen reading curriculum to address local needs and circumstances. In the adaptation, it will be essential to ensure that the curriculum is suitable for use by tutors with the level of skills and amount of training that are likely to be characteristic of those participating in the program. If the reading model has been developed for use by highly trained classroom teachers (such as Reading Recovery), it will need to be modified for use by less well-trained tutors, or a complementary model will need to be selected, as has been done in some AmeriCorps programs that are partnering with Reading Recovery teachers in a comprehensive reading strategy. In those situations, the Reading Recovery teacher works one-on-one with children who are experiencing the most severe reading delays, and the AmeriCorps member tutors children who are behind in their reading development but who may not require such a high level of expertise in helping them to improve.

The most effective reading curricula have built-in opportunities for children to:

- experience incremental successes (e.g., reread a familiar passage independently);
- reinforce a few skills and concepts (e.g., review sight words); and
- move to the next step (e.g., master new sight words or read a more complex passage).

Since school administrators and reading specialists are among the key stakeholders to be included in the planning team, they can ensure that the reading curriculum supports the school's reading approach and the program design.

Regardless of the specific model the program will use, it should include a structured, yet flexible, format for tutoring sessions. Reading and literacy development programs, like all early childhood education programs, should be consistent with the principles outlined in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, Revised Edition, 1997, from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This resource can guide planners and tutors in ways to adapt the format to promote learning by addressing children's individual and developmental needs.



Children need both consistency and attention to their individual learning style, skills, interests, and needs.

A consistent structure helps both children and tutors to stay organized and focused on meeting individual goals. Children feel a sense of competence from being able to predict what comes next in each tutoring session. A flexible format allows tutors to use strategies that are tailored to address each child's learning style, skills, interests, and needs. The flexibility ensures that each child will receive individualized and developmentally appropriate support.

The length of each tutoring session should be appropriate for the ages of the children involved and reflect a variety of planned activities. Evaluations of tutoring programs have shown positive results from sessions lasting up to 60 minutes. Longer sessions do not necessarily increase a child's literacy and reading development.

The *READ\*WRITE\*NOW Reading Partners Tutoring Program* suggests 35-minute tutoring sessions that follow this agenda:

Quick review of last session	3 minutes
Rereading of a story	5 minutes
Paired Reading of a new story	10 minutes
Vocabulary and comprehension exercises	5 minutes
Writing activity plus feedback	12 minutes

A 40-minute tutoring session might include these segments:

Opening activity and review	7 minutes
Instructional Goal 1	10 minutes
Instructional Goal 2	10 minutes
Reading activity	5 minutes
Closing activity	5 minutes
Follow-up assignment	3 minutes

The **opening activity and review** gets the lesson started. It is an opportunity to reinforce the tutoring relationship, help the child focus attention and get ready for the session, review what took place during the previous session, and discuss the follow-up activity.

**Instructional goals** focus on the child's needs. Usually one is related to reading and one to writing. Goals might come from the child's teacher. Completing several short activities helps a child feel a sense of accomplishment and success, which increases the child's motivation for learning.

A **reading activity** allows the child to practice reading something of his or her own choice or something the tutor selected. The reading material should be at an appropriate level so the child can read it with ease. Tutors might select a book on a topic of interest to the child or introduce a new book they think the child will enjoy. Many children like to read the same book or passage again and again because it helps them feel a sense of mastery. When children experience success as readers they are motivated to read on their own. Tutors can read aloud to non-readers. During the reading activity a child might read alone, take turns reading with the tutor, or engage in paired reading.

The **closing activity** encourages the child to think about what he or she has learned in this session and previous ones. The activity could involve talking, writing in a journal, or making comments that the tutor writes down.

**Follow-up activities** are a way to reinforce and build on what took place in the tutoring session. Many tutoring programs ask children to do independent reading or read with their families every day.

### *Step 7. Provide Support for Tutors*



Tutors are likely to be more effective when they receive a comprehensive orientation and ongoing training and supervision.

Qualified tutors are a critical element in the success of any tutoring program. The stakeholders will need a plan that specifies how the program will ensure that tutors have the knowledge and skills needed to carry out their roles effectively. Support begins with a comprehensive orientation prior to a tutor's first meeting with a child. Continued support is provided by a reading specialist through ongoing training and supervision using methods such as workshops, group meetings, and on-site visits.

The orientation gives tutors background information and opportunities to practice using the reading curriculum. The agenda should include plenty of time for discussion and questions. Ideally, orientation takes place at the tutoring site. If this is not possible, tutors can visit the site before their first session with a child. The orientation can address topics such as these:

#### **What Children Are Like:**

- an overview of child development,
- how most children learn to read,
- strategies for guiding children's behavior,
- building a trusting relationship with a child, and
- learning disabilities that may affect a child's reading skills.

#### **Getting to Know Families:**

- creating partnerships with families,
- sharing information about children's progress, and
- respecting diversity.

**The Tutoring Approach:**

- the reading curriculum used by the tutoring program,
- the reading approach used by the school system,
- tailoring the curriculum to address individual needs, planning the first session, and
- assessing the child's reading abilities and tracking the child's progress.

**Support for Tutors:**

- ongoing training and supervision,
- resources (materials, books, workshops, web sites, listservs), the role of the reading specialist, and
- strategies for handling problem situations.

**Working as a Team:**

- coordinating with tutoring program partners (e.g., the school; child care or Head Start program; Even Start, HIPPIY or other family literacy program; library; community groups),
- following the tutoring program's policies and procedures,
- handling problem situations, and
- making referrals, as appropriate.

**Ongoing training and supervision** for tutors should acknowledge and build on past experiences, provide information that can be used immediately, and allow for practice and skill development. The training might address a range of topics; however, all will be tied to effective implementation of the reading curriculum. Training content should cover the reading or emerging literacy approach used by the school, Head Start, or child care program and how to ensure that the tutoring curriculum and format builds on what children are learning in these educational settings. Many of the topics introduced in the orientation will be covered in depth through ongoing training and supervision. Including the orientation and pre-service training, a minimum of 36 hours of training in literacy and reading development is recommended.

Tutors will need continuing support in addressing children's unique needs. If the program serves children with severe reading difficulties, training should address the multiple factors that contribute to such reading difficulties and the tutoring strategies and other special services known to be effective in helping children gain the skills needed to learn to read.

The reading specialist and other trainers can provide ongoing training and supervision through a variety of methods that address group and individual training needs. Workshops and group meetings are effective ways to convey information needed by all tutors and to encourage discussion and problem solving. Tutors can share successes and seek input from others on how to address challenges. All tutors might keep journals about the child’s activities and progress and their own experiences in promoting the child’s literacy development. With the reading specialist’s assistance, the tutoring program can establish a resource library of professional journals, books, videotapes, and other materials about the teaching of reading. Tutors should be invited to use the resource library to increase their understanding of literacy development.

One of the most effective ways to support tutors is through on-site observation and feedback focused on skill development. The reading specialist can schedule regular visits to the program to observe tutors interacting with children and to give feedback on what he or she saw and heard. As an alternative, tutors can support each other by conducting peer observations or by videotaping each other’s tutoring sessions then meeting to view and discuss the tapes.

Here is how one tutoring program plans to provide ongoing training and supervision for tutors.

<b>KALEIDOSCOPE TUTORING PROGRAM</b>		<i>Ongoing Training and Supervision</i>
<b>Tutor Meetings</b>	Every other Wednesday, 7 to 9 p.m., pizza provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updates—from last meeting</li> <li>Sharing—tutoring successes and challenges</li> <li>Special Topic—presented by guest speaker, a tutor, or the reading specialist</li> <li>New Resources—now available in the resource library</li> <li>Skill Building—e.g., motivating young readers</li> </ul>
<b>Reflection Journals</b>	Kept by each tutor	Discussed with reading specialist, at tutor’s request
<b>Individual Support</b>	Biweekly observation and feedback by reading specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Biweekly observation and feedback with peer (tutor)</li> <li>Monthly “catch up” meeting with program director</li> <li>Individual meetings, at tutor’s request</li> </ul>

In addition to orientation and ongoing training and supervision, programs should provide a handbook that can serve as a ready reference. An example of the contents of a tutoring handbook follows.

**KALEIDOSCOPE HANDBOOK FOR TUTORS***Table of Contents*

<i>SECTION</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>
Getting to Know the Community	Introduce the community's cultures, ethnic groups, businesses, and resources for children and families. Include a map.
The Public School System	Provide a statistical overview of the schools, students, teachers, and administrators. Include information about students' cultures and ethnic groups, test scores, and graduation rate.
School Calendar	Include the school calendar and highlight special events/holidays.
Overview of Sponsoring Organization	Describe the history, programs and services, staff, and volunteers. Include a chart showing how the tutoring program is related to other programs and services.
Overview of the Tutoring Program	Describe the reading curriculum, format for tutoring sessions, training and ongoing support, coordination with teachers and principals, family involvement, recordkeeping requirements, and policies and procedures.
Responsibilities/Job Description	Provide a tutor's responsibilities or a "job description."
Tips and Strategies for Getting Started	Provide general information about getting to know children and their families.
Handling Problem Situations	Describe typical problems and suggested solutions. Indicate when and from whom tutors can seek help.
Tutoring Contract	Include a brief, but clear, contract that outlines the organization's expectations of volunteer tutors.
Recordkeeping Forms	Provide blank copies of forms and instructions for use.

## Step 8. Implement the Plans

As the development process moves from planning to implementation, the key stakeholders can continue to play a role in operating and evaluating the program. They might become program staff or volunteers, serve as members of an advisory group, and continue to provide input related to their areas of expertise. Specific program implementation issues have been discussed throughout this Guide. Planners and staff can use the checklist discussed in the next section to implement and periodically review their tutoring program plan.

## Characteristics of Effective Tutoring Programs

In developing this Guide, the authors have carefully reviewed reading curricula and tutor training materials as well as research studies concerning how children learn to read. The following 30 item list is a summary of the characteristics of effective programs. The list is adapted from the Reading Program Criteria provided by the Texas Children's Literacy Corps, a statewide AmeriCorps program sponsored by the State of Texas and administered by the Mental Health Association in Austin, Texas and from *Principles for High Quality America Reads National Service Program Initiatives*.<sup>19</sup>

### CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TUTORING PROGRAMS

#### *Program Administration*

- 1** Key stakeholders such as teachers, school or preschool program administrators, reading specialists, tutors, and families are involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating the program.
- 2** The partners have a proven track record of working with children to encourage the development of literacy skills and/or have strong linkages with groups that have this expertise.
- 3** The partners have support from the private sector and local and state programs that support literacy.
- 4** The partners can provide transportation, snacks, and/or information and referral for other support services that address child and family needs.

#### *Program Design*

- 5** The program design is based on assessed needs, a well-defined mission statement, and clear, measurable goals. The design is based upon or consistent with the latest research on literacy and reading development and developmentally appropriate practice for early childhood education.
- 6** The program has systems for:
  - identifying children in need of tutoring
  - recruiting volunteer tutors
  - conducting pre- and post-tests of children's skills
  - conducting periodic evaluations of program effectiveness, including feedback from stakeholders.

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**CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TUTORING PROGRAMS***continued*

- 7** Tutors and the program director, staff, and volunteers regularly communicate and collaborate with families, child care program or school staff, and administrators.
- 8** Tutors are screened before acceptance into the program.
- 9** Tutors receive a written job description and a tutoring handbook that outlines the program's approach, policies, and procedures.
- 10** Tutors receive an orientation before they begin working with children.
- 11** Tutors receive ongoing training, technical assistance, and supervision.
- 12** Tutors recognize the importance of building relationships with children and motivating them to want to read.

***Family Involvement***

- 13** Tutors communicate with families regularly to keep them up-to-date on their child's progress.
- 14** Tutors suggest home literacy activities such as reading aloud and writing together.
- 15** Tutors involve families in collecting items that document the child's progress to be included in the child's portfolio.
- 16** The program helps families gain access to children's books and writing supplies.
- 17** The program encourages families to develop or improve their own literacy skills.

***Tutoring Sessions***

- 18** Tutors work with children one-on-one (or in small groups of two to four children).
- 19** Tutoring takes place during school, after school, weekends, and/or in the summer.

- 20** Tutoring takes place in an area large enough for children to concentrate without being disturbed by others.
- 21** Tutoring takes place in an open area where the tutoring pair can be observed at all times.
- 22** Tutoring sessions are up to 60 minutes in duration, depending on the age of the child and variety of activities.
- 23** Tutoring sessions are provided at least twice a week.
- 24** Tutoring sessions are divided into segments such as: an opening activity to set the stage, activities based on individual learning goals, reading practice, and a closing activity.
- 25** Each tutoring session includes opportunities for the child to experience success and to progress toward becoming an engaged reader.

***The Reading Curriculum***

- 26** The reading curriculum has been proven to be effective and/or is based on effective strategies.
- 27** The reading curriculum supports or builds on how and what children are learning through their preschool or in-school reading program.
- 28** The reading curriculum includes opportunities to develop and practice reading skills and comprehension, independent reading, and writing.
- 29** The reading curriculum can be tailored to respond to a child's skills, learning style, interests, and needs.
- 30** The curriculum and tutoring strategies integrate opportunities for service learning for participants in the program.



### **KEY POINTS** *IN THIS CHAPTER*

- The first task of a planning group is to assess the need for a tutoring program to complement reading resources currently available in the community.
- A mission statement guides planners as they design, implement, and evaluate a tutoring program.
- All of the tutoring program's services, policies, and practices will be based on the mission statement and the proposed goals and objectives.
- Tutoring program partnerships should include two or more organizations with extensive experience in encouraging children's literacy.
- The design of the tutoring program should address details regarding the children to be tutored, tutors, the tutoring site, involving families, communication, and other policies and procedures.
- Select or adapt a research-based reading curriculum that has been proven successful with children whose reading skills and needs are similar to those of the children to be targeted through the tutoring program.
- By providing adequate training and supervision, planners and program administrators help to ensure that tutors have the knowledge and skills needed to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.
- Key stakeholders can continue to play a role in operating and evaluating the tutoring program.