

Case Study: Queens Public Library

Background

Name of library:	Queens Borough Public Library
Location(s):	Jamaica, Queens, New York, 64 branches, and a Central Library
Size of collection:	6.8 million items
Size of staff:	1,059 full time; 750 hourly
Annual budget:	\$107,500,000
Sources of core funding:	City of New York, NY State, USA (Federal)
Population(s) served:	2.2 million (based on last year's report)



Literacy programs or projects in the Queens Borough Public Library since 1990

I. Projects

- ✓ **Title: Health Literacy Curriculum for Beginning ESOL Learners**
Start date: January 2005
End date: December 2007
Objectives: To develop suitable materials, activities and health literacy lessons for beginner ESOL learners
Funding source: Langeloth and Valeria Foundation
Funding amount: \$115,000
Outcomes: Beginning ESOL Learners increased their Health knowledge. They also improved their language skills and navigating the health care system

- ✓ **Title: Basic Computer Literacy Class**
Start Date: January 2003
End date: Continuing
Objectives: To provide basic computer skills to ESOL Learners
Funding Source: From varied private grants
Funding Amount: \$30,000 annually (teaching wage only)
Outcomes: A curriculum is developed; 15-20 classes offered per semester; participants learned how to keyboard, search the internet, set-up an email account and use Word programs.

- ✓ **Title: Art Literacy for ESOL Learners**
Start date: May 2006
End date: Continuing through Queens Museum of Art and Metropolitan Museum
Funding source: Altman Foundation
Funding Amount: \$7,000
Outcomes: Offered 2 Art Literacy classes for Intermediate level ESOL learners and Family Literacy Program participants.

- ✓ **Title: ESOL Classes for Seniors**
Start date: July 30, 2004
End date: June 30, 2005
Funding Source: New York State Library Grant Programs
Funding Amount: \$19,000
Outcomes: In collaboration with the Department of Aging, offered 3 classes in two cycles.



II. Programs:

√ **Title: Family Literacy Program**

Start date: 2000

Objectives: To promote literacy and language skills for children and their adult caregivers

Funding source: City, State, Private organizations

Funding amount: \$150,000 it varies from year to year

Evaluation method(s): BEST Plus Test and in-house developed assessment tools

√ **Title: Basic ESOL Literacy Program**

Start date: 1998

Objectives: To provide Basic English Literacy to Adult immigrant learners who are non-literate in their native language.

Funding source: New York State Library Grant Program

Funding amount: \$20,000

Evaluation method: In-house developed pre and post testing

√ **Title: ESOL and Civics Classes**

Start date: 1985

Objectives: To offer English and Civics lessons to Speakers of other languages. Queens Public Library is the largest library managed ESOL Program in the nation.

Funding Source: New York State Department of Education and Queens Library operational funds

Funding amount: \$250,000 annually (it varies)

Evaluation Method: BEST Plus Test and Teacher made informal assessment

√ **Title: The Adult Learning Centers**

Start Date: 1977

Objectives: Located in 7 library sites, they are created to provide educational services to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and to adult literacy learners who speak English and are seeking to develop their reading and writing skills while aspiring to increase their employment and life opportunities. ESOL learners are students who speak language(s) other than English and want to learn/improve their English and language fluency to be successful in their new country.

Funding source: NYC Tax Levy and QBPL operational Funds.

Evaluation Method: Use Best Plus TES and TABE to measure student's progress



Analysis

The Queens Public Library Mission:

To provide quality services, resources and lifelong learning opportunities through books and a variety of other formats to meet the information, educational, cultural and recreational needs and interests of a diverse and changing population.

Background

Queens County in New York City is one of the most diverse counties in the United States, with more than 50% of its population speaking a language other than English at home. In some cases, more than 100 nationalities live and work in the same neighborhoods. The Queens Library system began developing programs to meet the borough's changing composition in 1977 and is the vanguard of library-based community programming.

In 1977, the Queens Public Library partnered with Literacy Volunteers of America to institute one-on-one reading tutoring in at least five branches. In 1983, the library started receiving funding from NYS Department of Education to provide math and ABE classes, the first ESOL classes were offered simultaneously. In 1985, four new Adult Learning Centers were opened through funding from private grants and the New York City Adult Literacy Initiatives (NYCALI). The following year, the literacy program was integrated into the library's operating budget. At present, the Queens Library's Adult Literacy programs are staffed by 30 full time Adult Educators with an MA in TESOL or related field and teaching experience to adults; 50 part-time teachers (ESOL and Pre-GED); 150 volunteer tutors.

Challenge

Queens is always changing as newcomers settle in and migrate to the borough. Keeping the library system responsive to the needs of an evolving community required a proactive and flexible approach. That approach needed to be supported institutionally and implemented throughout the organization. The fact that the Queens Public Library (QPL) was able to secure that institutional commitment enabled it to craft dynamic programs of interest to the community and to keep its programming fresh by regularly re-evaluating existing programs and designing new ones.

Solution

The secret to the success of the Queens Library system's approach is its combination of discipline and creativity, focusing on meeting community needs and flexibility to adapt to changing conditions and demands.



The library's ESOL Classes are wildly popular, so popular that in 2000 the library created a new Adult Learner Program (ALP) to oversee the ESOL classes formerly offered by another department, as well as family Literacy and Adult Learning Center programming. The QPL ESOL program is the largest library-managed ESOL program in the country. These are structured classes taught by paid, professional instructors. Approximately 100 classes offered per year serving between 2,500 to 3,000 students.

The QPL's Adult Learner Program has seven Adult Learning Centers since 1977. The resource centers operating within existing branches offer small group instruction, tutorials, computer assisted learning, conversation circles, basic ESOL literacy classes, and pre-GED classes. The centers serve approximately 3,000 students a year. In addition, through special grants, the Adult Learner Program set-up wireless computer labs in three branches in early 2005 with the goal of teaching basic computer skills to ESOL students. Hundreds of students have already taken these classes. All services are free of charge. The library recruits and trains volunteers to teach classes at the centers with the help of staff developer.

The third program component is the newest. Initiated in 2002, the Family Literacy Program offers classes for pre-kindergarten and K-3 aged children and their caregivers at the library. The classes prepare caregivers and children alike for what awaits them when school begins, helps parents understand the educational system here, and teaches them how to advocate for their children. For older children, the library has partnered with two public school classes (one in Flushing and one in Long Island City). Ten to fifteen families participate in a program that combines parenting and ESOL classes and educational activities for children.

The new initiative is Health Literacy for beginning ESOL Learners. The ALP has received a two-year grant to develop a curriculum for beginning ESOL learners. This curriculum is being piloted for its effectiveness and will be shared with other Adult Literacy providers interested in integrating Health topics into their instruction.

Foundation of the success of the QPL Literacy programs:

1. **Planning.** To understand the needs of the community including how new immigrant flows and residency patterns affect the potential users of the system's community libraries (branches).
2. **Outreach and Partnerships.** In the early years of the Adult Literacy program, library staff conducted aggressive outreach in the community to ensure that immigrants and new readers were aware of the libraries' ESOL classes and other literacy programs and not afraid to use them. Years of building trust and meeting community needs have paid off. As the QPL programs have grown over time, so too has their impact on the community. The QPL is always exploring new partnerships and fund raising opportunities to underwrite new programs. Most recently, with access to healthcare, health costs and health literacy of increasing



concern, the library has partnered with a Queens hospital system to offer health screenings and seminars on how best to access health care. It has also partnered with the Queens Museum of Art and Queens Health Network to provide on-site ESOL classes.

3. **Community Feedback.** In addition to tracking changes numerically, the library is constantly asking its various constituencies about their needs, about whether the QPL's programs are responsive to those needs, and how services could be improved. The Queens Library has developed Program Self-Assessment, Teacher Self-Assessment and Stakeholders Self Assessment tools that are administered through an online anonymous survey. The results of the surveys provide lists of needs to be addressed at various levels.
4. **Funding.** The programs described here are large-scale and require significant funding to operate. The QPL uses a combination of federal, state and city monies to run its programs, supplemented by grants from private foundations, many of which are channeled through the Queens Library Foundation, and partnerships with other organizations who have grants in hand. The QPL employs a government grant manager to facilitate funding for all the library's programs.
5. **Staffing.** All 30 full time staff for the Adult Literacy Programs have either an MA in Education, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages) or related field. In addition, they have experience teaching ESOL and Literacy to adults at all levels. They are also required to attend continuing training and workshops on improving classroom management, teaching instruction, and other aspects of literacy education.

Additional personal reflections:

Managing an Adult Literacy Program in a public library setting has its own "glory" and "defeats."

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