



Project IDEAL Update

Project IDEAL Support Center
Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan

Project IDEAL — Improving Distance Education for Adult Learners—A Collaborative of the states of Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, and West Virginia

Project IDEAL is a consortium of states working to develop effective distance education programs for adult learners. The Project IDEAL Support Center at the University of Michigan helps consortium states by developing training materials and web-based tools. The Center provides technical support in the areas of teacher training, research design, data collection, data analysis and reporting. Through collaborative research and practice, we are working to provide quality distance education for adult learners across the country.

Study Groups Update

How do you help experienced distance teachers refine their teaching skills? This year we have been experimenting with a new form of online professional development called Study Groups. In a study group, participants each write a case study of a learner who is struggling to master a basic concept. For example, "I have a student who is having a difficult time with ratios and wants to practice at home, and I'm having a hard time 'talking' to him online to explain the procedures." Under the guidance of a facilitator, participants help the author of each case understand the learner's problem and suggest possible solutions. Participants discuss 1-2 cases per week using an electronic discussion board. Each Study Group lasts 4-6 weeks.

The first Study Group included six teachers, three each from Ohio and Pennsylvania. Results were very positive. Participants reported acquiring more solutions to the teaching problems they face. An analysis of the discussions showed that several teachers gained deep insights into their approaches to teaching.

Two more Study Group pilots are running in March and April. If they show the same positive results, the model will be made available to states to implement in Fall, 2004.

COABE in Columbus

State and Support Center staff will host several events at **ALTN & COABE** this year.

IDEAL Kickoff Luncheon

Lunch is on Sunday, April 25, from 10:45-12:45 in the Harrison Room. IDEAL members are invited to join friends, enjoy good food, and learn about the latest project activities.

Presentations & Workshops

Tools to Support Adult Learners Working at a Distance
Saturday, 8:00-12:00, Fayette

What Ohio Has Learned About Distance Instruction in ABLE
Sunday, 4:00-5:15, Madison

If You Build It, They Will Come: A Program to Support GED Graduates in Higher Ed. Monday, 8:00-9:15, Marion

Are States Ready to Have a Policy on Distance Education?
Tuesday, 8:30-9:45, Union D

Pennsylvania's Use of Technology in Providing Distance Education for Family Literacy Practitioners
Tuesday, 10:15-11:30, Garfield

Online Professional Development: Discussion Boards and Other Asynchronous Tools. Tuesday, 1:30-3:15, Fayette

Distance Learning Options for Adult Learners
Tuesday, 1:45-3:00, Grant

Approaches to Teaching GED at a Distance
Wednesday, 8:30-9:45, Garfield

We hope you'll join us!

IDEAL Website Changes

If you haven't visited our website—projectideal.org—recently, check it out! We've reorganized the site to make it easier to navigate.

Implementing a Distance Learning Program: Planning & Implementation Components that Lead to Success

by Dr. Leslie Petty

Distance learning (DL) is appealing as it removes many of the barriers – time, location, transportation, child care – that prevent some adults from continuing their education. Yet, it is not a panacea, nor is it a quick fix. To develop a successful distance learning program, states need to understand that distance learning is based on a unique educational model. Navigating this largely uncharted educational territory can be frustrating. To make distance work, states must address a host of financial, planning, and implementation challenges. This article highlights what we're learning about good program development.

Create a culture that encourages and supports innovation

This is the first necessary step from which everything else flows. Implementing distance education is a very different task from teaching a new course in the classroom. It demands that programs explore totally new ways of recruiting, orienting and delivering instruction to students. Distance learning requires that teachers and administrators modify how they think about the process of teaching and how they interact with their students and content

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materials. To succeed in this endeavor, creativity and innovation are crucial.

- States must create an environment in which these traits are both encouraged and valued. One way to do this is to focus on the process—and learn from it—rather than on specific outcome measures. For example, in the first years of its experiments, the Pennsylvania pilot sites were exempted from tracking their distance learning students in the state's accountability system.

Rhode Island and Ohio have taken similar approaches with their fledgling DL programs, opting to explore the possibilities of using distance education effectively before imposing additional constraints on programs.

- States can also encourage and support the innovative use and development of curricular materials to meet the specific needs of distance learners. North Carolina took this approach in working with the producers of Crossroads Café to create “wrap-around videos” to help learners focus on the content contained in the curricula. Illinois and Missouri both created online GED programs. Missouri also worked with TABE to create an online version of the test to be used for placement purposes. Common to these approaches were the recognition that materials and approaches that are effective in classroom teaching may not be suited for distance and the willingness to explore other possibilities.
- It is also crucial that the teachers, administrators and programs involved are excited about the possibility and view themselves as innovators. These adult education professionals are taking a risk, and moving away from the security of what they know they can do effectively. They should be commended for taking on the challenge, and provided with an opportunity to explore, try new out new ideas, and take risks in a safe, supportive environment. In turn, they can then communicate this approach to their distance education students.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of creating this environment and this mindset among all participants involved in the endeavors. Without this

foundation, the rest of the program can only make limited progress. *However, creating an environment that supports innovation, by itself, is not sufficient to successfully implement distance learning programs.* There is a real need for a variety of other measures to be in place for this to go from an idea to a reality.

Provide strong leadership

Distance learning experiments are the most successful when the person assuming primary responsibility (the point person) is excited about the project, has both the time and resources to bring to bear on the project and has strong leadership skills. Distance education requires a major shift in how people both think about and deliver education to adults; the point person needs to be someone who can embrace the vision, has the clout to implement it and who can create a sense of enthusiasm among participating agencies. Experiments are more likely to be successfully implemented if the point person has the following:

- *High levels of involvement with the project.* States where the point person is actively involved with the experiments seem to have greater success in implementing their programs. Their involvement signals that this endeavor is an important one at various levels throughout the state.
- *Adequate time to spend on the project.* Implementing any new program is time consuming; distance learning may be even more so because it differs so dramatically from typical classroom programs. Thus, it is not enough for the point person to be excited and enthusiastic about the project, he/she must have sufficient time allocated to it. This may require re-assigning other tasks

or re-allocating work loads to ensure distance learning experiments are a priority in the state.

- *Influence with state leaders and participating agencies.* The point person often needs to bring people from disparate perspectives together and create consensus on working toward a goal. This appears to be done more successfully if the point person is well regarded as a leader in his/her state. It is also important for the person to have the authority to get things done and the funds available to support the project.
- *A desire to take this challenge and explore a relatively unknown area.* The point person's attitude permeates all aspects of the project. The job needs to belong to someone who wants the challenge, likes to create new programs and is excited about finding new ways to reach adult learners. Experiments are much less likely to succeed if the assignment is given to someone who does not relish the opportunity or someone whose time is already over-committed.

Funding is essential

There are costs associated with both new and existing programs. Distance learning – even if done on a small scale – requires funding to implement and support the project. Funds are necessary for the participating agencies and teachers, the point person, training and ongoing support and

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curricular materials. In order for agencies and their teachers to put enough time and effort into building a distance learning project, they must either receive financial compensation or release time from other assignments. This is too challenging a project to be added as an additional assignment to educators who are already carrying a full workload.

States have developed various ways of financially supporting their projects. Some

have provided small grants to participating agencies to cover teacher and administrator salaries (e.g., Ohio, Arkansas). Maine required that participating agencies split the cost of teacher support with funds from a state grant. Pennsylvania funded an agency to oversee and provide technical support for providers involved in the distance learning experiments. North Carolina financially supported the development of the modification of Crossroads Café. Several states have purchased state-wide or agency-wide licenses for the curricular package they are using. Successful states recognized that this program needs financial support if it is to flourish.

Support & professional development for teachers & administrators

Teachers working at a distance need ongoing support. This takes two forms – ongoing technical support in using the selected curricula and professional development to build skills needed for teaching at a distance.

Ongoing technical support. Just as distance learning students can sometimes feel isolated, so too can distance learning teachers. For most teachers and administrators, this is a new enterprise that makes different demands on their abilities. It is important for these educators to feel that they are not alone in this process and for them to have a resource available to answer questions, provide support and help guide them along the way.

- Successful state-wide experiments are likely to have a person or agency that can provide information about the curricula being used and guidance on delivering instruction at a distance. This support person/agency maintains close contacts with the experimental sites, thus diminishing feelings of being set adrift without guidance.

- Successful programs create situations in which sites act as mutual supports and share accumulated wisdom. Some states have established regular conference calls while others use electronic communications or face-to-face meetings.

Professional development. It is almost impossible to overstate how different distance education is from classroom-based programs. The entire process from beginning to end—from recruitment to assessment—requires new ways of thinking about teaching and of administering a program.

- Distance teaching requires different ways of orienting, teaching and motivating students. This difference necessitates that distance teachers have access to professional development. By providing professional development opportunities for teachers involved in distance learning programs, states increase the likelihood that these teachers will teach effectively, keeping learners involved and active.
- Administrators need to commit time and energy to new ways of work. Professional development opportunities that allow teachers and administrators to learn together and to plan how changes will be made in their own organizations maximize the possibility that programs will be successful.

Recognize that change takes time

Implementing any new program takes planning, time and effort. In the case of implementing distance learning programs, this is intensified because distance learning is such a dramatic departure from established classroom programs. The most successful state programs are those which recognize this and give agencies ample time to find their way in this new arena.

New Products Released

The following working papers are now available for download from projectideal.org.

- *Accountability in Adult Education for Learners Studying at a Distance* discusses seat time, educational gain, and policy issues, and reports findings from IDEAL research.
- *Using Assessment to Guide Instructional Planning for Distance Learners* examines three alternative assessment approaches (checklists, portfolios, and online quizzes) and how they are being adapted for use in distance education.

Resources Available to Member States

A new paper outlining services offered by the Support Center is available for download from projectideal.org. *Support Center Resources Available to Project IDEAL Member States* outlines the four main areas of support that the Center offers: (1) development, implementation, support, and evaluation of distance programs, (2) professional development, (3) research design and assessment, and (4) policy and administration. Check out this paper to make sure your state is taking advantage of all the Support Center has to offer!

New States & Staff

Welcome to our newest IDEAL state members Arizona and Maryland!

Kentucky co-DLCs Stuart Johnston and Peggy Muller. Maryland state director Patricia Bennett, DLC Richard Conroy, and trainer Kathy Ira. Missouri trainer Phyllis Shelby. North Carolina trainer Lynn Hinson. Ohio consultant Karen Scheid. Pennsylvania state director Rose Brandt. Washington co-DLCs Alleyne Bruch and Beth Wheeler. West Virginia state director William Wilcox.

Resource Library

Work has begun on an online resource library for IDEAL Study Group grads. This site will be dedicated to distance teaching issues, strategies for delivering content, and teaching using specific products. The site will be a place where DL102 teachers from across the country can share their ideas, questions, and resources.

The Resource Library will also include a facilitated discussion board where members can ask questions and receive support and feedback from other distance professionals. Stay tuned for updates on this exciting new resource.

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Annual Workshop in August

Plans are in the works for the 3rd annual IDEAL workshop. The workshop will be held in Ann Arbor at the Executive Residence from August 16th-20th. We strongly encourage states to send both DLCs and Trainers to the workshop. To see this year's agenda, go to projectideal.org. To register for the workshop, contact Deb Bourque (dbourque@umich.edu). We will also assist you in making travel arrangements.

CEUs Now Available!

The University of Michigan will now award Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for participation in *Distance Learning 101* and *Distance Learning 102: Study Groups*.

Teachers who complete course requirements for DL101 are eligible to receive 2.4 CEUs. Those who complete DL102 can earn 1.8 CEUs. For more information and instructions on applying for CEUs, go to your state's community zero website.

Support Center Staff Travels

This winter, Support Center staff have traveled to Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, Maine, Missouri, New York, and Pennsylvania to help with research design, to conduct trainings, and to explore collaborative possibilities.