



Bringing Resources and Needs Together

A team of researchers at the Cornell University Institute for Occupational, Career and Continuing Education is engaged in an effort that may well yield benefits for adult education providers, consumers and potential consumers of adult education services, and taxpayers. Further, we feel our findings will be of interest to those involved in formulating policies for continuing education.

The team is concluding a comprehensive study of needs and resources in an 11-county region. In keeping with the project objectives, we're inventorying continuing education opportunities available through secondary schools, colleges, industry, government agencies, Cooperative Extension, and civic organizations. In addition to a program inventory, we're cataloging policies on admissions, fees, credit, transferability, certification, placement, etc.

A second part of the research has been an adult education needs assessment in which we've conducted

in-depth interviews with 2,000 adults in 7 occupational categories. We've emphasized the nonparticipant in this part of the research, trying to get at the barriers to broader participation in adult education.

In meeting other project objectives, the team is developing a model for adult information and counseling delivery and building a constituency for continuing education throughout the region.

In the inventory of resources, we've had the help of 22 colleges, 9 boards of cooperative education services, 11 Cooperative Extension associations, industry personnel officers, and civic organizations. In the adult education needs assessment, we've gotten help from 60 Rotary Clubs and industry officials. In addition, a Regional Advisory Council of interested leaders in our region has been involved. The project is supported by Higher Education Act, Title I, through the Bureau of Special Programs in the New York Education Department.

Now that the team is concluding the research, we'd like to work with service providers and policy makers across the region to see that adults are better served. It's our feeling that we can make a special contribution on behalf of adults presently left out. We're in a position to address the question of program relevancy, employer needs, and individual career and learning needs. Our efforts, using data generated and analyzed, could help reduce service gaps, eliminate participation barriers, and make better use of public and private monies.

We'd like to work with service providers to facilitate decision making in the development of policies that remove barriers to participation, enabling them to more adequately serve present clients and to reach those as yet unserved. Policy conflicts and

voids in areas such as admissions, credit, certification, transferability, placement, and financial aid could be pointed out, and issues such as transportation, program location, instructional methods, and class scheduling could be addressed. Program articulation and a more rational use of the region's resources would be promoted, thus contributing to the development of a more comprehensive and coordinated system for continuing education.

Another worthwhile effort would be the building of a network of linkages in the region that would enable adults to have definitive information about opportunities and which would help service providers respond to specific adult needs. An overwhelming number of interview respondents have been saying that they just don't have information on continuing education opportunities. We're identifying what we call "natural linkers"—people who regularly serve adults in some capacity. Some of these are librarians, personnel officers, Extension agents, employment service counselors, and public school counselors. These people reach those who are participants in continuing education but more importantly reach the two-thirds of the adults in our region who don't participate.

"Natural linkers" could be educated in the use of information on client needs, barriers to participation, and area continuing education resources. They could develop counseling capability for people they presently reach as well as facilitate a continuing contact between service providers and clients. Ultimately, we'd like to see a network of natural linkers who could influence individual adults and service providers, using information generated through the Cornell research effort. Such an information exchange system could be perpetuated by instructing "natural linkers" in regularly doing research on needs and resources.