

Service to the Underserved Grant Application:
Richmond Public Library's Adult Education Resource Center

Dana Rigg

Old Dominion University

LIBS 656: User Services and Programming

Dr. Jennifer Scott Brown

May 4, 2022

**Service to the Underserved Grant Application: Richmond Public Library's Adult
Education Resource Center**

Summary of Proposal

The Richmond Public Library's (RPL) new Adult Education Resource Center will be a service designed to empower Richmond residents who do not have a high school degree to easily find information about the adult education options that will meet their needs. The first prong of the service comprises an online collection of community resources designed for Richmond residents to navigate easily and self-sufficiently. The second prong is in-person, where RPL will host a service where users can make an appointment with a librarian or trained volunteer to research their adult education options and leave with a way to connect with a specialist in their community. Through this combination of approaches, RPL aims to break down barriers to free, reliable information about the community resources that exist to help Richmond adults return to school. Funding is needed to extend the marketing for this new service to reach a population who is currently unreached and underserved.

Target Population

Richmond is Virginia's capital city, covering 59.9 square miles and with around 227,000 residents as of 2019, reported by the United States Census Bureau (USCB, 2019). The USCB reports that the majority (45% in 2019) of Richmond City residents are Black, followed by 42% white, 7% non-white Hispanic, 3% multiracial and 2% Asian. The median household income is \$51,285, and the percentage of Richmond households earning more than \$50,000 are lower at every income bracket when compared with VA or US percentages. Richmond's poverty level is 18.9% for adults and a full 24% for children under 18, according to the US Census Bureau (2019). Meanwhile, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, n.d.) reports that in 2020,

51.9% of students in the Richmond Public School system were economically disadvantaged. And, crucially, 15% of the Richmond over-25 population has less than a high school diploma (USCB, 2019).

This 15% of adult Richmond residents without a high school degree is the target audience for the new Adult Education Resource Center.. These adults represent a greater percentage of the population in Richmond than elsewhere in the state or in surrounding counties (USCB, 2019). Additionally, as of 2020, Richmond Public Schools have the lowest on-time graduation rate in Virginia (Hunter, 2020) and had the highest rate of students who dropped out in 2021 (Dennis, 2022), including 65% of the Latino student population (Hunter, 2020). These statistics are concerning because workers without a high school degree face lower earnings over the course of their lifetimes when compared with higher-educated workers, and may have fewer information literacy skills than their peers (Kurtz, 2014).

This sizable population, whether adults who dropped out last year or adults who left school years ago, need equitable information about their education options that aren't presented with a profit motive. Guidance counselors and other professionals exist for students still in school, but adults who left school without graduating must navigate their options alone. And while community organizations exist in Richmond to help adults obtain their high school diploma, prepare for their GED test, pursue a trade certification, or go to community college, it is difficult to find reliable information online amid a confusing glut of ads, irrelevant results, and inactive websites.

RPL's Adult Education Resource Center benefits this population by becoming the only community service to present organized, reputable resources in a single, easy-to-navigate place. It will empower users to research options on their own by providing a strong starting point. The

second part of the service, in-person consultations with English or Spanish-speaking librarians and volunteers, will also provide help comparing these resources for users who could benefit from expert guidance. This service will be free from paywalls or profit motives, which is currently a barrier to adults trying to navigate their options alone.

Although the service will be planned and maintained by librarians with advanced degrees, RPL will involve the target population through a self-selecting survey to the general population at the beginning of the planning process asking where their greatest information needs lie regarding adult education. Each in-person reference appointment will also include a short exit questionnaire to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the service, and what needs remain unaddressed. The online resources will be accessible 24/7 on RPL's website, and the page will be optimized for mobile devices and accessible to screen readers. In addition, information packets detailing our resources in English or Spanish will be available physically at the reference desk at each RPL branch and at the locations of community partners around the city. Reference appointments can be made for any branch, or in community locations after-hours as volunteer schedules permit.

The service will be open to everyone, and will benefit any adult interested in their options for community college or trade programs, whether or not they graduated high school. While development is focused on adults who did not graduate, because they face the greatest barriers to information access, the aim is to launch a service that helps as many Richmond adults as possible.

Project Information

The primary goal of the new service is to provide easy-to-access information on realistic options for continuing adult education, so users know where in the community they can go for

specialized help. Another goal is providing service with professionalism. RPL staff will provide individual attention in reserved sessions, presenting options in a way that is sensitive to each user's needs and goals and offering appointments in English and Spanish. Ultimately, each participant should be empowered to use these resources to form a clear picture of their education options and more easily figure out the next step they can take to pursue the education that will enable them to meet their goals.

The Adult Education Resource Center will be an expanded sister service of the existing Job Resource Center, which offers a web component of curated resources and a resume consultation service in person at the Main Branch. Although the concept is similar for both, the Adult Education Resource Center will be available in-person at all branches and have dedicated volunteer support, unlike the Job Resource Center. The online resources will also be more robust. Currently, the Job Resource Center is a curated list of links, with little text to help navigate each, and which cover general concerns. The Adult Education Resource list will specifically curate information for non-high school graduates that may otherwise be hard to find, and include contact information for representatives at each community agency.

Predicting a similar participation rate as that of the Job Resource Center, 75 web visits per month and ten scheduled appointments per month can be expected for the first quarter. With grant-funded advertising, as many as 300 web visits per month and 25 scheduled appointments are anticipated. RPL foresees training four new volunteers to help conduct these appointments within the first four months, and ten more the following quarter as demand increases.

The three community agencies RPL will be partnering with at the launch of this project are Reynolds Community College, the Capital Region Adult Education Program through Richmond Public Schools, and the Richmond Technical Center. Each organization will provide

information and promotional materials as well as the information for an employee that community members can contact for more specific information. The partners' chief responsibility will be ensuring that the information stays accurate and up-to-date. There are no financial partners for this service.

The program can be considered a success if the web page receives the anticipated base amount of traffic, if Richmond residents ask about the resources in person or using the ask-a-librarian email service, if people make advising appointments through our Google Form or at a reference desk, and if more volunteers become involved with RPL as a result of this service. The success of the web resources will be tracked using RPL's existing web traffic analysis system. Communication with community partners will report any impact they see after the service launches and users are directed toward these partners. RPL will also track appointments over time, and users will fill out exit questionnaires following each appointment so the service can be adjusted, if needed, to be maximally effective.

Since the target population is so dispersed, marketing must be as broad as possible outside the library. To impact the community, RPL must reach more people than currently use the Job Resource Center or other services. To this end, RPL plans a flier campaign focusing on grocery stores, gas stations, community centers and corner stores. Further marketing is planned through the city bus system, and billboard advertisements on I-95 where it cuts through the city and on one local street. Finally, the Adult Education Center will be marketed digitally using RPL's current digital marketing strategy.

To document the progress of the service, RPL librarians will keep an internal spreadsheet with web traffic and number of appointments by month. The same spreadsheet will also note any changes and updates made to the resources or the appointment scheduling system. Comments

about these changes will be included as needed, for instance, whether or not they were spurred by user comments or survey results.

Requested grant funds, if awarded, will go directly toward marketing, as that is the biggest challenge limiting the reach of this project. With additional funding, a wider audience can be reached, and the Adult Resource Center will have a more significant impact on underserved Richmond residents.

Needed	Cost Required
Bus Advertisement	\$720 for bus side advertising (curb side) - 3 months
Billboard	\$1000 for roadside billboard, + \$500 for poster-sized billboard targeting local traffic - 4 weeks
50 Fliers	\$20 for printing in-house
Printed materials for branch and partner distribution	\$20 for printing in-house, repeated quarterly. Total = \$80
Total RPL funds:	\$100
Total grant funds requested:	\$2220 for advertising

Indirect costs include: librarian time to curate resources, write descriptions as necessary, compose survey questions, maintain relationships with community partners, train volunteers, and distribute materials around the community; and the cost of wear on RPL vehicles and printers for flier distribution.

Grant Timeline

May 2022	Week 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reach out to community partners and solicit volunteers Week 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compile information and write up resource profiles Week 3
----------	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare new web page, incorporating resources • Scout locations for flier distribution <p>Week 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print and distribute resources to each branch and to community partners • Hold training session for volunteers <p>All month</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute preliminary survey questions to users digitally and in-person
June 2022	<p>Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish web page and open appointment scheduling • Distribute fliers in community locations <p>Weeks 2-4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold first advising appointments and monitor web traffic <p>Week 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate exit feedback from appointment users and volunteers <p>Each week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Troubleshoot web page (including mobile optimization) as needed
July 2022	<p>Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create images for billboard and bus advertising <p>Week 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch billboard and bus advertisements <p>Week 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record web traffic and appointments made • Evaluate participants' exit questionnaire responses <p>All month</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue conducting reference appointments and fielding questions
August 2022	<p>Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit flier locations and distribute new materials as needed <p>Week 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with community partners: verify information, distribute materials, and get feedback on community response <p>All month</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue conducting reference appointments and fielding questions
September and onward	<p>All months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue conducting reference appointments and fielding question <p>Monthly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check online resource links for accuracy and useability <p>Quarterly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit new volunteers and hold training sessions • Check in with community partners <p>December 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate marketing strategy success and develop continuing strategy <p>January 2023</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midpoint evaluation submission June 2023 • Final evaluation submission
--	---

References

Dennis, B. (2022, March 9). *Richmond Public Schools again leads the state in school dropouts.*

ABC8 News.

<https://www.wric.com/news/local-news/richmond/richmond-public-schools-again-leads-the-state-in-school-dropouts/>

Hunter, K. (2020, November 17). *RPS' graduation rate remains the lowest in the state, with Latino students falling the furthest behind.* Richmond Times-Dispatch.

https://richmond.com/news/local/rps-graduation-rate-remains-the-lowest-in-the-state-with-latino-students-falling-the-furthest/article_98a5a1d7-80f3-5241-aa31-9495de494295.html

Kurtz, H. (2014, February 10). *Study finds years in school matter more than high school diploma.* Education Week.

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/study-finds-years-in-school-matter-more-than-high-school-diploma/2014/02>

Richmond Public Schools. (n.d.). *Capital Region Adult Education Program.*

<https://www.rvaschools.net/academics/career-technical-education/capital-region-adult-education-program>

Richmond Technical Center. (n.d.). *Home.* <https://rtc.rvaschools.net/>

United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Richmond city, Virginia.*

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=05000000US51760>

Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.) *Richmond Public Schools quality profile.*

<https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/richmond-city-public-schools#desktopTabs-3>

Richmond Public Schools. (n.d.). *Capital Region Adult Education Program*.

<https://www.rvaschools.net/academics/career-technical-education/capital-region-adult-education-program>