

# United Way *Women's Leadership Council*



**EARLY GRADE READING  
A TOOLKIT FOR ACTION**



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The **United Way National Women's Leadership Council** would like to extend its heartfelt appreciation to Macy's for its commitment to this issue and its leadership to this work.



# THE CHALLENGE

United Way has set out a challenge to cut the number of young people who drop out of high school in half by 2018. **United Way Women's Leadership Councils** are committed to help make this a reality.

Reading is linked to high school success. That's because children are learning to read for the first few years of school, but after fourth grade they're reading to learn. Without strong reading skills, they fall behind, disengage and often drop out.



Today, two-thirds of American fourth graders cannot read at grade level. The shortfall in reading proficiency is especially pronounced among low-income, African-American and Latino children. Disadvantaged children come to school at least two years behind their peers in pre-reading skills. It is hard to catch up – especially after second or third grade.

Together, we can do something about it. **United Way Women's Leadership Councils** around the country are recruiting people with passion, expertise and resources to make a difference in this area. They're galvanizing people to read to preschoolers, tutor kindergarteners through third graders and mentor kids who need a caring adult in their lives.

United Way Worldwide has laid out a National Roadmap to increase students' early grade reading proficiency – of which our challenge to increase the number of caring adults actively helping kids learn to read is a critical component (The Roadmap is attached as an additional resource to this toolkit).

# COMMITMENT:

## 100,000 volunteers over three years

### HOW

Develop a national and quantifiable volunteer recruiting effort, engaging current and new volunteers to promote fourth grade literacy through programs such as: reading buddies, homework tutors, after school reading groups, topic-specific enrichment activities, and on-going mentoring.

### BEFORE YOU GET STARTED...

Building on its two decades of leadership in early childhood community mobilization, United Way is broadening its focus to include a range of advances in education, including launching a national initiative to boost early grade reading.

The education volunteerism effort your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** is undertaking can be an important driver of lasting change in your community — and to improve reading for young children. Here are a few questions to think about before you start:

1. **Is it part of the strategy?** Be sure your effort is strategically linked with your United Way's education work.
2. **What's the goal?** Goals can be great incentives. Consider setting a stretch goal for the number of volunteer readers, tutors and mentors you plan to recruit.
3. **Who else cares about this?** Other organizations may already be recruiting, training and deploying education volunteers in your community. Connect with them to make sure your efforts compliment each other. Of course, the unique "value add" of a **United Way Women's Leadership Council** effort is the network of women leaders, in business and philanthropy, that you can enlist in this cause.

### KEY STEPS

1. Decide what level your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** wants to get involved in Early Grade Reading. Do you want to add a project to compliment your existing work or do you want to take this on as your primary goal? Find out what others are already doing. This includes your United Way.
2. Decide what your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** will do to have the greatest impact. Working with schools that feed to high schools with the greatest dropout problems is a great place to focus.
3. Set goals and objectives.
4. Recruit great community partners.
5. Communicate opportunities for **United Way Women's Leadership Council** members to get involved.
6. Evaluate progress.
7. Celebrate and communicate success.
8. Set new goals.



## INTRODUCTION

This toolkit has been designed to use as a tool for **United Way Women's Leadership Councils** interested in developing a volunteer-based program as part of their strategy improve fourth grade literacy scores. It contains key preliminary steps, tools, and resources as well as ideas for on-going corporate and community support, which are necessary for building a sustainable program.

Volunteers are a critical part of community literacy programs. They bring passion, enthusiasm, commitment, a vast array of skills and knowledge and an overwhelming desire

to make a difference. Yet there are millions of students who could benefit from a volunteer reader, tutor or mentor – who are not getting the extra help that could make the critical difference in their lives. One of the biggest reasons individuals are not getting involved is that the commitment can sound daunting. Some potential volunteers are afraid of the perceived responsibility to turn around a failing student. A simple word change from “mentor” to “reading buddy” makes a difference by having the request of the volunteer sound less intense and more fun.



## DETERMINE IF THIS WORK IS RIGHT FOR YOU

If you're thinking about incorporating early grade literacy and volunteer effort into the work of your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** – or even taking it on as your priority cause – what are the factors that can help you and your United Way decide? Here are five key questions to spark your thinking and fuel discussions, along with resources to support that process.

### QUESTION 1 IS THE ISSUE A CRITICAL ONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

- **Is the high school dropout rate a major concern for your community and United Way?** Early grade reading is a key indicator of high school graduation, so it can be an important strategic driver to the larger goal. You can look up your state and your community's high school dropout rate at [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org).
- **Are there schools that produce large numbers of dropouts in your community?** Some 15 percent of America's high schools produce more than 50 percent of our dropouts, and close to 75 percent of minority dropouts. Their "feeder" middle and elementary schools are generally struggling just as much. Dr. Bob Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University, a United Way partner in education work, has mapped the country to identify the 5,000 high schools in question. Is your community listed? If so, those elementary schools need your help! Find out more at <http://www.every1graduates.org/analytics/item/64-locating-the-dropout-crisis.html>.
- **Are there high numbers of African-American and Latino children in low-wage families in your community?** Children of color from low-wage families

usually lag behind their white, middle-class counterparts in reading. Often, the schools they attend have fewer resources, less experienced teachers and a greater need for caring adults to volunteer as reading tutors in the classroom. Your United Way's impact staff should have that socioeconomic data.

- **How well are kids in your state reading?** Reading is assessed nationally, so you can find out how fourth graders scored last year in your state at [www.nces.ed.gov/NATIONSREPORTCARD](http://www.nces.ed.gov/NATIONSREPORTCARD). To find out how kids are doing locally, consider inviting the school superintendent to your next WLC meeting, or work with United Way staff to set up a board briefing. Ask the superintendent what local data shows, and to what that can be attributed. Expect a rich discussion, which could lead to new strategies and actions.

### QUESTION 2 WHERE IS YOUR UNITED WAY ON EARLY LEARNING (AND WHAT'S NEXT)?

- **Does your United Way already have a track record on early childhood education?** Whether that's a *Born Learning* campaign, a Dolly Parton's Imagination Library book project, a Success By 6<sup>®</sup> initiative or something else, consider whether early grade reading could be the next phase of the work. Early childhood includes ages 0-8, so building literacy components – like helping kids in kindergarten through third grade read better – into your early childhood work aligns with that. In fact, many United Ways are looking at early grade reading as the next stage in scaling up their early childhood work.

### QUESTION 3

#### HAS YOUR UNITED WAY PUT A STAKE IN THE GROUND ON EDUCATION?

- **Has your United Way set a specific education goal?** Many United Ways have set their own education goals, keying off United Way Worldwide's goal to reduce dropout numbers by 50 percent by 2018. Setting a bold goal like that – with community input – can be the first external step in shaping community debate around education.
- **Is the board discussing strategies and opportunities for going deeper into education?** Many United Ways are still in transition from a fundraising organization to a community impact organization. If your United Way is looking for ways to accelerate that change, early grade reading could provide a “hook,” as an issue that provides fundraising, visibility and community engagement opportunities – while impacting critical community conditions.
- **Does your United Way have a focused education impact initiative?** If not, consider an early grade reading pilot project as the “baby step” the board is seeking. If you need examples of what other United Ways are doing in early grade reading, contact Lynn. Tveskov@unitedway.org.
- **Is education your United Way's #1 issue?** If so, moving into early grade reading may be a perfect opportunity for expanding that work into a critical focus area – while engaging donors in a year-round strategy, and enhancing strategically aligned volunteering and advocacy efforts.

### QUESTION 4

#### ARE LEADERS STEPPING UP?

- **Is there a community-wide vision for education that includes lowering the dropout rate?** Who is already working on this issue? Is there room for the **United Way Women's Leadership Council** to play a leadership role, or should you support current efforts? Are there gaps that need filling? Work with your United Way to convene a meeting of agency heads and

community leaders whose organizations serve young children, and conduct a “mapping” exercise – who does what for kids at what age? – to help identify gaps. That spurs conversation about leaders working together in new ways.

- **Is there a community coalition already focused on the issue of literacy? If not, should there be?** (Consider community conversations, below.) If there is, can your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** add velocity to its efforts? Ask your United Way impact staff for details, and then reach out to those leaders to find out what's happening, and how your network of powerful women leaders could help.
- **Have there been community conversations about the issue of early grade reading?** Hosting a community conversation can help a community get clearer on its assets, challenges and resources – and can help United Way leaders forge new partnerships to make change. Convening conversations about early grade reading with stakeholders whose voices are often overlooked – like parents, students and teachers – might be a good way for your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** to play a leading/convening role. Check out resources for education-themed community conversations at <http://online.unitedway.org/commongood>.

### QUESTION 5

#### DOES YOUR COMMUNITY NEED A POSITIVE CAMPAIGN FOR CHANGE?

- During these challenging economic times, people need a hopeful, uplifting cause to rally around. Problems matter, but research shows that most people want to invest energy, time and resources into solutions that work. United Way is an organization that recruits people with passion, expertise and resources to get things done. Might early grade reading be the positive note your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** can sound?



## PRELIMINARY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

1. **Establish planning committee** – to include members of **United Way Women's Leadership Council**, partnering non-profit organizations, any other community partners and corporate representatives, if applicable.
2. **Develop goals and objectives** – set reachable goals. Keep it simple at first with the intent of developing your program. Estimate number of hours and volunteers needed.
3. **Identify Staff and Lead Volunteer Roles**
4. **Develop communications strategy** – how will the work be publicized? how will volunteers be recruited? how will they be recognized?
5. **Assess who is already doing good work in your community.** Ask them how your WLC can work with them to increase results.
6. **Determine volunteer project type and schedule** - To recruit ideal volunteers, it's important to know what you want them to do within your program and for how long. Is it a one time activity? Is it ongoing? Is it ideal for groups, or an individual project? Here's a list of ideas:
  - Book drive.
  - Back to school supply drive.
  - Bi-weekly reading buddy program during lunch or after school.
  - Enrichment activities with large groups of children – use these to recruit ongoing volunteers.
  - Partner with local children's education organizations on non-literacy related projects, such as Earth Day, or Heart Month to promote reading, i.e. themed reading.



# CREATING A VOLUNTEER READING BUDDY/TUTOR PROGRAM

Knowing specifically what types of volunteers you need and how your organization will capitalize on their skills will provide direction for the subsequent stages: recruitment; orientation and training; supervision and evaluation; and recognition.

## RECRUITING 100,000 OF THE ONE MILLION

### How will we track the 100,000?

- United Way Worldwide is counting people who pledge to be volunteer readers, tutors or mentors.
- Special counting for **United Way Women's Leadership Council** recruits at: [www.liveunited.org/WLCvolunteer](http://www.liveunited.org/WLCvolunteer)
- Please use this url to share with all potential volunteers – this will ensure that the **United Way Women's Leadership Council** gets credit for recruiting those individuals.
- Volunteers will simply complete their name, email address and zip code. If they used the **United Way Women's Leadership Council** URL, they will be identified in reports as a **United Way Women's Leadership Council** recruit.
- You can access the names of people who signed the pledge from your community by connecting with the person at your United Way who is the liaison to United Way Worldwide for the Campaign for the Common Good. Please contact Liz Moderi at [liz.moderi@unitedway.org](mailto:liz.moderi@unitedway.org) if your United Way currently does not have a contact.

## RECRUITMENT

The planning committee should identify sources of possible volunteers who are likely to be interested in becoming reading buddies, tutors, or mentors and who meet the specified requirements and/or qualifications for supporting the volunteer program. The committee should determine what possible tools will aid in volunteer recruitment. The following are potential sources of and tools for recruiting volunteers:

- Your **United Way Women's Leadership Council** members, their friends, family and colleagues
- High school or college students
- Local businesses
- Service organizations
- Religious communities
- Community centers
- Retirement homes

The screenshot shows the 'LIVE UNITED' website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'MEDIA CENTER', 'STORE', 'EN ESPAÑOL', and 'JOBS'. A search bar for 'FIND YOUR LOCAL UNITED WAY' is on the right. Below the navigation is a 'GET UPDATES BY EMAIL' section with input fields for 'email' and 'zip' and a 'SIGN UP' button. The main content area features a blue banner with the text 'Change can't happen without you. Pledge to become a volunteer reader, tutor or mentor.' Below this is a form with four input fields: 'first name', 'last name', 'email\*', and 'zip\*'. A large 'PLEDGE' button is to the right of these fields. A checkbox with the text '\* I am over the age of 13.' is located below the form. To the right of the form is a photo of a group of people, with a counter showing '11,279 INDIVIDUALS HAVE PLEDGED SO FAR'. At the bottom of the page, there is a link to 'Pledge as an Organization or Group. Learn How »' and a 'UNITED WAY DAY OF ACTION' banner. A 'TELL US HOW YOU VOLUNTEERED' button is also visible.



## TOOLS FOR RECRUITMENT

- Post your volunteer opportunities on United Way site – [www.liveunited.org/WLCvolunteer](http://www.liveunited.org/WLCvolunteer)
- You can post opportunities on Volunteer Solutions or Network for Good. Please see the “Best Practices for: Local and National On-Line Volunteer Opportunity Sharing” document for great information on how to post opportunities.
- Internal corporate sites and communication vehicles – position the event as a team building experience for a department or a group of co-workers at a local business you have partnered with
- Social media
- Email blasts to those who signed up via United Way site and live within your zip code
- Flyers and posters
- Word of mouth
- Newsletters media, local newspapers, press releases
- Public service announcements

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Depending on the intensity of the opportunities; you may need volunteers for a one-time enrichment activity or for ongoing longer term commitment. Make sure to offer a variety of each to garner as much interest as possible. Some ideas for volunteer positions are:

- A team of corporate executives for a seasonal enrichment activity involving developing a book report, arts and crafts activity surrounding reading and mentoring, a literacy project around a non-literacy cause, for example learning about Earth Day and the environment through reading.

- Ongoing bi-weekly reading buddies during lunch periods or at after school programs.
- Online based homework helper – can communicate via Skype or email.
- Virtual book drive

Many partner organizations have established programs in which your **United Way Women’s Leadership Council** can help make a difference. Please remember that as you partner with an organization who is providing a good volunteer experience for your members, its also important to support them financially as it does cost money to manage volunteers.

## SAMPLE VOLUNTEER POSITION POSTING

**Title:** *United Way Women’s Leadership Council* Volunteer Reading Buddy

**Accountable to:** Site Supervisor

**Objective:** To read with one student for a minimum of one hour every two weeks. To help motivate and guide students, challenging them to increase their learning skills and academic success.

**Duties:** Commit to a regular and consistent schedule of the length of the marking period of school year.

**Qualifications:** Reliable and patient. Have a desire to read with a student.

**Benefits:** The personal satisfaction of helping students. Gain valuable work experience. Make a positive contribution to your community

**Training:** One hour of orientation.

## VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Knowing why people become volunteers — and more specifically literacy volunteers — is essential for developing a focused training and recruitment plan. Equally important, knowing what motivates people to continue volunteering is integral to volunteer recognition and retention. Remember to ask the question during orientation, and relate back to it while explaining how your program fulfills their inspirations.

Volunteer training should begin with an orientation to the school or volunteer program site. At this initial meeting, the site supervisor, volunteer coordinator or trainer should explain:

- Volunteer rights
- Responsibilities and shared motivations
- Key position duties and expectations
- School-specific information such as procedures, policies, and contact information. Then, preliminary training should include information on such areas as:
- Tutoring session set-up and content
- How children learn to read
- Reading strategies

## RECRUITING LOCAL BUSINESS PARTNERS

- Offer position on the board, or a membership to local community or corporate organization
- Ensure open and frequent communication
- Be flexible
- Present your program as fulfilling a shared vision for the company's core focus areas in giving and social responsibility
- Give them a layer of decision making
- Share stake in process and outcome

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE FOR VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION SESSION

Headline: **United Way of Anytown's Women's Leadership Council** is looking to help students read well by the fourth grade.

Body: On xxxxx (date), **United Way of Anytown's Women's Leadership Council** will be hosting a community wide volunteer orientation session for any individuals interested in becoming a literacy volunteer in xxx (our community/school/ after school program). Literacy is a skill that helps children participate more fully in their academics and lives. **United Way of Anytown's Women's Leadership Council** invites those who are interested in hearing more about volunteer literacy opportunities to visit xxxxx (location) between xxxxx (time). "Many people don't realize that the literacy programs we offer are available both during the day and after school, and they don't know that they can spend as little as one hour every other week enhancing the lives of a young child by reading books together," says the Executive Director of **United Way of Anytown's Women's Leadership Council**.

Today, two-thirds of American fourth graders cannot read at grade level. The shortfall in reading proficiency is especially pronounced among low-income, African-American and Latino children. Disadvantaged children come to school at least two years behind their peers in pre-reading skills. It is hard to catch up—especially after second or third grade.

Together, we can do something about it. **United Way Women's Leadership Council** all over the country are recruiting people with passion, expertise and resources to make a difference in this area. They're galvanizing people to read to preschoolers, tutor third graders and mentor kids who need a caring adult in their lives.

To learn more about **United Way of Anytown's Women's Leadership Council** or to get involved in the programs the council offers, contact xxxx or visit us at xxxxx. To pledge to become a volunteer reader, tutor or mentor, go to <http://liveunited.org/WLCvolunteer>.



# MAINTAINING A VOLUNTEER READING BUDDY/TUTOR PROGRAM

## VOLUNTEER RETENTION AND APPRECIATION

Ongoing communication, recognition and appreciation are vital to volunteer retention in a program. Generally, volunteers want and need both formal and informal recognition. As a result, their level of productivity, motivation, and commitment increases. Sample ways to show appreciation:

- Host a recognition event, like reception at a **United Way Women's Leadership Council** leader's home, recognizing the volunteers and their accomplishments.
- Write thank-you or personal notes.
- Award certificates.
- Have students write thank you notes or make thank you art.
- Quantify hours volunteered and what impact they have made.

## REPORTING VOLUNTEER HEADS

Quantifying results and comparing them to initial goal is best way to determine the efficacy of your program. To best report the volunteer heads:

1. Download pledge report for your local zip codes.
2. Use the sum of those as a starting guide.
3. Estimate number of hours volunteered.
4. Multiply by the national average of \$20. For state specific information, check out [http://independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](http://independentsector.org/volunteer_time)
5. If possible, show a comparison of then and now. What was the value added through the program?
6. The more results and numbers driven the campaign is, the more tangible the results will be, and the more effective the recruiting effort becomes.
7. Share results with non-profit and corporate partners.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Find the following documents and more at [wl.unitedway.org](http://wl.unitedway.org).

- **United Way Women's Leadership Council**  
Position Paper on Early Grade Reading
- United Way Network's National Roadmap to Increase Students Early Grade Reading Proficiency
- Engaging Volunteers in Education:  
A Volunteer Reading Guide

- Regarding **United Way Women's Leadership Councils**:

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**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.**  
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