Senior Corps
Volunteer Tutoring Toolkit
In the Spirit of
No Child Left Behind
Senior Corps Volunteer Tutoring Toolkit

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Introduction

Each year, more than half a million people over age 55 volunteer through the three Senior Corps programs: RSVP, the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program. More than 20,000 of these RSVP volunteers and Foster Grandparents choose the tough and rewarding work of helping our nation’s children and youth learn how to read.

The recently enacted No Child Left Behind law, introduces new opportunities and priorities for those in the field of reading instruction. Similarly, the Corporation holds new expectations for its grantees who tutor in reading. RSVP and Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) projects that help children learn to read will need to become familiar with these changes. This toolkit provides an overview of the new requirements, effective practices and tips, and an introduction to the new language.

Experience and research suggest that volunteer tutors are most effective when certain key elements are in place in tutor programs. This toolkit will help you understand the what—the characteristics of strong tutoring stations—and the how—strategies for recruiting, training, placing, and supporting volunteers at those stations.

As you read, ask yourself the following questions:

- How can this information help me make informed choices about how and where I place my volunteers?
- How can I ensure that my volunteers are adequately prepared to serve as tutors?

Toolkit sections:

I. Placing Your Volunteers in Effective Tutoring Programs
II. Selecting and Working with Volunteer Stations to Promote Literacy and the Effectiveness of Volunteer Tutors
III. Volunteer Screening and Selection
IV. Volunteer Training
V. Outcomes and Performance Measurement
VI. Self-Assessment: Tutoring in the Spirit of No Child Left Behind
VII. Worksheet: Sample Interview Questions for Volunteer Tutors
VIII. Additional Resources
**Summary of No Child Left Behind**

The primary impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (Public Law 107-110, enacted in January 2002) is on schools and teachers, but certain elements of the law will also impact national service projects serving children. The chart below highlights key features of the law that have implications for tutoring projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Element</th>
<th>What does it look like in a tutoring context?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading instruction builds the five skills key to literacy development identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.</td>
<td>Tutoring activities support development of the five skills. See <em>Strategies that Work</em>, below, for sample activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The law sets standards for professional and paraprofessional staff hired by schools to tutor in literacy.</td>
<td>Tutoring program establishes standards to ensure that senior volunteers are adequately prepared to tutor. See <em>Volunteer Screening and Selection</em> for suggested selection criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals ensures that children receive high quality instruction.</td>
<td>Tutors receive adequate initial and ongoing training to support their work with children. See <em>Volunteer Training</em> for more information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reading curriculum is grounded in research-based methods.</td>
<td>The tutoring program corresponds to and supports the school’s research-based approach to reading instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. All students achieve proficiency in core subjects by Grade 12.</td>
<td>Tutoring activities focus on achieving realistic, measurable student outcomes established with input from school staff whenever possible. See <em>Outcomes and Performance Measurement</em> for examples.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To find out whether your senior volunteers are “tutoring in the spirit of No Child Left Behind,” take the *Self-Assessment* in section VI of this toolkit.
I. Placing Your Volunteers in Effective Tutoring Programs

As a Senior Corps project director or coordinator, you will rarely, if ever, design a tutoring program from the ground up. Experts in literacy and education are responsible for design, selection of the tutoring program, and ongoing management. Your role is to place volunteers in high quality tutoring programs in schools or community-based organizations. You should be able to recognize the elements of strong programs. To help you do so, here are components of effective tutoring programs.

**Component 1: A Plan and Structure for Tutoring Sessions**

Children learn best from well-planned, structured tutoring sessions. Effective volunteers have at-hand a variety of materials and strategies to meet children’s interests, abilities, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds.

**Component 2: Frequent and Regular Tutoring Sessions**

Because tutoring is about building relationships, children benefit from regular sessions with tutors that occur at the same time, day, and place from week to week. Volunteers who tutor the same children regularly build caring, trusting relationships and can plan more effectively for the learning needs of the child. This consistency is an expected feature of Foster Grandparent projects. RSVP directors may consider screening volunteers for their availability to tutor consistently.

**Component 3: Coordination with Classroom Instruction**

Senior Corps has always recognized that schools and community-based education stations have valuable knowledge and resources to share with volunteers. When education professionals help volunteers coordinate activities with the instructional program, children receive consistent messages about reading and can practice the skills most relevant to their schoolwork. Look for evidence that volunteer time and activities are well-coordinated by education staff.

**Component 4: Research-Based Methods**

Research-Based Methods. The 2003 and 2004 Field Guidance states that Senior Corps volunteers who help children improve reading skills should follow research-based methods. The basic belief underlying this guidance is that it is essential to use methods that are “tried and true.” When volunteers support classroom instruction it makes it easier for children to apply what they learn in tutoring sessions to their class work.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) identified five skills that are key to literacy development. These are: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Students benefit from systematic instruction in each of these skills. Professionals should guide volunteers regarding which skills to focus on with particular students; some children may need more help in one skill area or another.
**Strategies that Work.** Most likely, your *Foster Grandparents* and RSVP volunteers already engage in work that supports one or more of these reading components. The following chart lists typical tutoring activities and shows ways that these activities support the development of the five skills:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutoring Activity</th>
<th>NRP Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>phonemic awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your volunteers engage in any of the activities below? If so, read across to see which of the National Reading Panel skills they support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read stories aloud to students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to students reading aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about stories by discussing character, setting, and plot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to write about what they read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have students re-read familiar texts for speed, accuracy, and expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach students high-frequency words, such as him, her, us, them, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play rhyming games</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to identify the number of sounds in words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play letter-sound association games</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage students in dramatic play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to read poetry and short texts aloud</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Reading Aloud. Many Senior Corps volunteers spend the bulk of their time reading to and with children. When thoughtfully done, reading aloud can be an important part of a research-based approach to reading instruction. For examples of concrete ways that volunteers can make reading aloud most effective, download Reading Aloud to Build Comprehension: Using a think-aloud technique to build understanding, at: www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/spr2001/spr2001.html. Share this information with volunteer station staff or use it in training or a newsletter.

Component 5: Assessment of Student Progress

Assessing children’s learning is useful to everyone. Volunteers can use assessment information to adjust tutoring activities to meet the needs of individual students. Projects may assess factors such as:

- school attendance
- improved behavior
- self-esteem
- increased literacy skills

Ask for (or help create) tools for volunteers to record their activities and the progress they see in students. In addition, recordkeeping forms help tutors plan future sessions and communicate with the child's teacher. To view an assessment tool with sample recordkeeping forms, visit: www.nwrel.org/learns/llap/index

Component 6: Positive, Caring Relationships amongst Participants

Foster Grandparents and RSVP volunteers have a long history of providing children with positive, caring relationships. Research shows that mentoring relationships strengthen assets in children and youth that lead to improved skills. Strong tutor programs foster positive relationships that help motivate students to learn. Similarly, a culture of caring among the professional staff at the volunteer station and volunteers promotes teamwork and volunteer satisfaction. When volunteers are placed in teams, they can debrief and discuss their work, create activities and games together, and share materials and strategies. Look for climates that value and foster these positive relationships.

Component 7: Family Involvement

The Corporation strongly supports parents as their child’s first and most important teacher(s). High quality tutoring stations provide appropriate opportunities for parents and caregivers to get involved with student learning. Strategies for family involvement may include help for family members to support learning at home, volunteer opportunities for families, and opportunities for families’ concerns to be heard through advisory committees or group meetings.
II. Selecting and Working with Volunteer Stations to Promote Literacy and the Effectiveness of Volunteer Tutors

When selecting volunteer stations, assure that:

⇒ The school or community-based organization is using a reading program that meets the “scientifically-based” threshold as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act. This definition can be found at: www.ed.gov/nclb.
⇒ The school or community-based program provides training to the volunteers that will adequately prepare them to tutor children in literacy.
⇒ The school provides the volunteer tutors and other volunteers supporting the tutoring program with written volunteer assignment descriptions, regular supervision and feedback, and ongoing training.
⇒ There is a signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the school or community-based organization in which the station agrees to provide data and other information to the Senior Corps project that documents the impact of the tutoring on children and demonstrates the value of the contributions of volunteers to the overall tutoring program at the station.

III. Volunteer Screening and Selection

Any tutoring project is deeply influenced by the quality of its volunteers. As Senior Corps project staff, one of your primary responsibilities is to recruit and place volunteers effectively. The quality of the match is especially important for volunteers who work with children.

The No Child Left Behind Act sets standards for professional and paraprofessional staff hired by schools to tutor in literacy. While Senior Corps volunteers are not considered staff, the Corporation is taking steps to ensure that Senior Corps volunteers who tutor are appropriately trained “in the spirit” of the standards set for paraprofessionals.

Qualifications for tutoring include the skills volunteers bring, the skills they learn in training and practice, suitability screening, and background clearances. Also, keep in mind your training plan for the year and think about what skills volunteers can share with others.

The following list of critical skill areas can serve as a guide as you recruit, select, and place volunteers. (See Section VII for a list of sample interview questions that correspond to the suggestions below.)
As you screen potential volunteers, look for:

**Level of Literacy Skills**

Tutors need to be able to do what is expected of them. To assess that tutors have the literacy skills they need, consider the following:

- ✓ Ask volunteers to demonstrate reading and writing skills through a brief writing sample, reading aloud, or other literacy assessment
- ✓ Ask for demonstration of new skills learned in training
- ✓ Consider evidence of second language proficiency, a valuable asset in many educational settings
- ✓ Ask about familiarity with libraries or children’s literature
- ✓ Look for background in reading instruction or education courses
- ✓ Ask for knowledge in specific subject areas, especially helpful for tutoring in homework help programs

**Education Level**

You may choose to set specific education requirements for tutors, such as post-secondary education or coursework in education or reading. In these cases, look for:

- ✓ Documentation of successful completion of a course or degree program
- ✓ Letters of reference
- ✓ Certificates and diplomas

Although literacy skills and education are the most important criteria in setting standards for tutors, consider these additional factors that could influence tutors’ effectiveness and your project’s ability to retain them.

**Experience with Children**

Working with children has rewards and challenges that are different from other volunteer activities. Senior volunteers may have specific experience, preferences, and expectations that you should consider when making a placement. Through applications and interviews:

- ✓ Ask for details about work or life experience related to children
- ✓ Explore applicants’ knowledge of child development and attitudes about children
- ✓ Find out if volunteers have experience or affinity with a particular age group

**Experience and Knowledge of Local Community**

Often, Senior Corps volunteers have lived in their communities for many years. Make the most of this experience by asking about personal or professional experience with local schools or other community organizations. Ask volunteers whether they know people who work in or attended the school where they will serve.
**Personal Goals and Motivation**

You may also:

- Ask volunteers to share the type of assignment they feel is the best fit for them
- Probe for values and motivation that may support or hinder their effectiveness
- Check references, asking questions regarding dependability, work styles, or other factors that help you determine if this assignment will be a good fit.

**Attitudes Toward Education and Schools**

For many senior volunteers, much time has passed since their own experience with schools. Rely on tough interview questions to uncover attitudes or experiences that could make tutoring difficult or inappropriate for some individuals.

**IV. Volunteer Training**

Ongoing volunteer training and support are standard expectations for high quality tutor programs. Volunteer training should take place both before and during service to ensure that tutors can support student learning.

**RSVP** directors may provide pre-service orientation, but in most cases volunteer stations are expected to train tutors onsite. **FGP** directors provide pre-service orientation as well as monthly in-service training for volunteers. In either case, you can help ensure that volunteers are trained—both before and during service—for the actual activities they will undertake.

If you run an **RSVP** project, work with volunteer stations—to the extent possible—on the development and delivery of pre-service orientation for volunteers. Pre-service and in-service training by volunteer stations should be designed to build on and enhance skills and to provide **RSVP** volunteers with new information related to their assignments.

**Foster Grandparent Projects** that have a significant number of volunteers who are providing tutoring may choose to include topics related to literacy tutoring and child development in their pre-service orientation and ongoing monthly in-service trainings. However, professionals at the volunteer stations should retain the overall responsibility for providing training to Foster Grandparents on how to be a volunteer literacy tutor in their schools or community-based organizations.

Many projects experience rolling admissions, with new volunteers coming on board throughout the project year. Engage experienced volunteers to act as mentors to newcomers. Often senior volunteers have been tutoring for many years and can share valuable insights about tutoring strategies, behavior management techniques, challenges, and successes. Encourage more experienced tutors to identify the areas in which they would like additional training. Ongoing training should be designed to deepen the volunteer's ability to support children who have a variety of learning styles and needs.
Service-Learning

Service-learning, in the context of Senior Corps projects, is a learning method that allows volunteers to reflect on their tutoring experiences and apply their insights. By incorporating service-learning into your project, you will help ensure that volunteers learn from what they do and apply what they learn—increasing the strengths and impacts of your project as a result. Service-learning reinforces the value of lifelong learning and reminds senior volunteers that people of all ages can expect to improve, refine, and expand their skills and knowledge.

Reflection is the cornerstone of this process. It is recommended that volunteer stations provide regular opportunities for volunteers to reflect on their tutoring experiences and apply insights to their continued work with children and youth and to their own lives. Reflection can take the form of group discussions, journal writing, drawing, making scrapbooks or albums, role-plays, or group projects; invite volunteers to facilitate the reflection process whenever possible.

Annual Training Plan

An annual training plan can ensure that volunteers receive adequate initial and ongoing training despite busy schedules and competing demands. A variety of resources are available to help you map out a plan for the year. Online, check out the Senior Corps Tech Center which provides resources to assist you in planning your training. These include: customizable PowerPoint presentations specific to RSVP and FGP; customizable Frequently Asked Questions to include in orientation; tools to guide reflection and volunteer action plans; and a training evaluation form. Visit the Tech Center at: www.seniorcorpstechcenter.org.

To further assist Senior Corps project directors in advocating for and/or designing good tutor training, the Summer/Fall 2001 issue of the Tutor, The Verdict Is In: Trained Tutors = Increased Student Learning (www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/sum2001/sum2001.html), outlines the essentials of an effective tutor training plan. In this article, you will find:

- Guidelines for training delivery
- Suggested content and timing for tutor training
- Tips for finding trainers
- Peer approaches to training
- Training evaluation strategies
- Resources for tutor training

Training Content

Training content should support the volunteers’ tutoring activities at their volunteer stations. Professional educators and reading specialists should guide training priorities and topics. If your volunteers are placed in a school receiving federal funding for reading instruction (Reading First), training should address the five components of early reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel (see Curriculum and Tutoring Strategies). You can find out if a school is supported by Reading First by checking with the principal or station contact.
Training Activities
If you are an FGP director and looking for training activities for your monthly in-service meetings, LEARNS offers a variety of resources for training volunteers. Tutoring Our Youngest Readers: Focusing on the five major reading strategies (www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/win2002/win2002.html) and Room for One More? Strategies for small-group tutoring (www.nwrel.org/learns/feature/index.html) provide examples of one-to-one and small-group tutoring activities that can be introduced and practiced in training sessions. Ready-to-use training activities for a variety of topics can also be downloaded from: www.nwrel.org/learns/trainingopps/training/index.html.

Trainers
In addition to school or other station staff, other professionals from the community can provide training to senior volunteers. Consider calling on: youth serving agency staff, child psychologists, social service or health care professionals, juvenile justice staff, librarians, higher education or other professionals who may have important skills to share. Also, don’t overlook volunteers themselves to help provide the training.

Training Success
Once you have your training plan in place, how will you know if it’s effective? Two types of training effectiveness are important to measure: satisfaction and impact. To measure volunteer satisfaction with training, ask them to complete surveys or written evaluation forms or engage them in a discussion that allows them to reflect on the training they received. To measure impact—the extent to which volunteers actually transfer what they learn into practice—ask volunteer station staff to observe the volunteer’s work with children and provide you with feedback, and ask volunteers to reflect on and report how they’ve applied the skills they’ve learned in their work with children.
V. Outcomes and Performance Measurement

Project Outcomes

Effective programs are designed around the results they hope to achieve. Performance measurement is the process of identifying, measuring, and reporting the outcomes that are a direct result of the volunteers.

As always, Senior Corps projects should develop their tutoring outcomes in concert with the volunteer station professionals. Avoid developing your project’s outcomes in a vacuum. Additionally, refer to FGP and RSVP Operations Handbooks and advisory committees as a way of generating community participation and local ownership. Ideally, the education partners helping you will include those working most closely with the children who will benefit from the program.

For more about performance measures, the Senior Corps Toolkit: Performance Measurement Initiative (www.projectstar.org/star/SeniorCorps/sc_pmtoolkit.pdf) highlights the correspondences between PFI and the current requirements, and will assist you in identifying the performance measures that will best inform your work plan(s).

Student Outcomes

When Foster Grandparents and RSVP volunteers are tutors, the best way for them to assess children’s progress is by using the tools and protocols developed and used by education professionals.

Examples of positive student outcomes include improved reading scores, improved attitude toward school, or increased homework completion. Include outcomes in your Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). For more information about what to include in an MOU, consult the RSVP/FGP operations handbooks, listed under Additional Resources.
VI. Self-Assessment: Tutoring in the Spirit of No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act previously known as the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA). Its primary impact is on schools and teachers, but certain elements of the law will also impact national service projects serving children.

The following self-assessment checklist will help you understand the relationship between No Child Left Behind and the efforts of senior volunteers engaged in tutoring. If you are able to check some or all of the boxes in the right hand column, your volunteers are indeed tutoring in the spirit of NCLB.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutoring in the Spirit of NCLB</th>
<th>What does it look like? Check all that apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (1) Tutoring activities support the five skills key to literacy development identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. | □ Tutoring program used by volunteers is endorsed and used by the school and supports 5 National Reading Panel skills  
□ Tutoring activities target and build 5 National Reading Panel skills |
| (2) Standards and qualifications for tutors are in place. | □ Volunteer tutors can demonstrate reading and writing skills  
□ Volunteer tutors follow guidelines for tutoring sessions established by teachers and reading specialists  
□ Volunteer tutors demonstrate familiarity with and comprehension of the tutoring materials they will use in their sessions |
| (3) Tutors receive adequate initial and ongoing training. | □ Volunteer tutors receive orientation and training in areas such as tutoring skills, reading instruction, child development, etc. from station staff  
□ Reading specialists and other experts are available to provide tutors with ongoing training and support |
| (4) Tutoring program is research-based. | □ Name of tutoring program (if applicable):  
□ Tutoring program supports the school’s research-based reading curriculum |
| (5) Tutoring activities focus on measurable student outcomes. | □ A recordkeeping system is in place to help volunteer tutors track tutoring activities and observations about students  
□ Tutors use assessment tools and protocols used by school staff |
VII. Worksheet: Sample Interview Questions for Volunteer Tutors

**Literacy Skills & Education**

- Do you have any coursework or experience in education and/or reading instruction?
- What experience do you have reading to or with children?
- Are you proficient in a language other than English?
- What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

**Experience with Children**

- What experience do you have working with children?
- What are the best things about working with children? The most challenging?
- Have you served as a tutor or mentor?
- What is your favorite age group to work with? Why?
- Children benefit most when tutored by the same person over time. Are there any circumstances that would prevent you from volunteering consistently throughout the school year?
Experience and Knowledge of Local Community

- How long have you lived/worked in the community?
- What experience do you have working with people from different cultures?

Personal Goals and Motivation

- How does the service description fit with your personal goals?
- What personal qualities do you bring to this position?
- What is the ideal working environment for you?
- What are the most difficult aspects of jobs you have held?
- What skills and experience could you potentially share with other volunteers in training (e.g., First Aid certification, EMT, former life’s work, etc.)?
- Describe a situation in which you worked as part of a team. What were your contributions to the functioning of the team?

Attitudes Toward Education and Schools

- How do you think schools and children today are different from when you were in school?
- What are your thoughts about discipline in schools?
- What positive or negative school experiences have you had?
What would you do if a fight broke out?

What would you say if a student cursed during a session?

What strategies would you use if a child didn’t want to work with you?

Suppose you observe an adult in the school (parent of staff) doing something you think is wrong or bad for a child. What would you do?
VIII. Resources

- **RSVP and FGP Operations Handbooks**  
  These documents provide detailed information about the specific requirements of both the Foster Grandparent and Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs. Available online at: [www.seniorcorps.org/resources/forms/index.html](http://www.seniorcorps.org/resources/forms/index.html)

- **Built for Success: Good Practice in Volunteer Tutor Programs**  
  This half-hour video produced by LEARNS features four national service tutoring projects engaged in tutoring. These projects and their participants reveal and discuss strong characteristics of good tutoring programs. Available Fall 2003 from the National Service Resource Center: [www.nationalserviceresources.org](http://www.nationalserviceresources.org)

- **Day one … in the life of a program coordinator**  
  This monograph helps you identify and tackle the many components of your tutoring program's first weeks, including assessing your resources, defining goals and objectives, and involving stakeholders. It also includes a sample Memorandum of Understanding and other forms. Available online at: [www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/startup/index.html](http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/startup/index.html)

- **Growing a Volunteer Tutor Program: Engaging Communities to Support Schools**  
  Developed with input from seasoned program directors, this book offers advice for surviving the critical start-up year of a volunteer tutor program. The book follows Maria Martin, a fictional program director, as she launches a volunteer tutor program in a make-believe community. Through four seasons, Maria encounters many of the challenges that arise in the real world of school-community partnerships, including finding schools willing to open their doors to tutors, recruiting volunteers, helping tutors work effectively with teachers, and providing funders with proof that the program helps children succeed. Available by calling 1-800-860-2684, ext. 142 or by e-mail: nsrc-shipping@etr.org

- **On the Road to Reading: A Guide for Community Partners**  
  Developed in collaboration with the US Department of Education, this guide shows community partners how to become involved in setting up a volunteer tutor program. It presents a step-by-step process and describes how most children learn to read, how tutors can help young readers, and how community partnerships support the progress of literacy. Available online at: [www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/otr/ontheroad.html](http://www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/otr/ontheroad.html)

- **Documenting Progress and Demonstrating Results: Evaluating Local Out of School Time Projects**  
  This brief, part of the Harvard Family Research Project and The Finance Project’s series entitled Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation, provides out-of-school time projects with the evaluation resources necessary to improve their projects and to demonstrate results for sustainability. Available online at: [www.financeproject.org/OSTlocalevaluation.pdf](http://www.financeproject.org/OSTlocalevaluation.pdf)

- **National Service Resource Center Sample Forms Collection**  
  [www.etr.org/nsrc/forms/index](http://www.etr.org/nsrc/forms/index)