



R-Ally: Research Allies for Lifelong Learning

ALLIES Final Year Leadership Report: Part 4, Outstanding Leaders

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VALUEUSA and Research Allies for Lifelong Learning released initial [final year key quantitative findings](#) of the two-year Adult Learner Leadership in Education Services (ALLIES) evaluation in September 2016 (Patterson, 2016a). This report is the fourth part in a series of final ALLIES reports. Adult education programs from seven states in the evaluation were randomly assigned in 2014; if assigned, their “participating” adult learners received training in leadership from VALUEUSA and planned a leadership project. Adult learners in control programs were not assigned and received no training (Patterson, 2016a). Participating adult learners and staff implemented a leadership project, such as raising awareness, communications, or fundraising (Patterson, 2016b).

In 2015, the final year, 60 participating adult learners were designated as outstanding leaders, either by staff from their programs or by rating their own leadership skills from 8 to 10 on a 10-point scale (Patterson, 2016a). Following participation in leadership projects, adult learner leaders were asked, in a final-year survey, what they learned or gained from and what they contributed to their leadership project. They were also asked about organizational skills, program involvement, and attributes related to leadership, such as being extroverted or taking charge. In addition, learners took pre- and post-assessments in critical thinking (Mincemoyer, Perkins, & Munyua, 2001) and writing (Boekaerts & Rozendaal, 2007).

Part 1 of this report series found that outstanding leaders experienced gains in overall personal attributes associated with leadership from 2014 to 2015. In the final year, outstanding leaders scored higher in critical thinking and writing than did other learners (Patterson, 2016a). Their attendance also increased during the period of leadership projects. Patterson (2016a, p. 9) observed, “Outstanding leaders appear to have spent more time in their program than their peers, particularly in the first half of 2015.”

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The first-year survey also asked adult learners if they used to be leaders. For comparison purposes, those who replied Yes to the question were designated as *experienced* leaders (n = 29), whereas those who replied No to the question were designated as *new* leaders (n = 25; six adults had missing data). In Part 3 of the report series, evaluators identified leaders as experienced or new, as defined above, and found that new leaders made more gains in two measures of critical thinking, reasoning and information processing, than did experienced leaders (Paulson & Patterson, 2017). For the fourth report, the author hypothesized that level of experience with leadership could potentially interact with a learner’s status as an outstanding leader and his or her outcomes.

Referring to conclusions and recommendations from Patterson (2016a), the author further hypothesized that for outstanding leaders, being there in the program, making a difference, and making personal growth would matter to outcomes associated with participation in leadership. *Being in the program* refers to outstanding leaders bringing certain characteristics to the program during the time they are there, with time measured by attendance. *Making a difference* implies outstanding leaders might make contributions, might benefit their adult education program in some way, and might benefit their workplace or communities as well. New and experienced outstanding leaders might also undergo *personal growth* – as measured in gains in personal attributes associated with leadership, project learning experiences, and assessments in critical thinking and writing. Therefore, this Part 4 report addresses the following nine research questions about outstanding leaders:

**Being in the Program Matters...**

1. What are the characteristics of leaders with previous leadership experience?
2. What are the characteristics of new leaders?
3. How many hours did new and experienced leaders attend the adult education program from mid-2014 to mid-2015?

**Making a Difference Matters...**

4. What did new and experienced leaders contribute to their adult education programs?
5. From the perspectives of adult learners and staff, how did new and experienced leaders benefit their adult education programs?
6. How did new and experienced leaders benefit their workplaces or communities?

**Personal Growth Matters...**

7. How did new and experienced leaders grow, from 2014 to 2015, in personal attributes associated with leadership?
8. What were the learning experiences of new and experienced leaders who showed the most growth in personal attributes?
9. What growth did new and experienced leaders undergo in critical thinking and writing assessments?

**Being in the Program Matters**

**Characteristics.** The characteristics of new and experienced leaders were compared in response to the first two research questions. As shown in Figure 1, these characteristics included gender, age, and language status. Both new and experienced leaders were predominantly women. Experienced leaders tended to be younger than new leaders. Both experience levels comprised mostly English language

learners (ELL) rather than English native speakers (EL1). Other participants (i.e., participating adult learners not rated as outstanding leaders) were 65% female, 69% under age 39, and 56% ELL.

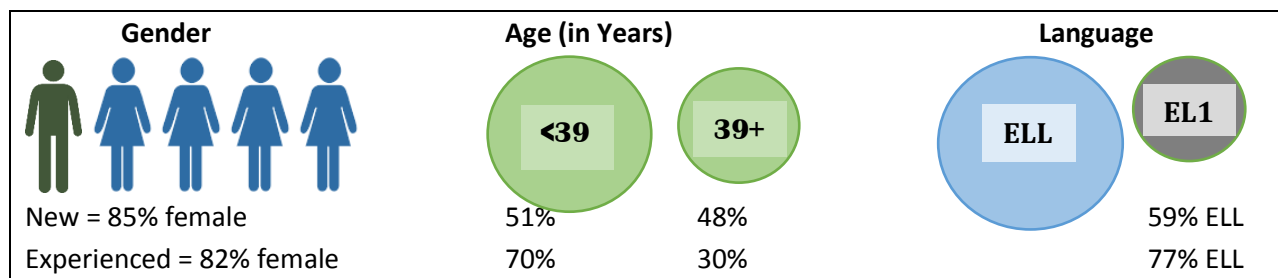


Figure 1. New and experienced leader characteristics

Years in adult education, current and future leadership status, self-rated leadership ranking, and learner progress in the center were also compared to provide context and background (see Figure 2). Leadership status was determined by a learner’s response to two survey items: “I am currently a leader” and “I want to be a leader in the future”. Progress in the center was determined by the learner’s response to the item asking “how far you have come in this learning center: just started, about halfway through, near the end, or already finished”.

**Experienced leaders reported more years in adult education, higher awareness of current leadership status, higher leadership ratings, and more progress in the program than new leaders.** Experienced leaders had been in adult education for an average 3.1 years (SD = 3.0), or approximately one year longer than new leaders (Mean = 2.1, SD = 1.2). More than twice as many experienced leaders (84%) considered themselves current leaders as did new leaders (39%). New and experienced leaders rated themselves an average 7.2 and 8.4, respectively, on a 10-point scale of leadership. Virtually all leaders wanted to be future leaders (93% of new and 96% of experienced). Experienced leaders reported higher rates (60%) than new leaders (44%) of being near the end of the program or already completed. Other participants (i.e., participating adult learners not rated as outstanding leaders) had been in the program an average 1.6 years (SD = 1.3), considered themselves current leaders 33% of the time, and 72% wanted to be future leaders. Other participants were mostly (62%) at or near the end of the program and rated themselves an average 5.6 as leaders.

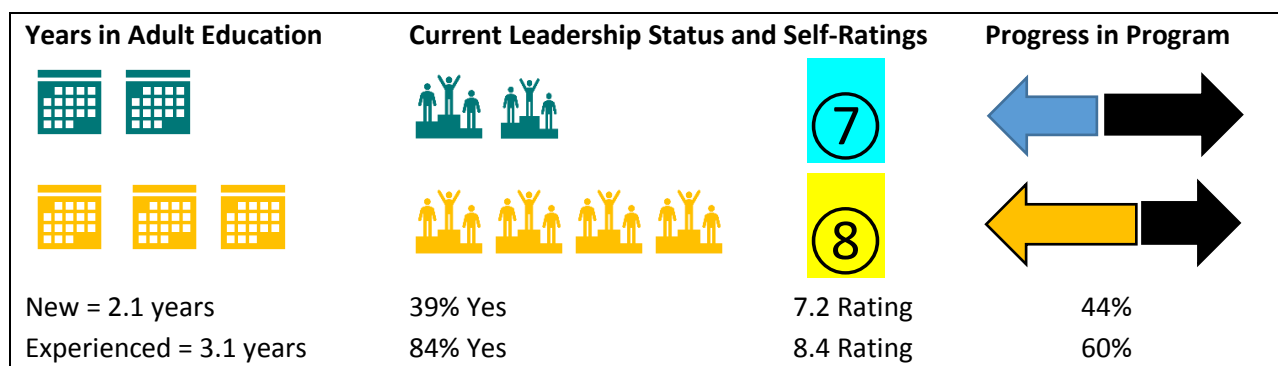


Figure 2. Background and context for new and experienced leaders

**Attendance.** The third research question addressed adult education program attendance of new and experienced leaders. New leaders attended an average 117 hours in the 2014-15 academic year (SD = 75). The average hours for experienced leaders in 2014-15 were approximately similar (Mean = 128, SD = 79). **Experienced leaders put in slightly more average hours (Mean = 78, SD = 39) in the first half of 2015, the time when most adult learners were planning and implementing leadership projects,** than new leaders (Mean = 65.3, SD = 45.5). The magnitude of the difference, however, was small ( $d = 0.30$ ).

### Making a Difference Matters

**Contributions to Programs.** One way that outstanding leaders might make a difference is through contributing to their respective adult education programs. Outstanding leaders wrote about contributing ideas, participation, organization, outreach, fundraising, and mentoring. Contributions of 14 experienced leaders are described in Table 1. **Experienced leaders wrote most often about contributing through planning meetings and project activities. They also contributed via organization of meetings, events, and sales, as well as outreach in the program and to the community at large.** To a lesser extent, they described contributing ideas, raising funds, and mentoring other learners.

Table 1  
Contributions of Experienced Leaders (N = 14)

| Contribution Type    | N (Contributor Names)                                                               | Contribution Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ideas</b>         | 2 (Cecile and Imelda)                                                               | "I have a few [ideas] about what is the best for the project and student[s]," remarked Imelda.                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Participation</b> | 9 (Francesca, Frederica, Heath, Julia, Manuela, Nicole, Patricia, Rosa, and Teresa) | Rosa stated, "I take notes of the people who [attend] the sales and yard sales. I helped to [sell] fruit. I helped in the yard sale." Heath wrote: "I contacted the recycling place." Patricia related, "I worked on getting done our [student] newsletter." |
| <b>Organization</b>  | 4 (Beatriz, Martina, Patricia, and Teresa)                                          | Rosa decided to "organize meetings for the sales." Teresa helped "[organize] the event."                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Outreach</b>      | 3 (Enrique, Imelda, and Patricia)                                                   | Enrique wrote, "We help the project...[with] distribution and publishing of pamphlets and flyers in our city and community and inviting [friends] to be tutors."                                                                                             |
| <b>Fundraising</b>   | 2 (Janelle and Nicole)                                                              | Janelle, contributed by "coming to the class [and collecting donations] for the program." Nicole wrote, "I have taken a leadership role in getting our tickets to be sold for our [event]..."                                                                |
| <b>Mentoring</b>     | 2 (Nicole and Patricia)                                                             | Patricia saw her mentoring role as helping "classmates and student council members to being involved in our project." Nicole: "I have taken a leadership role in ... help[ing] a few [students] with their assignment."                                      |

Source: ALLIES final-year adult learner survey. Note: All names are pseudonyms. Further detail on characteristics of named individuals is in Patterson (2016b).

New leaders (28) also made important contributions of similar types, as shown in Table 2. **Participation again tended to be the most prominent type of contribution of new leaders, and the participation they described appeared very active. They also wrote proportionately more often about organization than did experienced leaders. New leaders communicated much enthusiasm about their outreach efforts, especially to the broader community.** They less often mentioned fundraising, ideas, and mentoring overall as contributions.

Table 2  
Contributions of New Leaders (N = 28)

| <b>Contribution Type</b> | <b>N (Contributor Names)</b>                                                                                                                     | <b>Contribution Examples</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ideas</b>             | 3 (Eleanor, Lorene, and Marta)                                                                                                                   | Lorene shared, "I learned how to... come in with ideas and conclusions to get help for the thing we would need."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Participation</b>     | 18 (Ahmed, Alma, Bella, Bertha, Blanca, Candace, Diana, Eleanor, Elena, Josefa, Marcie, Paz, Rufia, Saeda, Shirley, Wanda, Yasmina, and Yesenia) | Alma contacted "the managers of different stores or services." Bella "prepared the food we were selling," Elena wrote about "making signs for yard sale." Josefa stated, "I learnt that to be a leader you have to participate in projects." Diana and Ahmed wrote their stories for the project's book. Paz wrote that she contributed by "collecting items to [sell] in the yard sale and I bought it." Rufia explained, "I was the host of the program. I did [work from] open to end of the program by hosting." Yasmina "made [brochures] and flyers. And we advertised." |
| <b>Organization</b>      | 10 (Ahmed, Bella, Carolina, Elena, Josefa, Lorene, Orlando, Paz, Rufia, and Saeda)                                                               | "ORGANIZE things right and everything goes well as we want," wrote Carolina. "With help of the staff some [students] organized an [event] to present the different programs that the Department of Literacy is already offering the community," wrote Orlando. "I did [organize] all the members for the meeting and also I did [organize] the open house event," wrote Rufia.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Outreach</b>          | 11 (Ahmed, Alma, Antoinette, Bertha, Eleanor, Jean Luc, Leona, Lourdes, Marcie, Orlando, and Yasmina)                                            | "I went to a group and told them about the project," wrote Lourdes. Antoinette explained how she contributed "to the leadership project in the past year by putting the word out that the program really is a great program." "I invited [volunteers to tutor] and 3 [accepted]," related Leona. "I was several times [quoted] in [the] newspaper," Ahmed wrote, "including in [two communities]. I spoke to the radio, [a nearby] museum, Rotary club, Lion's club," and at two local library events.                                                                         |
| <b>Fundraising</b>       | 3 (Betsy, Chad, and Elena)                                                                                                                       | Chad related that his leadership group "worked together to organize an [awareness] event to help gain funding for the center."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

| Contribution Type | N (Contributor Names)   | Contribution Examples                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mentoring         | 2 (Bertha and Carolina) | Carolina saw her involvement as “helping my classmates with time.” Bertha visited “every class and to let them know how important we all are to each other. We are the voice to speak up.” |

Source: ALLIES final-year adult learner survey. Note: All names are pseudonyms. Further detail on characteristics and leadership projects of named individuals is in Patterson (2016b).

Figure 3 displays the types of contributions new and experienced leaders each cited, in proportion to total leaders at either level. Leaders at both experience level wrote about participation at similar rates. New leaders emphasized organization and outreach proportionately more often than experienced leaders. Compared with new leaders, experienced leaders cited ideas, fundraising, and mentoring more frequently.

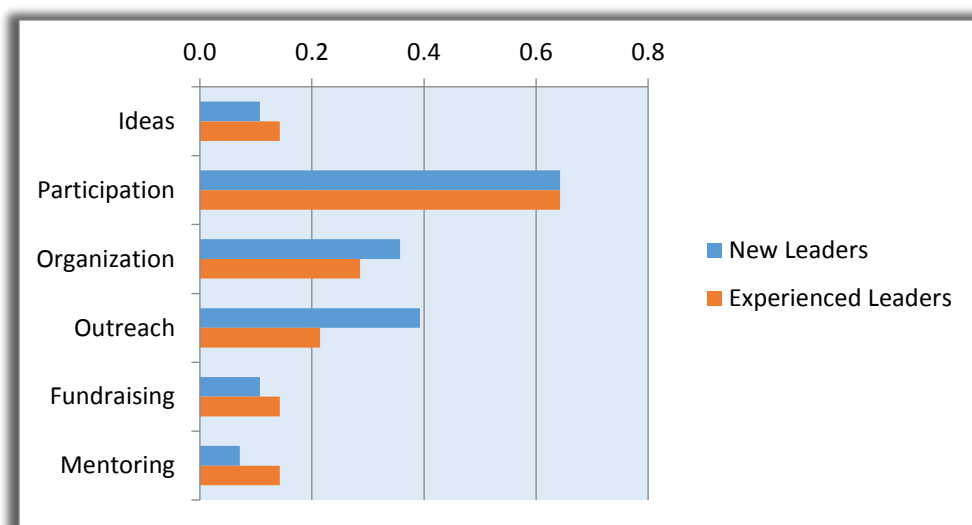


Figure 3. Proportional contributions of new and experienced leaders

**Benefits to Adult Education Programs.** Adult education programs benefitting from the work of outstanding leaders is the thrust behind the fifth research question. Perspectives of both learner leaders and staff were considered for this question. Benefits to adult education programs that learner leaders recognized “explain the circumstances surrounding the outcomes of leadership projects” (Patterson, 2016b, p. 23). **Three new leaders described benefits of added funding and of infusion of new ideas to support their programs.** Experienced leaders did not write about these benefits to programs.

New leaders observed that one important benefit to the program was obtaining funding for the program (note: all names are pseudonyms). Chad related that his leadership group “worked together to organize an [awareness] event to help gain funding for the center.” In Betsy’s fundraising project, as she “got donations” to refurbish the center, she learned “how to help our school.”

Another benefit for programs was an infusion of new ideas from adult learners. New leader Lorene wrote about her group's fundraising project: "I contribute by working together to help come up with ideas on how to put a project together that will give us help on what we need [for our family literacy program]." These ideas helped not only the program but potentially the greater community. Lorene explained that her group of adult learners working together on the leadership project "will help ourselves and [ultimately] help ...our community."

**Three new and two experienced leaders pointed to another program benefit: learner cohesiveness. Learners working closely together and seeing positive outcomes can benefit not only individuals but also the entire program.** Experienced leaders Rosa and Francesca noticed the cohesiveness and teamwork of the leadership group as they decided on and developed a fundraising project. Rosa pointed to learning "how [to get] working as a team" as a benefit. Francesca saw the benefit of "how to share [responsibilities] and opinions with others, and together make a [successful] work." New leader Marta learned "how to work in group. Have a team[.] Take [decisions] together" in a separate fundraising project. New leaders in another fundraising project, Paz and Yesenia, also described their closeness to their fellow group members. Yesenia remarked on "the participation of people who need each other" as a gain. Paz summarized, "It is very necessary [to have] the communication to work in a good team and obtain good results."

Staff perspectives were also considered for this research question. In both years, staff were surveyed on the extent to which they agreed having learners in leadership roles benefitted program services. All 21 staff who responded to the survey in both years agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Staff also commented on gains and contributions of learners during leadership projects. Although staff were not directly asked to comment on how leadership benefitted the program, several staff members did. **Staff pointed to benefits such as making accomplishments for the program, fostering planning and advocacy, and promoting retention.** An instructor working with adult learner leaders in a fundraising project wrote, "I learned that adult learners are very efficient, effective and productive leaders. When they are brought together in an organized way, they can put themselves into committees, plan, decide and act on projects, and get the job done (sometimes more effectively than staff and certainly with much more enthusiasm)." A staff coordinator from a communications leadership project stated, "...[A]ny amount of [learner] involvement [in the leadership project] was beneficial. The students that participated in a committee or as an officer gained many skills such as team work, planning, parliamentary procedure, note taking, professional vocabulary, [and] advocating for their needs..." An instructor noted that the communications project "has promoted greater retention, camaraderie, and achievement."

**Benefits to Workplaces and Communities.** The purpose of the sixth research question was to ascertain benefits to workplaces and communities. **Three types of benefits to workplaces were noticeable to outstanding leaders: employability skills, workplace communication, and the chance to lead at work.** Six leaders, three new and 3 experienced, wrote about these benefits. An effect of their awareness project for new leader Alma and experienced leader Enrique was employability skills. Both described gaining skills to apply for a job. Enrique wrote, "The project [helped] me a lot to obtain the

necessary skills ... to have a job in [my] county.” New leader Leonel found that from his communications project “I [am] learning to [understand] the [coworkers].” Learning to communicate in his adult education leadership project benefitted not only himself but also his relationship with co-workers in the workplace. New leader Gloria saw an opportunity for leadership at work as well as in her program. She wrote, “I have been the leader *hente* [for] my colleagues [at] work, ORGANIZE issues, *investigacioner*, and give each assignment.” As he noticed “better performance” at work, experienced leader Jorge saw the connection of the soft skills learned in his leadership project with useful workplace skills. He was “happy to be manager now” at his workplace. Another experienced leader, Nicole, stated, “As a leader[,] I gain a lot of confidence in ... the work place knowing that I can achieved anything through hard work.”

**Leaders also benefited their communities by strengthening community awareness of services programs offer, preparing themselves for community involvement, and direct contributions to the community.** To boost community awareness of program services, experienced leader Enrique explained, “We help the project this [year] contributing with the distribution and publishing of pamphlets and flyers in our city and community and inviting [friends] to be tutors.” Participating in the project, going to meetings, speaking out, and reaching out to the community “will help ourselves and [ultimately] help our family and our community,” stated Alma, a new leader and his peer. New leader Antoinette explained how she contributed “by putting the word out that the program really is a great program.” In a library awareness effort, wrote new leader Orlando, “some student[s] designed a flyer with the information ...[on] the [different programs in]... the community.”

Two new leaders saw their leadership experiences as preparing them for community involvement. Marcie felt ready to take on a leadership role in her community, stating that her fundraising project taught her “how to understand how to be a good leader in society.” New leader Josefa stated: “[I got to] experience... how [to get] more involved in the community.” New leaders in a fundraising project saw direct connections of their work with benefits to the community. Eleanor benefitted her community through her voice. Eleanor realized “that I have a voice in my community. And I learned how to make my opinion count and my voice heard.” Lorene perceived that her leadership project ultimately “will help ...our community.”

## **Personal Growth Matters**

**Personal Attributes of Leaders.** The seventh research question considers growth in personal attributes of leaders. Leaders had the opportunity in ALLIES to indicate how they described themselves as people both before and after they practiced leadership. In the survey that adult learners took before training and approximately a year later, they were asked to “think about how you see yourself in general. Each statement below has three words with similar meanings. How much do you agree that these words describe you?” Adult learners then responded to a five-point agreement scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, or strongly agree) for each of eight triads, as shown in Tables 3 and 4. Triads reflected personal attributes believed to be associated with leadership as described in Big Five personality models (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004) and the *Parker Team Player Survey* framework (Parker, 2008). Addressing the seventh research question, responses of new and experienced leaders were compared for these eight triads of personal attributes within and across years. First, rates of



agreement were compared for statistical and practical significance, with odds ratios representing the magnitude of differences within or across years. Then average total scores were compared from 2014 to 2015 for growth, with Cohen’s d representing the magnitude of the difference.

Table 3

2014 Rates of Agreement for Personal Attributes of New and Experienced Leaders

|                                              | Agreed or Strongly Agreed |                 | Odds Ratio |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|------------|
|                                              | New (%)                   | Experienced (%) |            |
| <b>Outgoing, sociable, extroverted</b>       | 55.4                      | 95.9            | 14.8***    |
| <b>Conscientious, goal-oriented, focused</b> | 86.0                      | 100.0           | NS         |
| <b>Stable, even-tempered, steady</b>         | 76.2                      | 83.9            | NS         |
| <b>Open, willing, innovative</b>             | 93.6                      | 95.9            | NS         |
| <b>Agreeable, flexible, adaptable</b>        | 83.8                      | 100.0           | NS         |
| <b>Nurturing, encouraging, supportive</b>    | 81.2                      | 100.0           | NS         |
| <b>Taking charge, directing, steering</b>    | 80.6                      | 95.6            | 4.2*       |
| <b>Proactive, forward-looking, prepared</b>  | 88.1                      | 100.0           | NS         |

Source: ALLIES first-year survey data (N = 132) with weights for age and language status applied. Note: \*\*\* designates p < .001; \* designates p < .05.

Table 3 presents 2014 rates of agreement for new and experienced leaders. In the first year (2014), experienced leaders had very high rates of agreement (greater than 90%) with seven attributes of leadership; the agreement rate for a single triad, stable/even-tempered/steady, was also high but not at ceiling levels. New leaders in 2014 had high rates of agreement as well, but had an agreement rate greater than 90% only for a single triad: open/willing/innovative. **Experienced leaders in 2014 reported being outgoing/sociable/extroverted substantially more often than did new leaders. Also, new leaders saw themselves as taking charge/directing/steering in 2014 much less than experienced leaders did.**

Table 4

2015 Rates of Agreement for Personal Attributes of New and Experienced Leaders

|                                              | Agreed or Strongly Agreed |                 | Odds Ratio |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|------------|
|                                              | New (%)                   | Experienced (%) |            |
| <b>Outgoing, sociable, extroverted</b>       | 68.2                      | 81.4            | NS         |
| <b>Conscientious, goal-oriented, focused</b> | 91.5                      | 96.3            | NS         |
| <b>Stable, even-tempered, steady</b>         | 77.6                      | 96.3            | 5.7*       |
| <b>Open, willing, innovative</b>             | 94.7                      | 100.0           | NS         |
| <b>Agreeable, flexible, adaptable</b>        | 90.5                      | 100.0           | NS         |
| <b>Nurturing, encouraging, supportive</b>    | 92.6                      | 96.3            | NS         |
| <b>Taking charge, directing, steering</b>    | 73.3                      | 79.4            | NS         |
| <b>Proactive, forward-looking, prepared</b>  | 92.6                      | 100.0           | NS         |

Source: ALLIES final-year data (N = 132) with weights for age and language status applied. Note: \*\*\* designates p < .001.

**From 2014 to 2015 new leaders demonstrated modest growth in overall personal attributes related to leadership**, moving from a mean of 31.7 in 2014 (SD = 3.7) to 33.3 in 2015 (SD = 3.5). Across 8 triads of attributes, their average response was “agree” (4.2). The magnitude of the difference was small (0.44). Experienced leaders saw an average total change in personal attributes from 34.1 in 2014 (SD = 4.0) to 34.9 in 2015 (SD = 2.7), which represents a nonsignificant difference.

Growth within triads explains this growth pattern in greater detail. By 2015 new leaders had very high levels of agreement in five triads (see Table 4). **New leaders in 2015 considered themselves significantly more nurturing/encouraging/supportive following their leadership training and practice than they did in 2014 (see Figure 4). Experienced leaders indicated much more agreement with the stable/even-tempered/steady triad in 2015 than did new leaders in 2015. Experienced leaders in 2015 perceived themselves as being outgoing/sociable/extroverted and as taking charge/directing/steering significantly less than they had in 2014 before the leadership training and project.** These findings about extroversion and taking charge, while counterintuitive, probably reflect the collaborative nature of group work in leadership projects or the willingness of experienced leaders to step aside from being “in charge” in support of peers who were new to leadership and eager to lead. Experienced leaders may have rethought the functions of “leadership”, whether consciously or not, as they collaborated. As Marcie noted, she learned “how to understand how to be a good leader in society. Also it is very importan[t] to be respectful to other and don't let others feel less important.” Leaders at both levels of experience in 2015 had comparable rates of growth in all other personal attributes.

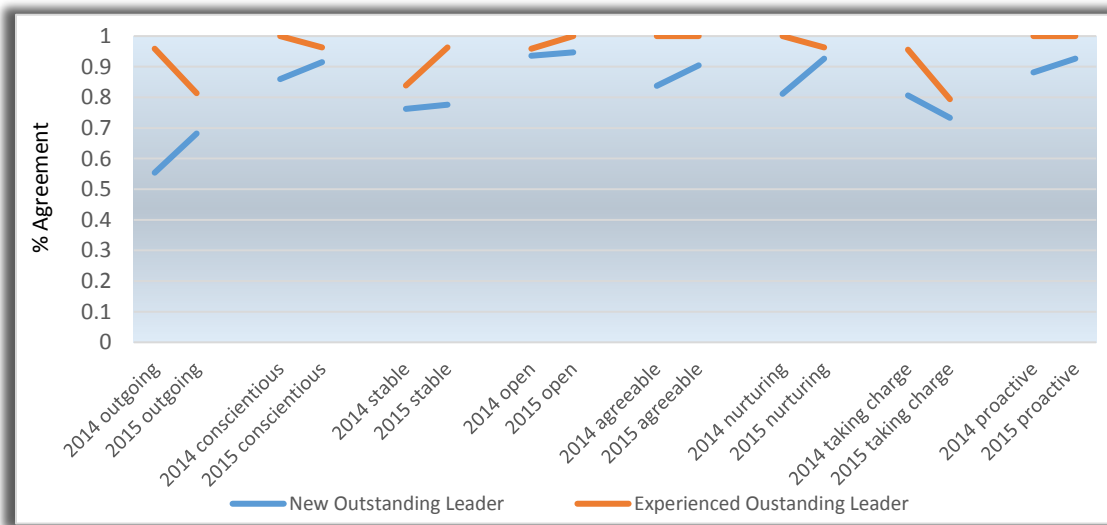


Figure 4. Growth in personal attributes of new and experienced leaders, 2014 to 2015

**Learning Experiences.** How was personal growth associated with what leaders learned? The learning experiences of new and experienced leaders who showed the most growth in personal attributes is the focus of the eighth research question. Six leaders made total gains of at least 6 points – that is, they made substantial gains in a few attributes or at least one point in gain across most attributes – from 2014 to 2015 following leadership training and experience (note: all leader names are pseudonyms). Three were experienced leaders from two separate community-based programs

(Francesca, Jorge, and Lucia). Three were new leaders; Betsy, Gloria, and Josefa came from the same community-based program as Jorge and Lucia.

**Experienced leaders shared that in their leadership projects they learned about collaboration, language skills, and learning itself. All three saw gains in the stable/even-tempered/steady triad.**

Francesca, who also experienced a gain in openness, emphasized learning through collaboration in her fundraising project: “I learned how to share [responsibilities]... with others, and together make a [successful] work.” In a separate fund-raising project, experienced leaders Jorge and Lucia focused on gains related to learning. Jorge, who reported gains in conscientiousness and flexibility, thought he gained “more confidence in speaking, reading, listening” during the project. He also noted he gained “better performance at work.” Lucia, who saw a gain in taking charge, added, “Personally [the fundraising] LEADERSHIP project has helped me as learning (sic).” Like Francesca, she noted learning about “working with others.”

**Three new leaders from the same fundraising project as Jorge and Lucia learned about organization. Gloria, Betsy, and Josefa saw growth from 2014 to 2015 in all or nearly all triads of personal attributes.** Gloria, who experienced gains in seven of the personal attribute triads (all except openness), reported learning “more about how to organize everything step by step.” Betsy, who experienced growth in all 8 triads, added, “We [learned] how to put thing in [order].” Josefa gained “experience, how to organize.” Josefa, who saw growth in all triads except flexibility and taking charge, added “I participated in meetings[,] organized by separating items, donating, [and] putting prices time of the day yard sale.” She also experienced “how [to get] more involved in the community.”

**Growth in Critical Thinking and Writing Approaches.** The final research question considers growth in critical thinking and writing assessments that leaders took. **Most of the growth in assessed approaches to critical thinking and writing occurred in new leaders. As displayed in Figure 5, leader performance in critical thinking approaches from 2014 to 2015 increased at nearly parallel rates for both experience levels. Both experienced and new leaders made slight growth in writing, but new leaders outpaced experienced leaders in growth.** In critical thinking, new leaders had higher average total scores in 2015 than those of experienced leaders. Their average score growth in Enquiry was modest ( $d = 0.38$ ) yet outpaced that of experienced leaders ( $d = 0.22$ ). Information Processing scores increased more for new leaders from 2014 to 2015 ( $d = 0.34$ ) than for experienced leaders ( $d = 0.09$ ). In writing, new leaders made more gain in scores ( $d = 0.38$ ) from 2014 to 2015, on average, than did experienced leaders ( $d = 0.22$ ). Much of this gain was in Metacognitive Strategy Use ( $d = 0.35$ ).



Figure 5. Leader growth in mean critical thinking and writing scores by experience level

## Conclusion

### Limitations

Earlier in the final report series, the author noted important limitations (Patterson, 2016a). One limitation was attrition. Although 12 of 13 participating programs remained in the evaluation from the first year to the next, approximately half of adult learners in the evaluation left; attrition did not differ by assigned condition. Learners who remained tended to be older and to be English language learners. To adjust for this limitation in the current report, weights for age and language status were applied to statistical comparisons. Future evaluations of leadership should keep attrition in mind and determine in advance how to mitigate it to the extent possible.

Another limitation of the evaluation is in providing context. While evaluators collected data on the year in adult education and past leadership status, little else is known about adult learner leader experiences before the evaluation. Future evaluations should consider the context of past academic and leadership experiences.

### Being There Matters

Experienced leaders appeared to have an initial advantage over new leaders in terms of their background and characteristics. Even though they tended to be younger than new leaders, they generally brought more years in adult education, recognized themselves more readily as leaders, put in more time in the program as the leadership project occurred, and progressed further through the program than new leaders.

### **Making a Difference Matters**

Qualitatively, however, new leaders appeared to offer an advantage in what they contributed. Both new and experienced leaders wrote most often about their contributions through participation in planning meetings and project activities and organizing meetings, events, and sales. However, new leaders appeared to organize proportionately more than experienced leaders. New leaders were most aware of the benefits to their programs of fundraising and an infusion of new ideas. As a former program administrator, the author sees strong advantages for programs that have organized adult learners who are helping plan for the future, generate new ideas, and raise funds.

Leaders at both experience levels also emphasized outreach within the program and to the community at large, yet new leaders especially communicated enthusiasm about their outreach efforts as they strengthened community awareness of program services, prepared themselves for community involvement, and made direct contributions to the community. Many programs would benefit from greater community awareness of the program, as well as informed and involved community members to advocate for the program. Outstanding leaders are poised to offer programs these benefits.

Leaders at both levels also identified learner cohesiveness as a benefit to adult education programs. Paz's observation of the necessity of "communication to work in a good team and obtain good results" is right on target with the goals of adult education. Learners working closely together and seeing positive outcomes can benefit not only individuals but also the entire program. Staff noted programs benefitted through accomplishments for the program, planning and advocacy, and enhanced retention. Leadership projects hold much promise for strengthening learner cohesiveness and yielding outcomes that programs and learners identify as needs.

The potential of leadership projects to make a difference appeared to spill over into the workplace as well, at least for some leaders. An even balance of experienced and new leaders noticed the benefits of employability skills, workplace communication, and a chance to lead at work. As adult learners begin or continue along career pathways, learning and practicing leadership in adult education can position them for highly valued skills – teamwork, critical thinking, and even managerial skills – that employers expect.

### **Personal Growth Matters**

Before taking on leadership projects in adult education, experienced leaders reported being outgoing and sociable. During leadership projects, they described learning about collaboration, language skills, and learning itself. Afterward, while still highly outgoing and sociable, they tended to consider themselves even-tempered and steady at a higher rate and taking charge or directing at a lower rate than before. On the other hand, before leadership in adult education, new leaders tended to see themselves to a lesser extent as outgoing and sociable or as taking charge or directing. After working in leadership projects, they generally considered themselves more encouraging and supportive, as well as more even-tempered and steady. Individually, new leaders saw growth from 2014 to 2015 in all or nearly all measured personal attributes; in fact, their rates of agreement with having attributes of leadership approached that of experienced leaders by the final year.

Most of the growth in approaches to critical thinking and writing occurred in new leaders. Outstanding leader performance in critical thinking approaches increased at a nearly parallel rate for both experience levels. Both experienced leaders and new leaders experienced slight growth in writing, but new leaders outpaced experienced leaders in growth. Growth in personal attributes and approaches to critical thinking and writing, then, was especially relevant to new leaders.

### **Recommendations to VALUEUSA**

1. Check with adult education staff on the continuing progress of experienced and new leaders in the program. Consider interviewing staff across time about effects on adult education program improvement as new learner leaders remain in the program and continue learning and leading.
2. Interview staff and learner leaders about outcomes and experiences of former learner leaders who have completed the program and return as leaders, mentors, or other volunteers. Determine in individual programs whether experienced or new leaders are more apt to return to the program to lead and which experience level contributes more to meet the program's needs. For example, to what extent might encouraging experienced leaders to stay involved in fundraising efforts help the program meet its resource needs? Or to what extent does the program benefit from the community outreach efforts of new leaders?
3. Examine the role of peer mentoring, especially mentoring by experienced adult learner leaders, in leadership. Interview new and experienced leaders to ascertain their experiences as mentors and mentees. How do experienced leaders mentor, guide, and coach new leaders? In what ways do mentors support new leaders to generate and implement new ideas to benefit the program? What role does mentoring take in boosting learner cohesiveness?
4. Interview future learner leaders on connections of leadership experiences with workplace and community roles, with emphasis on what elements of leadership benefitted them in these roles. Assess and survey them longitudinally to determine long-term effects of leadership. Collect detailed attendance data on future adult learners who participate in leadership training and projects, including how much time they spent on leadership project activities and in the classroom, so that dosage and intensity can be determined and related to effects.
5. Expand the dissemination plan for final ALLIES results beyond websites and network distribution. Identify specific national organizations, public officials, and state associations and meet with them to talk about how results can be incorporated into practice. Take along a few leaders from ALLIES to share their enthusiasm for and experience with leadership. Together brainstorm ways to build leadership into adult education and career pathways programming.
6. Work with state associations and state adult education directors to identify which adult education programs in their state would benefit from greater leadership capacity from adult learner leadership. Working with any adult learner leaders in the state, offer training to identified programs whose adult learners seek to build personal and group leadership skills. Help learners plan and implement leadership efforts that improve their programs, such as (but not limited to) raising program funds, building community awareness of the program to recruit learners or staff, or enhancing in-house communications. Build in measures to evaluate the success of the training and leadership efforts.

7. Connect with local or state community development administrators and with library officials to expand leadership training in communities with heavy concentrations of low-skilled adults. Share evaluation results with them and ask them to replicate the evaluation in a community or library setting. Remind them how new leaders make a difference: new leaders can strengthen community or library awareness, prepare themselves for community involvement, and make direct contributions to the community or library. Involve former project leaders where feasible.
8. Share results of the evaluation with business leaders who employ adults with entry-level skills and need to build workplace teams, enhance workplace communication, and train new leaders at work. Should an employer express concerns about employees with leadership skills moving on after training, work with the employer to determine agreements with prospective leaders to receive training contingent on staying with the company for a specified length of time. Assure employers that new leaders can bring strengths in organizing and outreach, as well as generating new ideas that could benefit the company. Provide on-the-job leadership training via a “grow-you-own-leaders” approach and guide employees with entry-level skills to collaborate, problem solve, and contribute ideas to meet a business need. Build in measures to evaluate the success of the training and leadership effort. Involve former project leaders as feasible.

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