



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE
MEBANE EARLY LITERACY CENTER



MELC Brief Series Community Inquiry Study

BRIEF V:

**ROOTS AND ROADBLOCKS:
CBO PERSPECTIVES ON FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO
PROVIDING LITERACY SERVICES IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY**

Jennifer Merry, MSA and Chris O'Brien, Ph.D.

PREFACE

The purpose of this research brief is to share findings about perceived facilitators and barriers to providing literacy-related services in Mecklenburg County in NC, as reported by leaders of CBO. An overview of the study background and methodology is summarized in the Executive Summary titled Early Literacy Services Provided by Community Based Organizations in Mecklenburg County: An Inquiry Study.



Key Facilitators and Barriers

CATEGORY	KEY FACILITATORS (ASSETS)	KEY BARRIERS
PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION	Extensive partnerships with schools, Universities (e.g., UNC Charlotte), government organizations, libraries, and other CBOs.	Lack of opportunities for connection and collaboration between CBOs, leading to siloed work.
	Partnerships extend beyond literacy (e.g., health, food services) to meet basic community needs.	Collective Action Problem: Difficulty coordinating and optimizing resources among city, county, and district leaders.
	Collaboration with school personnel (principals and teachers) to identify students and promote programs.	School Turnover: High turnover of principals and teachers necessitates constant relationship rebuilding.
RESOURCES	Availability of funding from foundations, government, corporations, and community sources.	Funding Competition & Sustainability: Constant competition among CBO for the same funding opportunities and limitations on how funds can be used.
	Access to specialized resources (e.g., transportation solutions, digital library resources).	Personnel and Staffing: Challenges in hiring qualified staff (due to salary competition) and recruiting available, qualified volunteers. Need for qualified support for multi-language learners.
PROGRAMMATIC & COMMUNITY	Direct alignment of CBO program curriculum with district strategic plans and priorities.	Difficulty demonstrating value of programs and program impact. Perceived lack of community interest in research and data.
	Framing the service around solving specific regional challenges (e.g., gaps in literacy proficiency, need for bilingual books).	Communicating with Families: Difficulty in reaching and maintaining contact with families due to highly transient populations.
	Creation of family partnership programs, connecting with adult caregiver learners to support their children's literacy.	Family Engagement: Occasional pushback from families who expect schools to exclusively address literacy needs.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1

CBOs are deeply embedded in addressing complex literacy challenges, often acting as essential bridges between families and formal education systems. Their ability to deliver effective services is highly dependent on a set of core facilitators, primarily centered on robust partnerships. CBOs rely heavily on collaborations with schools, often working with principals and teachers to identify students and ensure their programming is aligned with the district's curriculum and strategic goals—a key success factor cited in the findings. Partnerships with Universities supply trained tutors, while collaborations with local libraries offer access to digital resources and training. The availability of diverse funding streams from local government and community foundations is also an essential asset, enabling the organizations to execute their missions.

2

Despite these assets, CBOs face significant, interconnected barriers that threaten their stability and reach. The primary resource constraint is funding, which is described as simultaneously available yet intensely competitive. CBOs find themselves vying for the same "buckets of money," leading to organizational stress and a lack of sustainability when funder priorities shift. Compounding this is a personnel and staffing barrier, where CBOs struggle to compete with the private sector to hire and retain qualified staff, while also experiencing a decreasing pool of available volunteers.

3

Perhaps the most structural challenge is the barrier to collaborative action. CBOs report working in isolation, often unaware of what other organizations are doing, leading to redundancy. Furthermore, the high turnover rates of school personnel forces CBOs to repeatedly rebuild the crucial relationships needed to operate effectively within school sites. Finally, connecting directly with the intended beneficiaries is a persistent struggle. CBOs must overcome the challenge of communicating with families directly, which is complicated by highly transient populations in the service area, making sustained engagement and tracking difficult. Ultimately, the findings suggest that while CBOs possess the vision and local connections to facilitate literacy, their long-term success requires overcoming structural issues related to funding, staffing, and coordinated collective action among all regional partners.

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