

PROGRAM START-UP HINTS

One of the most comprehensive sources of information on how to establish a lifelong learning program may be found in **Transforming Older Adult Education: An Emerging Paradigm From A Nationwide Study**, *Educational Gerontology*, 21:613-632, 1995, authored by Diane Moskow-McKenzie and Ronald J. Manheimer of the North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement. The article details the critical considerations for initiating an older adult education program. When the University of Hawaii at Manoa established a lifelong learning program in 1997, our group followed the advice outlined in the article and made sure that all the necessary institutional conditions were in place. Those include:

- **Commitment of at least one administrative champion who will take the lead in promoting the idea.** Our program was fortunate to have the strong backing of one of the deans in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences who convinced his colleagues that the time was right and need existed to launch the program;
- **Approval and enthusiasm from a group of influential older learners.** Our exploration committee consisted of 10 retired faculty members with an interest in gerontology and a group of six savvy community people with strong ties to the University;
- **Response to request for the program from older learners.** Initiation from the “grassroots” is key. Through local senior centers and other elder organizations, our group created and conducted a needs assessment survey to determine level of interest for the idea of a lifelong learning program based at the University;
- **Special opportunity through a “gift” or fund.** Our lifelong learning program was fortunate to have the gift of a sizeable bequest from a staunch supporter to help establish an endowment fund which in turn generated more program interest from

university administrators and elders. Further substantial support for the venture resulted from the initial grant from The Bernard Osher Foundation during the sixth year of program operation;

- **Congruence with host institution's mission, goals and ongoing programs.** The program's mission dovetailed with the University's and Colleges' aims to boost lifelong learning. As a contributor to the university-community relationship, the lifelong learning program was acknowledged for providing the university community visibility, access and pride of place. The lifelong learning program furthers the university's commitment to liberal arts education by demonstrating that education is a process of discovery that continues over the entire lifespan. But even with those acknowledgements, organizational positioning was not without problems. Perceived overlaps with continuing education programs caused some initial turf protection problems that required negotiations to establish the appropriate institutional niche for the new membership program. Unlike many other programs in the OLLI network, our program is housed under the Colleges of Arts and Sciences at the University rather than the outreach or continuing education division on campus.

- **Institutional affiliation.** Clear letters of agreement can help a new program navigate the shoals of bureaucracy. It's important to have a full understanding of the new program's rights, responsibilities, status and place within an institutional setting.

For a list of comprehensive guidebooks and research studies on how to establish and maintain a lifelong learning program, see:
<http://www.unca.edu/ncccr/publications/>