Module 6: Outreach Strategies

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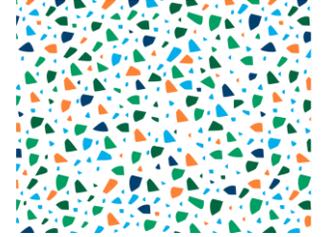
Section 1: Introduction and Learning Outcomes

Module 6: Introduction

This module explores how outreach can be used to find and engage adult learners effectively. Outreach , when used effectively, responds to real-life needs, and creates access opportunities for learners.

In many cases, adult migrant learners face barriers that prevent them from participating in learning opportunities — even when they are eligible, motivated, and capable. Through this module, you'll learn how to design and deliver inclusive outreach that not only raises awareness but builds trust and leads to meaningful engagement.

Module 6: Learning Objectives

After completing Module 6, you will be able to:

- ❑ **Explain what outreach is and why it matters in adult education**

- ❑ **Recognise common barriers migrant learners face in accessing opportunities**

- ❑ **Identify principles and methods for inclusive, targeted outreach**

- ❑ **Understand how to build trust and collaborate within communities**

- ❑ **Reflect on your own outreach practices and plan for improvement**

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The Role of Outreach in Adult Education

Why Outreach Matters for Migrant Learners

Migrant learners bring valuable experiences, skills, and aspirations. Yet many remain underrepresented in adult learning programmes. Outreach creates the invitation, and the pathway into education, especially for those who may not see themselves as "learners" or who have had difficult past experiences with formal systems.

Effective outreach helps ensure that everyone, regardless of background or status, has the opportunity to access education and thrive in their new environment.

Reaching Learners Early and Meaningfully

Outreach is not a one-off action, but rather the beginning of a relationship. Done well, it can lead to continued engagement, progression to further education, and participation in community life. It helps adult learning providers move from being distant institutions to becoming trusted spaces.

For outreach to be truly effective, it must be rooted in **empathy**, **cultural awareness**, and a genuine **understanding** of the learner's context.

Click to listen!

The focus of this podcast by Epale Ireland is the meaning of and importance of Outreach in a community education setting. Listen to 3 women tell their stories and connect the impact.

Reflect: what's the role of outreach in your organisation?

Consider your current role or organisation. Reflect on the following:

- How do learners typically find out about your programmes?
- Who might be missing — and why?
- Are there communities you haven't yet reached or engaged with?
- What does "inclusive outreach" mean in your context?

"Outreach is not just about informing people, it's about actively removing barriers, social, cultural, economic, to ensure that learning is truly for all."

Paul Downes
Director of the Educational
Disadvantage Centre
Dublin City University

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Barriers to Engagement for Migrant Learners

Common Barriers: Language, Trust, and Access

Overlapping Barriers Faced by Migrants in Education

High Barriers

Trust Barrier
Negative experiences cause hesitance

Logistical Barrier
Practical obstacles limit access

Low Barriers

Language Barrier
Limited proficiency hinders access

Legal/Financial Barrier
Rules and costs deter participation

Awareness Barrier
Lack of knowledge limits engagement

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Can Learner-Centred Education Help?

Learner-Centred Education (LCE) is an approach that places the learner at the heart of the educational process, rather than focusing primarily on the teacher or the curriculum. It is particularly effective in diverse and inclusive contexts, such as adult education or working with migrant learners.

Features of LCE:

1. Personalization

Learning activities are adapted to suit individual needs, interests, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles.

2. Active Participation

Learners are encouraged to take part in setting goals, choosing learning strategies, and evaluating their own progress.

3. Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

Emphasis is placed on inquiry, discussion, and reflection rather than rote memorization.

4. Respect for Learner Autonomy

Learners are viewed as co-creators of knowledge, with experiences and prior knowledge that enrich the classroom.

5. Collaborative Learning

Group work, peer learning, and dialogue are encouraged to build social and intercultural skills.

6. Flexible Teaching Methods

Teachers use varied strategies like project-based learning, storytelling, digital tools so they engage learners effectively.

Further Reading!

This book examines how learner-centred education (LCE) is implemented for adult migrants across various European contexts, including Estonia, Malta, Scotland, and Cyprus. It explores the successes and challenges of LCE programs, emphasizing the importance of addressing migrants' unique educational needs.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Learner-Centred Education for Adult Migrants in Europe

A Critical Comparative Analysis

Maria N. Gravani and Bonnie Slade (Eds.)

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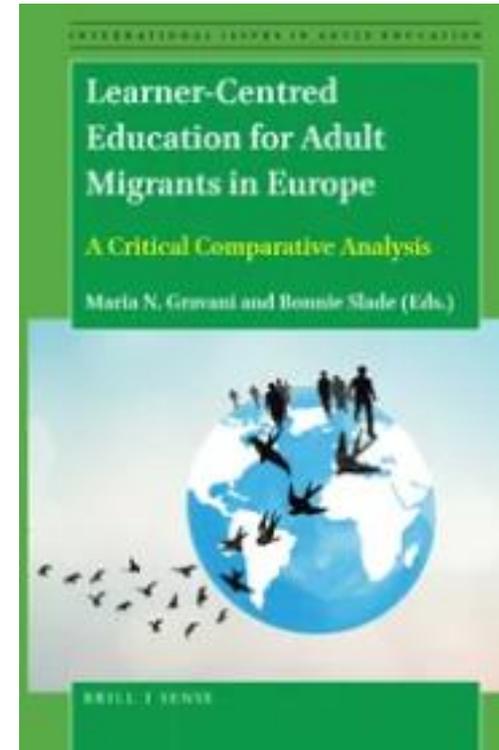
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Case Study: Missed Opportunities

A local adult education centre launched a new course designed for migrant women, focusing on basic digital skills and language support. The course was promoted through flyers (which were in English only) and the information session was held at the centre, during working hours.

Despite good intentions, only one person registered.

Follow-up conversations with community contacts revealed that many women were interested, but the materials weren't accessible, and the centre wasn't seen as a welcoming space.

In the end, the initiative was reshaped to include translated outreach, peer involvement, and community-based delivery causing participation to triple. The changes allowed the education centre to reach target students and enrollment to grow.

What can we learn from this scenario?

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What Can We Learn from This Scenario?

This case study highlighted a common mistake in outreach: assuming people will come to something simply because the offer exists.

Key Takeaways:

- ✓ Practical barriers matter

- ✓ Outreach must be tailored to the community it is targeted at

- ✓ Good approaches are built through listening, and not just providing information

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Designing Inclusive Outreach Strategies

Principles of Inclusive Outreach

Respect

Collaborative and culturally sensitive engagement

Accessibility

Suitable language, format, and delivery

Inclusive Outreach

The goal of effective community engagement

Relevance

Connection with community needs and interests

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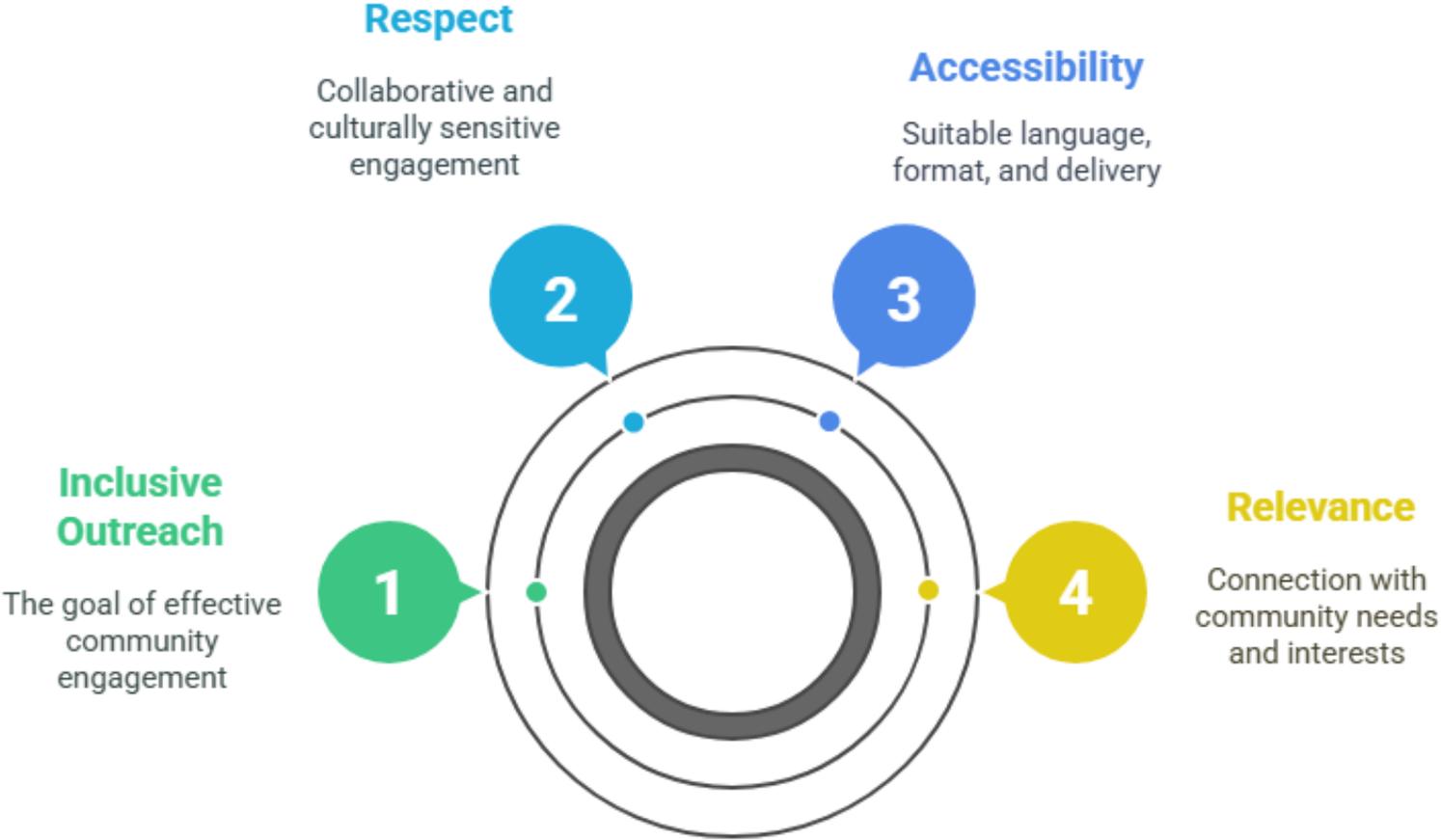
Identifying Communities and Their Needs

Before designing outreach strategies, it's essential to be specific:

➢ Are you targeting recent arrivals or long-term residents?

➢ Do learners need language support, vocational training, or community connection?

➢ Which (physical or digital) spaces are they already present in?

Use existing data, local networks, and conversations to build a picture of the community and identify the gaps you can help fill.

Choosing the Right Methods

There is no single correct method. Depending on your target group, effective outreach might include:

Face-to-face visits to local gathering spaces

Translated materials shared via WhatsApp groups

Outreach through trusted intermediaries

Visual or spoken messaging, not just written flyers

Informal events that double as information sessions

Think about where, how and by who your message is most likely to be received.

Language and Cultural Considerations

To build trust, your outreach must be culturally and linguistically appropriate. This may include:

Translating content into key community languages

Using images and examples that reflect your learners' realities

Avoiding bureaucratic or formal tone in materials

Offering interpreters or multilingual staff when possible

Acknowledging and respecting religious or cultural norms

Building Outreach into Organisational Culture

Outreach works best when it's not just one person's task but embedded in your organisation's values. That means:

- Training staff to understand outreach as part of inclusion

- Allocating time and resources to relationship-building

- Valuing community input in programme design

- Reflecting outreach priorities in organisational goals
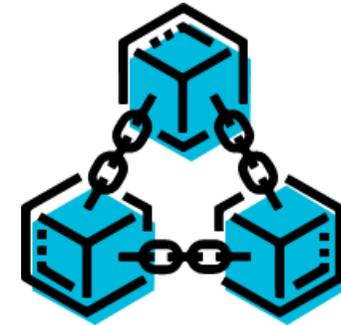
When outreach is integrated, learners feel welcome before they even arrive.

Reflection Prompt

Think about your current programmes:

- **Are there groups in your community who aren't participating?**

- **What obstacles could there be (practically, socially, culturally)?**

- **Have you ever asked them?**

- **What changes could make your offer more accessible?**

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Outreach Methods and Partnership Approaches

Community Intermediaries: Trusted Connectors

Community intermediaries are individuals or organisations that already have relationships with your target learners.

Community Intermediaries

Support Staff
Workers at essential community institutions

Community Elders
Leaders within the local community

Shopkeepers Organisers
Local business people hosting events

Faith Volunteers
Religious individuals offering support services

Migrant Workers
Advocates assisting new community members

Building relationships with these connectors allows you to reach people who might never otherwise see a flyer or attend an open day.

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Involving Peer Ambassadors and Former Learners

Peer-led outreach can be especially powerful. Former learners or community members who share similar experiences:

➢ Understand the fears and hopes of potential learners

➢ Can communicate in familiar ways and languages

➢ Can be an example of what's possible to their peers

Training and supporting peer ambassadors to speak at events, join pop-ups, or distribute information helps build outreach that feels personal, relevant, and real.

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Faith, Migrant and Cultural Groups

Faith and cultural groups often serve as **informal hubs** of **connection** and **support**. **Partnering** with these organisations can expand your **reach** and build **trust** more quickly.

This might include:

- Hosting information sessions at religious venues

- Asking community centres to co-design outreach activities

- Providing posters, translated materials, or guest speakers

Community Outreach Strategies

Food Markets
Places where people gather to buy and sell food

Local Festivals
Events that celebrate local culture and traditions

School Events
Gatherings organized by schools for students and families
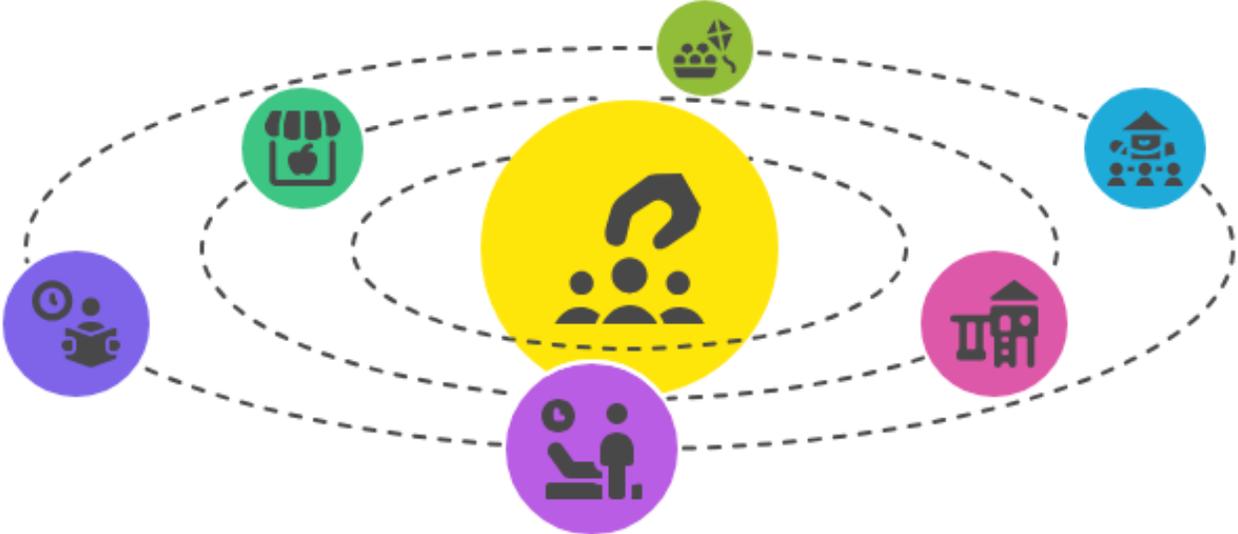
Libraries
Public spaces for reading and community engagement

Waiting Rooms
Areas where people wait for appointments or services

Childcare Centres
Facilities providing care and education for children

Set up a welcoming table, bring visuals, offer translated info, and engage in real conversation. Sometimes informal chats over a coffee achieve more than formal presentations.

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Digital Outreach: Opportunities and Challenges

Digital tools can make outreach fast and flexible. Social media, messaging apps, and video content can help you reach migrant learners in spaces they already use (like WhatsApp groups or community Facebook pages). Visuals, voice notes, and short clips can break through language barriers and feel more approachable than formal flyers or emails.

But **digital outreach** only works if learners are **digitally included**. Some may not use the internet confidently, or may share a single device at home. Language, literacy, and trust still matter online. It's important to check that your message is reaching the right people.

Case Study: Success Through Partnership

A regional college wanted to reach isolated migrant men who weren't attending any courses. Instead of launching a campaign, they connected with a local halal butcher and a mosque committee. Together, they created short learning tasters delivered after Friday prayers, with flyers distributed in the shop.

Attendance exceeded expectations. The success was attributed to community involvement from the start, culturally respectful timing and content, and trust built through familiar spaces.

What can we learn from this scenario?

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What Can We Learn from This Scenario?

What Made This Outreach Work?

Key elements of success:

1. Outreach was co-designed with community members.

2. Materials and methods respect cultural norms.

3. Delivery took place in trusted, familiar spaces.

4. The focus was relational, not promotional.

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Sustaining Engagement and Tracking Success

Following up after Outreach and maintaining engagement

Reaching someone once is important, but it's what happens next that solidifies the engagement. A first conversation, event or message might create interest, but without a **follow-up**, learners can quickly lose momentum or confidence.

Ongoing engagement means thinking beyond outreach as a one-time activity. It's about being **easy to contact**, offering clear **next steps**, and **checking in** with learners over time. It also means **adapting** your offer or your approach as needed when you recognize that circumstances may have changed.

Further Learning

The InclusiPHE mission is to contribute to a more inclusive environment at Professional Higher Education Institutions but can be adapted to suit other learning organizations. The **PHEI Self-assessment Tool** helps staff and students to assess the extent PHEIs are following inclusive strategies and practices for student engagement and how these are aligned with their overall institutional strategies.

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Reflect on the outcomes of your outreach

Consider the following:

- What happens after your outreach activity ends?
- Do learners know what their next step is and who to talk to?
- How do you know if your outreach is working beyond attendance?
- Who else in your organisation plays a role in sustaining engagement?
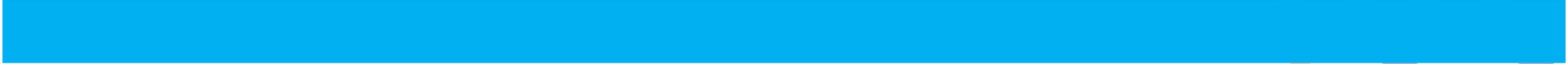
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Conclusion and Next Steps

Summary of Key Takeaways

Throughout this module, we've explored the following:

- Understanding outreach as a relational, not just promotional, activity

- Recognising common barriers that prevent learners from engaging

- Designing inclusive, community-informed strategies

- Partnering with trusted individuals and organisations

- Moving from first contact to lasting participation

- Reflecting, adapting, and improving over time

Reflecting on Your Practice

Use these questions to reflect on what you've learned in this module:

- What is one change you could make in your current outreach work?

- Who could you connect with in your local community to extend your reach?

- How can you share what you've learned with colleagues or partners?

Thank you for Completing Module 6 Outreach Strategies

Empowering managers, educators and staff to create inclusive and accessible adult learning environments that address the diverse needs of learners and communities.

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