

ROADMAP TO CHRISTIAN ADULT EDUCATION

A Step-by-Step Guide to Starting a Christ-Centered Adult Education Ministry

From calling and community assessment to launch and long-term sustainability

The destination

A healthy Christian adult education ministry that offers practical learning, spiritual encouragement, trustworthy relationships, and a clear pathway toward greater stability and hope.

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How to Use This Roadmap

Starting a Christian adult education ministry involves more than selecting a curriculum and announcing a class. A healthy ministry is built through prayer, careful listening, wise planning, trained volunteers, responsible policies, and a genuine commitment to serve adults with dignity.

This roadmap presents twelve connected phases. A church or ministry may move through some phases quickly and spend several months on others. The goal is not to rush toward an opening date. The goal is to build a ministry that is faithful, safe, useful, and sustainable.

A guiding principle

Begin with the people and the needs God has placed before you. Do not begin with a program you are trying to fit into the community. Listen first, then design the ministry response.

The Twelve-Phase Journey

	PHASE	PRIMARY OUTCOME
1	Pray and Discern	Confirm the calling and gather a prayer team.
2	Listen to the Community	Identify needs, strengths, gaps, and existing services.
3	Define the Ministry	Clarify mission, audience, values, and ministry model.
4	Build Leadership	Establish oversight, roles, accountability, and teamwork.
5	Design Learning Services	Choose classes, schedules, assessments, and curriculum.
6	Establish Safe Practices	Create policies, boundaries, confidentiality, and response plans.
7	Prepare the Budget	Identify costs, funding sources, and financial safeguards.
8	Develop Partnerships	Build referrals, shared services, and community support.
9	Recruit and Train Volunteers	Prepare adults to teach, encourage, and serve well.
10	Welcome Adult Learners	Use respectful outreach, intake, goal setting, and orientation.
11	Launch Carefully	Prepare the facility, team, students, communication, and first weeks.
12	Evaluate and Sustain	Measure progress, strengthen the team, and plan for the future.

Before Moving Forward

A ministry should not advance to the next major phase simply because leaders are excited. Each phase ends with a milestone—a clear decision, document, team, or system that demonstrates readiness. These

milestones create healthy decision points and reduce the risk of launching before the ministry is prepared.

1

Pray and Discern the Calling

Confirm the calling and gather a prayer team.

Purpose. Begin with God's direction rather than with pressure to create another church activity.

Key actions

- Gather a small prayer and discernment team.
- Identify the burden or opportunity that prompted the conversation.
- Pray for wisdom, humility, patience, and the right partners.
- Discuss whether education is the appropriate ministry response.
- Invite church or ministry leadership into the discernment process.
- Write a brief statement describing the calling you believe God is placing before you.

Milestone: Leaders can clearly explain why the ministry is needed and why they believe their church or organization should respond.

Watch for: Treating enthusiasm as confirmation, selecting a launch date too soon, or placing the entire vision on one person.

Use these kit tools: Calling Reflection, Prayer Guide, Initial Leadership Conversation Worksheet

2

Listen to the Community

Identify needs, strengths, gaps, and existing services.

Purpose. Understand the adults, needs, strengths, resources, and service gaps in the community before designing the ministry.

Key actions

- Review local education, employment, poverty, transportation, language, and digital-access information.
- Talk with adult education providers, libraries, employers, churches, schools, workforce agencies, and community leaders.
- Listen directly to adults who may use the ministry.
- Identify existing programs and learn what they already do well.
- Map barriers that could prevent participation, such as childcare, transportation, scheduling, fear, or past school experiences.
- Document both community needs and community assets.

Milestone: The planning team completes a written community needs and assets summary.

Watch for: Assuming leaders already know what people need, duplicating an existing service, or gathering data without listening to actual adults.

Use these kit tools: Community Needs Assessment, Listening Interview Guide, Community Resource Map

3

Define the Ministry*Clarify mission, audience, values, and ministry model.*

Purpose. Turn the calling and assessment findings into a focused ministry identity and realistic first-year direction.

Key actions

- Write the mission, purpose, and values.
- Identify the primary adults the ministry will serve.
- Choose a ministry model: literacy, high school equivalency, ESL, digital literacy, job readiness, life skills, financial education, or a carefully selected combination.
- Determine what the ministry will not provide.
- Set three to five achievable first-year goals.
- Select a ministry name and basic description that communicates dignity and hope.

Milestone: The team approves a one-page ministry definition that includes audience, purpose, values, services, and first-year goals.

Watch for: *Trying to serve everyone, offering too many classes at once, or using deficit-based language to describe participants.*

Use these kit tools: Mission and Purpose Worksheet, Ministry Model Selector, First-Year Goals Planner

4

Build Leadership and Accountability*Establish oversight, roles, accountability, and teamwork.*

Purpose. Create shared leadership, clear authority, healthy oversight, and dependable responsibilities.

Key actions

- Identify the ministry director or coordinator.
- Establish a leadership team or advisory group.
- Clarify the relationship to the sponsoring church or organization.
- Create written role descriptions.
- Determine who approves policies, spending, volunteers, and major changes.
- Develop a communication and meeting rhythm.
- Plan for leadership continuity rather than dependence on one founder.

Milestone: Every essential leadership responsibility has an assigned person, written expectations, and a clear line of accountability.

Watch for: *Vague roles, hidden expectations, one person controlling all decisions, or a ministry operating without church or organizational oversight.*

Use these kit tools: Leadership Structure Worksheet, Position Descriptions, Advisory Team Guide

5

Design the Learning Ministry

Choose classes, schedules, assessments, and curriculum.

Purpose. Build services around adult goals, sound instruction, accessible schedules, and practical application.

Key actions

- Choose the first classes or tutoring services based on the assessment.
- Determine class size, location, schedule, length, and delivery format.
- Select curriculum appropriate for adult learners and reading levels.
- Plan initial assessment and individual goal setting.
- Decide how Bible study, devotionals, prayer, and spiritual conversations will be offered.
- Create an attendance and progress process.
- Plan accommodations and referrals when needs exceed the ministry's role.
- Start with a manageable pilot rather than a full catalogue of classes.

Milestone: A written instructional plan identifies classes, curriculum, schedule, staffing, student process, and intended outcomes.

Watch for: *Using children's materials with adults, choosing curriculum before assessing learners, or overloading volunteers with too many offerings.*

Use these kit tools: Class Planning Worksheet, Curriculum Review Checklist, Individual Learning Plan

6

Establish Safe and Ethical Practices

Create policies, boundaries, confidentiality, and response plans.

Purpose. Protect participants, volunteers, the church, and the integrity of the ministry through clear policies and boundaries.

Key actions

- Create confidentiality and records-handling procedures.
- Establish volunteer screening and background-check requirements.
- Write boundaries for transportation, money, gifts, communication, social media, and relationships.
- Create incident, emergency, conflict, and referral procedures.
- Clarify mandatory reporting responsibilities under applicable law.
- Address facility access, child safety, technology use, and emergency contacts.
- Have appropriate leaders and professionals review legal, insurance, and financial concerns.

Milestone: Required policies, forms, insurance conversations, and safety procedures are complete before participant enrollment.

Watch for: *Relying on good intentions instead of policies, collecting unnecessary private information, or allowing volunteers to work outside their role.*

Use these kit tools: Policy Checklist, Confidentiality Agreement, Boundaries Agreement, Incident Report

7

Prepare the Budget and Resources

Identify costs, funding sources, and financial safeguards.

Purpose. Ensure the ministry can begin responsibly and continue without creating avoidable financial strain.

Key actions

- List start-up and recurring costs.
- Separate essential expenses from preferred additions.
- Identify facility, curriculum, supplies, technology, screening, insurance, childcare, transportation, and recognition costs.
- Determine financial oversight and purchasing procedures.
- Create a conservative first-year budget.
- Identify church support, individual donors, grants, sponsors, and in-kind contributions.
- Develop a plan for reporting how funds are used.

Milestone: The sponsoring leadership approves a realistic budget and financial accountability plan.

Watch for: *Depending on one temporary gift, promising services without sustainable funding, or treating donated items as automatically useful.*

Use these kit tools: Start-Up Budget, Funding Plan, In-Kind Donation Guide, Donor Communication Template

8

Develop Community Partnerships

Build referrals, shared services, and community support.

Purpose. Connect adult learners with a network of education, employment, health, family, and stability resources.

Key actions

- Identify organizations that can receive or make referrals.
- Meet with partners to understand eligibility, services, and limitations.
- Clarify what information may be shared and obtain proper participant authorization.
- Avoid informal promises that the ministry cannot guarantee.
- Build relationships with employers, libraries, colleges, workforce agencies, counseling resources, recovery ministries, food and housing organizations, and churches.
- Maintain an updated resource directory.

Milestone: The ministry has dependable referral pathways and a written community resource directory.

Watch for: *Calling a list of phone numbers a partnership, sharing participant information without permission, or expecting another agency to solve every barrier.*

Use these kit tools: Partnership Map, Referral Form, Participant Authorization, Resource Directory Template

9

Recruit and Train Volunteers*Prepare adults to teach, encourage, and serve well.*

Purpose. Prepare volunteers to serve adults with skill, patience, cultural humility, healthy boundaries, and Christian compassion.

Key actions

- Recruit for specific roles rather than making a general request for help.
- Use applications, interviews, references, and screening.
- Match volunteers according to skills, availability, temperament, and calling.
- Provide orientation on adult learning, trauma awareness, dignity, confidentiality, boundaries, safety, and faith integration.
- Practice realistic scenarios before volunteers begin.
- Provide ongoing coaching, observation, appreciation, and correction.
- Create a substitute and volunteer retention plan.

Milestone: The ministry has enough screened and trained volunteers to operate without overloading one or two people.

Watch for: *Assuming professional knowledge automatically makes someone a good adult educator, skipping orientation, or failing to address unhealthy helping patterns.*

Use these kit tools: Volunteer Application, Interview Guide, Training Mini-Manual, Volunteer Covenant

10

Welcome and Enroll Adult Learners*Use respectful outreach, intake, goal setting, and orientation.*

Purpose. Create a respectful pathway that helps each adult understand the ministry, identify goals, and begin without shame.

Key actions

- Use respectful outreach language focused on opportunity, growth, and support.
- Develop inquiry, application, orientation, and enrollment procedures.
- Explain participation expectations in plain language.
- Gather only information the ministry genuinely needs.
- Identify strengths, goals, learning needs, barriers, and referral needs.
- Protect personal information and explain confidentiality limits.
- Develop an individual goal or learning plan with the participant.
- Create a welcoming first contact and classroom environment.

Milestone: The enrollment process is clear, respectful, accessible, and ready to use consistently.

Watch for: *Making intake feel like an interrogation, using labels, promising outcomes, or requiring adults to tell painful stories to receive help.*

Use these kit tools: Participant Application, Strengths Inventory, Needs Assessment, Student Covenant, Goal Plan

11

Prepare and Launch Carefully*Prepare the facility, team, students, communication, and first weeks.*

Purpose. Open with a prepared team, workable systems, realistic enrollment, and a plan for the first weeks.

Key actions

- Use a ninety-, sixty-, and thirty-day launch checklist.
- Confirm facility, technology, materials, signage, safety, communication, and accessibility.
- Hold final volunteer orientation and role review.
- Complete student orientation before or during the first week.
- Prepare an opening-day agenda and contingency plan.
- Limit pilot enrollment to the number the team can serve well.
- Establish weekly leadership check-ins during the launch period.
- Celebrate the beginning without placing unrealistic pressure on participants or volunteers.

Milestone: The ministry opens with trained people, completed systems, prepared materials, and manageable enrollment.

Watch for: *Promoting before the ministry is ready, accepting more participants than can be served, or judging the ministry by the first week alone.*

Use these kit tools: Launch Countdown, Facility Checklist, Opening-Day Agenda, Communication Plan

12

Evaluate, Strengthen, and Sustain*Measure progress, strengthen the team, and plan for the future.*

Purpose. Learn from the ministry's experience, measure meaningful progress, care for the team, and make wise decisions about continuation or growth.

Key actions

- Track attendance, learning progress, goal progress, referrals, volunteer service, and ministry participation.
- Gather participant and volunteer feedback.
- Review policies, curriculum, schedules, partnerships, and budget.
- Celebrate small wins and protect participant privacy when sharing stories.
- Address volunteer fatigue and leadership overload.
- Revise what is not working instead of preserving it because it was part of the original plan.
- Plan the next term and annual ministry goals.
- Expand only when leadership, resources, and community need support growth.

Milestone: The leadership team completes a written review and approves a focused improvement plan for the next ministry period.

Watch for: *Measuring only enrollment, expanding too soon, ignoring volunteer burnout, or sharing participant stories without appropriate permission.*

Use these kit tools: Monthly Report, Participant Evaluation, Volunteer Evaluation, Annual Ministry Review

A Sample Twelve-Month Start-Up Timeline

Every community and sponsoring organization is different. This sample timeline is not a deadline. It shows a thoughtful pace for a church or ministry that is beginning with no established adult education structure. Some ministries may require more time for approval, fundraising, volunteer recruitment, or community assessment.

FRAME	PRIMARY WORK
Months 1–2	Prayer, discernment, leadership conversations, and initial vision
Months 2–3	Community listening, needs assessment, and resource mapping
Months 3–4	Mission, ministry model, audience, values, goals, and sponsorship approval
Months 4–5	Leadership structure, role descriptions, policies, insurance, and legal review
Months 5–7	Class design, curriculum selection, budget, funding, and partnership development
Months 7–9	Volunteer recruitment, screening, orientation, and instructor preparation
Months 9–10	Participant outreach, inquiry, application, assessment, and orientation preparation
Months 10–11	Facility preparation, materials, communication, final systems, and pilot enrollment
Month 12	Pilot launch, weekly review, and rapid problem-solving
Post-launch	Ongoing evaluation, improvement, volunteer care, and sustainability planning

Permission to start smaller

A ministry does not need every possible class, service, computer, volunteer, or partnership before it begins. It does need a clear purpose, responsible leadership, safe practices, prepared volunteers, and the ability to serve its first group of adults well.

Five Decision Gates

Gate 1: Calling — Do we have a clear, shared reason to begin this ministry?

Gate 2: Need — Does our assessment confirm a meaningful need that is not already being met adequately?

Gate 3: Capacity — Do we have the leadership, volunteers, oversight, facility, and finances to serve responsibly?

Gate 4: Readiness — Are policies, training, enrollment, curriculum, safety, and launch systems complete?

Gate 5: Sustainability — After the pilot, is there evidence that the ministry should continue, change, pause, or grow?

Ministry Readiness Checklist

Use this checklist before announcing an opening date. A “not yet” answer is not a failure. It identifies the work that will protect the ministry and the people it serves.

- ☐ Church or organizational leadership has formally approved the ministry.
- ☐ The ministry has a written mission, purpose, audience, values, and first-year goals.
- ☐ A community needs assessment and resource map have been completed.
- ☐ A ministry leader and accountable leadership team are in place.
- ☐ Essential roles and decision-making authority are documented.
- ☐ The initial classes or services are clearly defined.
- ☐ Curriculum and assessments are appropriate for adult learners.
- ☐ Volunteer applications, screening, interviews, and training are complete.
- ☐ Confidentiality, boundaries, safety, incident, technology, and referral procedures are approved.
- ☐ Insurance, legal, financial, and facility questions have been reviewed appropriately.
- ☐ A realistic start-up and operating budget has been approved.
- ☐ The ministry has dependable referral partners and a current resource directory.
- ☐ Participant outreach and enrollment materials use respectful language.
- ☐ Applications, covenants, emergency information, assessments, and goal plans are ready.
- ☐ The facility, supplies, technology, accessibility, signage, and emergency plans are ready.
- ☐ The first four weeks of instruction and leadership follow-up are planned.
- ☐ The number of participants will not exceed the team’s ability to serve well.
- ☐ The ministry has a plan for evaluation, volunteer care, and improvement.

Our Immediate Next Steps

#	ACTION	OWNER	DUE	STATUS
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

#	ACTION	OWNER	DUE	STATUS
7				
8				

Closing Encouragement

Christian adult education ministry creates a place where adults can learn without being shamed, ask questions without being dismissed, practice new skills without fear, and encounter the love of Christ through people who serve with patience and integrity.

The roadmap is not merely a list of administrative tasks. Each phase helps a ministry prepare to receive people whose lives, families, work, confidence, and faith may be affected by what happens in the classroom. Careful preparation is one way leaders honor both God's calling and the adults He entrusts to their care.

Remember

Move prayerfully. Listen carefully. Start responsibly. Teach practically. Serve with dignity. Evaluate honestly. Trust God with the results.

This roadmap is part of the

Christian Adult Education Ministry Start-Up Kit

Leader guides • planning tools • policies • forms • volunteer training • launch resources

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