

YOUTH SUCCESS MOVEMENT

Village Founder Orientation

What you need to understand before you start a village

Village Series · Document 2 of 10

Required for Village Founders and Village Leaders. Recommended for Chapter Coordinators and anyone considering the role.

Read Document 1 first.

The Village Model sets out what a village is, who holds it, and how it is structured. This document assumes you have read it and takes up the next question: what does a founder actually need to know?

How to use this orientation

Nobody can build something they do not understand. Before you gather your first family, you need to be able to explain — in your own words, to a skeptical neighbor — what is wrong, why it has not been fixed, what this Movement does differently, and what you are asking of them.

That is the entire purpose of this document. It is not a certification and there is no test. The goal is a working understanding, good enough to talk with a parent honestly and to know when a question is beyond you and belongs to someone else.

Time	Two to five hours, self-paced. Most founders read it in two sittings.
Format	Read it through once. Then talk it over with your trainer — the Chapter Coordinator, or the person who brought you in. Bring your disagreements. The Movement is better for having them raised early rather than discovered in front of a family.
Companion materials	A welcome video, a short film on what a movement is, and the current tool sheet. Your trainer will point you to these.
What comes after	Document 3, the Village Startup Guide, which is the operational sequence. Do not start recruiting families until you have been through both.

A note on tone before we begin. Nothing in this orientation asks you to be against schools or against teachers. Most teachers are working hard on a problem they did not create and cannot solve from where they stand. If you find yourself building a village on resentment of the local school, you have misunderstood the model, and the village will not last.

PART ONE

1. The problem

Where reading actually stands

On the most recent national reading assessment, roughly two out of three American fourth graders scored below proficient. That share has barely moved in twenty years. It did not move when the money went up, and it did not move when the curriculum changed.

Check the current figures before you quote them to anyone — the national assessment is updated periodically and your trainer can point you to the latest. What will not have changed is the shape of the picture: a large majority of children are not reading well, and decades of effort have not shifted it.

Understand what “below proficient” means before you use the number. Proficient is a demanding standard, not a passing grade, and a child below it is not necessarily unable to read. But the bottom band is the one to worry about, and it is large. These are children who cannot reliably get meaning off a page — which means every subject they will ever study is partly closed to them.

Why the money has not fixed it

Public K–12 spending is approaching a trillion dollars a year — about \$984 billion in fiscal year 2024, or roughly \$17,600 per pupil in current spending. Spending has risen nearly every year for more than a decade. Reading scores have not followed.

The conclusion most people reach is that schools are failing. That is the wrong conclusion, and a founder who repeats it will alienate the very educators a village needs as collaborators.

The better conclusion is that schools are being asked to solve a problem they were never designed to solve.

The supply chain

A manufacturer can only build a good car if the steel arriving at the factory is sound. When the steel is defective, no amount of skill on the line compensates. That is not a manufacturing problem — it is a supply chain problem.

Children who arrive at kindergarten with a strong foundation do well in almost any school. Children who arrive without one struggle, regardless of the school, the teacher, or the curriculum. The years before school are the supply chain. Schools have no mandate over them and no reach into them. They were built to manufacture, not to produce the raw material.

The space nobody owns

It would be wrong to say nobody works on the years before school. Head Start, home visiting programs, early literacy efforts, libraries, pediatric practices, and county services all work somewhere in that space, and many of them do it well.

But no entity owns it. Each holds one piece, works to its own mandate, and coordinates with the others rarely or not at all. There is no plan for a child that spans them, no shared picture, and nobody responsible for whether the whole thing adds up.

And the people actually building the child — parents — receive no formal training in child development at any point, from any institution, ever. We license drivers and certify food handlers. We hand a family a newborn with a car seat pamphlet.

That is why children keep arriving at kindergarten under-prepared in a country that is not indifferent to them. It is not neglect and it is not a shortage of caring organizations. It is an unowned space — and a founder who can say that clearly will be understood by every early childhood worker in their community, because they already know it.

Why the last fifty years of reform did not work

Every major national reading initiative of the last half century shared one architecture: get a better input into the classroom. The arguments were about what to teach and how to teach it. The classroom itself was never questioned as the place where the problem would be solved.

Consider what happened when one state trained a large share of its elementary teachers in the science of reading. The training worked — teacher knowledge moved substantially, by any measure you like. Student

outcomes did not follow. That is not an argument against teaching teachers well. It is evidence that the binding constraint was somewhere else.

What none of those initiatives did:

- Treat the years before school as the place where the foundation is actually built
- Look underneath reading failure at the skills a child needs in order to learn at all
- Act on the arithmetic that a child spends far more waking hours at home than in a classroom
- Give families a coherent pathway instead of a pile of competing advice

The integration problem

Here is something a founder needs to internalize, because it explains what a village is really for.

The reading researchers are right about what they have found. So are the people working on attention, on trauma, on vision, on vocabulary, on instruction. Each has built a field around their piece, with its own vocabulary, its own advocates, its own programs, its own funding.

And in the middle of all of it sits a parent at eleven at night, searching why her second grader cannot read. She falls into one of those worlds. An hour later she has seventeen tabs open, three groups joined, two programs that cost thousands of dollars, and no idea what to do first.

The problem is not a shortage of information. It is the absence of anyone who will sit with that parent and help her work out which pieces apply to her child, in what order. That is the job. That is what a Family Ambassador does, and what a village makes possible at scale.

The same fragmentation runs through the organizations themselves, and it is worth seeing that it takes two forms rather than one. The usual complaint is that everything comes and goes. That is only half right.

Tier	What it is	What is missing
The institutions	Schools, Head Start, health systems, libraries, county services. These endure and will still be here in decades.	Management turns over constantly, so priorities reset. Each works its own mandate in its own silo. The families served have little or no say in how any of it is run.
The programs	Initiatives, grants, pilots, and campaigns layered on top. Many genuinely help while they last.	They end when the funding or the leadership changes. And here too, the families served have no voice in what is offered or whether it continues.

Both tiers share one absence, and it is the one that matters: the people being served do not hold any of it. They receive it. Which means nobody holds the whole child either — not the school, which sees six hours; not the clinic, which sees a visit; not the program, which sees a semester. Each hands the child back knowing nothing of where she came from or where she goes next.

There is no continuity, no coordination, and no memory. The village supplies the first two. The Youth Success Record supplies the third.

PART TWO

2. The model

The equation

Everything the Movement does rests on one idea:

Academic Success = Instructional Effectiveness × Learning Effectiveness

The relationship is multiplicative, not additive. Two implications follow, and you should be able to state both.

First, a near-zero on the right side cancels everything on the left. A child who cannot hold information, cannot attend, cannot see the page properly, or has no language to think with will not be rescued by excellent teaching. The excellence is real and it is nullified.

Second, the field has spent fifty years and a great deal of money improving the left side. The right side has organizations working in it but no owner, no coordination, and no formal preparation for the parents doing most of the building. That is where this Movement works — not because instruction does not matter, but because someone has to take responsibility for the half nobody is responsible for.

If a school administrator gives you five minutes and you only get one idea across, make it this one. It reframes the entire conversation from blame to partnership: you are not there to criticize their instruction. You are there to work on the factor their instruction is being multiplied by.

Three things have to be built for a child to read

Reading is not one skill. It is the joint product of three, and a child can fail on any one of them while looking fine on the others.

What gets built	What it is
The word library	The store of words a child recognizes instantly, without effort. Words arrive by two routes — some sounded out, some learned as wholes — but both routes end in the same place: the whole word held in long-term memory and recognized on sight after enough exposures. Two routes, one destination. This is the piece school builds best.
The comprehension engine	The machinery that turns recognized words into meaning: vocabulary, background knowledge, sentence structure, inference, the habit of asking what something means. This is built mostly by families, mostly out loud, and mostly before print begins. School builds far less of it than people assume.
The cognitive skills machinery	The processing a child does the work with — attention, working memory, processing speed, visual and auditory processing, logic and reasoning. These are what the other two are built out of, and they are largely built through ordinary early family interaction long before anyone thinks about reading.

Say this part plainly whenever you get the chance, because almost nobody hears it: the comprehension engine is built primarily by families, mostly out loud, mostly before print begins. Talking, reading aloud,

telling stories, asking real questions, singing. That is not a warm-up for the real work. It is the work, and it belongs to the family in a way that classroom instruction never can.

And conditions at the base can block everything

Underneath the three builds sit conditions that stop a child from making use of any instruction at all. When one of these is present and unaddressed, no program on earth will move that child, and the family is usually the last to be told.

- Vision — not acuity alone, but tracking, focus, and visual stress
- Hearing
- Attention
- Trauma and adverse experience, which sits close to shame and is best understood as continuous with it rather than a separate thing
- Mindset — a child who is certain he cannot improve will not try, and every other intervention runs into that wall first
- Household conditions — sleep, food, housing stability, chronic stress

Which conditions matter most differs by age. Do not carry a list written for one age band across to another.

So the sequence is: check the base, then build

This is why the Movement's work with a family runs in the order it does. Wellbeing and the blocking conditions first. Then mindset. Then find where reading is actually breaking — the word library, the comprehension engine, or the machinery underneath. Then train the specific thing that is weak.

The full sequence is the Family Ambassador's working tool and is set out in Document 4. What a founder needs is the logic: check before you train, and never assume the school has already checked.

The tools

The Movement uses a small set of online tools, given to families at no cost. Understand them by what they do, not by their names — the specific programs change as better ones become available, and the current list is on the tool sheet your trainer will give you.

Function	What it is for
Early reading program	A self-guided online program a child does at home in 15–20 minutes a day, building the word library and early reading. Because it is self-guided, its results do not depend on the skill of whoever is supervising — which matters, since most of the adults supervising will be parents and volunteers.
Cognitive skills assessment	An online assessment that produces percentile scores across the underlying processing skills. It shows what is weak underneath, which nothing else in a child's school file will show. The Movement treats scores below the 15th percentile as the point where targeted training is warranted.
Cognitive training program	Online training that works the specific weak skills the assessment identified.

Function	What it is for
Visual processing screening	Short screens for visual stress, tracking difficulty, and related problems that make print hard to work with. Among the most commonly overlooked causes of reading struggle.
Wellbeing and homelife survey	A structured conversation about the conditions the child is living in. It runs first, before anything academic.

Screeners are not diagnoses.

Everything above is informational. It tells a family where to look and what to ask about. It never tells them what their child has. A founder who lets a screen be described as a diagnosis has created a serious problem for a family and for the Movement. Say “this suggests it is worth checking” and mean it.

What we do not claim

Being straight about the limits is part of the founder's job, and it will earn you more credibility than any claim you could make.

- Giving children books, by itself, has little rigorous evidence of raising reading scores. Books are good. Book distribution is not a program.
- Phonics instruction is not the cause of an individual child's reading failure. Method rarely explains why one particular child is stuck. Use the word phonics anyway when you talk with parents, because it is the word they hear from school.
- A village does not diagnose, does not treat, and does not replace a doctor, a therapist, or a school.
- We do not yet have the measurement infrastructure to make broad claims about outcomes. Building it is part of why families are asked to share before-and-after school reading results.

PART THREE

3. Movement, not program

There are two ways to try to fix something for a group of people.

The first is a program: designed outside the group or above it, and delivered down into it. The people running it protect it, because its survival is their goal. It usually addresses one slice of the problem rather than the whole. When the funding ends, it ends — and nothing is left behind, because nobody in the group ever owned it.

The second is a movement: created and driven by the people it serves. They make the decisions about how it works where they live. They participate because it helps their own family, and they keep going because they can see it helps everyone's. Outsiders can support a movement and help guide it, but the people it serves have to own it, or it is a program wearing different clothes.

The tools may be identical either way. The difference is who holds it.

Why this is a founder's problem specifically

In the first months, you are the village. You recruited the families, you know the model, you answer the questions. Every instinct will tell you to keep doing that, because it is faster and you are good at it.

That instinct, followed for two years, produces a program with one employee. Your job is the opposite: to move ownership outward as fast as people will take it. Start the councils before you feel ready. Hand the first Ambassador a real caseload rather than shadowing them. Let a parent run the gathering badly rather than running it well yourself. A village that still depends on you after two years has failed, however good it looks.

Two more things follow from this, and you will need both.

No program has solved the reading crisis. Say so openly. Founders sometimes think honesty about past failure undercuts them; it does the opposite. A parent who has watched three initiatives come and go trusts the person who names that, and distrusts the person who talks as though this time is obviously different.

And a family that is just adding another program to an overloaded schedule will drop it by March. The shift you are trying to produce is not “here is a good program.” It is “I am not a bystander in my child's education, and there is something I can do.” Families who make that shift stay.

PART FOUR

4. How families get served

Document 1 covers the structure in full. Three points a founder needs to hold clearly.

Virtual first, local as fast as possible

Standing up a village takes months. Families need help now, so the Movement serves them remotely from the start — a Family Ambassador assigned at a distance, the same sequence, the same tools, the same weekly contact.

That is the on-ramp, not the destination. When enough families in one community are being served remotely, that cluster becomes a village: a founder is recruited from among them, a boundary is drawn, and local Ambassadors take the handoff.

Which means your first ten families may already exist. Before you go recruiting from scratch, ask your Chapter Coordinator whether the Movement is already serving families in your area.

Most families will not have an Ambassador

Family Ambassadors are the strongest support the Movement has and the scarcest. One carries up to ten families and takes months to recruit and train. Your village will always be able to reach more families than it can assign.

So there are two levels of support, and you should present both without apology:

- Self-guided — the family works through the courses, tools, and community themselves, at their own pace, asking for help when they want it. This is how most families will be served.

- Ambassador-supported — an assigned Ambassador and weekly contact, for a year or more. The intensive option, for families who need more than materials can give or who ask for it.

Do not build a village that only works with an Ambassador attached.

If a family cannot make progress without a trained volunteer beside them, the Movement can never help more families than it has volunteers — and the problem is far larger than any volunteer corps will ever be.

Your job includes making sure a motivated parent in your village can navigate the system alone. Show them where things are. Point them at the courses. Introduce them to the community space. Then check that they actually found their way, because the difference between a self-guided family and an abandoned one is whether anyone ever looked.

Prioritize your scarce Ambassadors for the families in crisis, the families who have stalled on their own, and the families who ask. Offer one to a self-guided family whenever capacity frees up.

Four tracks

Which path a family follows depends on the age of the child. The ideas underneath are the same for everyone; the framing and the order differ.

Track	The framing
Birth to 5	Prevention and hope. Nothing has gone wrong. The Movement's priority group.
K–3	The window — when reading is meant to be built and a gap is still cheap to close.
4–12	It is not too late, and the point is to find the cause rather than repeat the effort.
Adult	Dignity. Many parents struggle to read themselves and will never say so. Some have grown children who left school without it. This track exists so a village serves the adult in front of it, not only the child.

Expect to run more than one track in a household, and expect a parent to quietly recognize themselves in the adult track while working on their child's. Meet that without comment or fuss.

Maya, and what to say about her

Maya is the Movement's AI guide — built to know a family, start with their wellbeing, give one next step at a time, follow up, and hand off to a human when a family needs one. She is in development and she is not live.

Do not sell her. Describe her as what is being built, and build your village so that it works without her, because for now it has to. When she arrives she will make the Ambassador's job lighter. She will not make it unnecessary.

The Youth Success Record

Think about how often a child is failed not because nobody cared but because nobody remembered. A new teacher each September starting from zero. A specialist who never reads the pediatrician's notes. A tutoring

program that knows nothing of what is happening at home. And a parent made to tell the whole painful story again to every new person.

Medicine fixed a version of this. A patient's history used to sit scattered across offices that never spoke; now the record follows the person. The Youth Success Record does the same for a child's learning — one living record of what has been assessed, what was found, what was tried, what worked, and where the child stands now.

Two things about it a founder must always get right. The parent owns it — not the school, not any agency, not the Movement — and controls entirely who sees it, with the right to take it, move it, or close it at any time. And it is in development, like Maya, so describe it as what is being built. Until it exists, the Family Ambassador keeps the family's record by hand, which is the same job done slower.

Who a village is for

Every resident in the boundary, with youth success as the organizing purpose. You start with ten families who have students, because the model has to be demonstrated on real children with real results. You widen from there.

And the reason the local village matters at all, when remote support already reaches people, is worth being able to say out loud: remote help can teach a parent what to do. It cannot make a neighborhood. It cannot put another adult in the room at a hard moment or produce the ride to the appointment. That is what a village adds, and it matters most where families are carrying the most and have the least around them.

PART FIVE

5. The Family Ambassador model

The Ambassador is the role that touches children's lives. A founder's most consequential work is finding, preparing, and keeping these people. Document 4 is their handbook; what follows is what you need in order to build the team.

What you are recruiting for

Two to five hours a week. Up to ten families. A year or more. Two to five hours of orientation before starting. A background check and a signed confidentiality agreement before a single family is assigned.

The work itself: onboard the family, set up their access to the tools, look at each student's progress once a week, and contact the family every week to encourage them, congratulate them, and sort out whatever is in the way.

An Ambassador does not need a degree, a teaching background, or expertise in reading. They need to be reliable, warm, and willing to make a phone call that might be awkward. Everything technical is in the materials or belongs to you.

Where they come from

In order of how well it works:

- Parents the village has already helped. Strongest by a wide margin — they believe it because it happened to them, and they can say so to a skeptical parent in a way you cannot.

- Your councils. Parent and Youth Council members frequently become Ambassadors.
- Your own network, and the networks of the people you have already recruited.
- Retired educators, faith communities, service clubs, and the people who already show up for things in your area.

Note the implication for sequencing. Your first Ambassadors have to come from outside the village because the village has not helped anyone yet. That is a one-time problem. By your second year, the village should be producing its own.

Recruiting them, honestly

Be specific about the commitment and let people say no. An Ambassador who signs up under a vague description will quit in eight weeks, and a family will lose the person who was supposed to be walking with them.

Give a new Ambassador two or three families, not ten. Ten is the ceiling, not the starting point.

And do not put an Ambassador in front of a family until they have completed orientation, passed the check, and signed the agreement. There is no version of this where those steps get skipped because someone is eager and you are short-handed.

Supporting them so they stay

Ambassadors leave for two reasons: they feel alone, and they hit something they do not know how to handle. Both are yours to prevent.

- Be reachable. An Ambassador should be able to get an answer from you within a day.
- Bring them together regularly — a call or a meeting where they can compare notes and see they are not the only one with a family that has gone quiet.
- Make clear what is not theirs to carry. Crisis, safety, and anything clinical comes to you and goes on from there. Say it early and repeat it.
- Notice their work out loud. This is unpaid, and recognition is most of the compensation.

The founder can be the first Ambassador — and then should stop being one.

Many founders take the first ten families themselves. That is a good way to learn what the work actually feels like, and you will lead better for having done it. But holding a caseload and running a village at the same time is not sustainable past the first months. Plan the handoff from the beginning rather than discovering the need for it when you are underwater.

PART SIX

6. What you actually do first

Document 3 is the full startup sequence. This is the shape of it, so you finish orientation knowing what Monday looks like.

When	What	Why it is in this order
First	Finish this orientation and talk it through with your trainer	You cannot recruit anyone into something you cannot explain.
Next	Decide your boundary and check for families already being served remotely in it	Your first ten may already exist.
Next	Decide which hats you are wearing — founder only, founder and leader, founder and first Ambassador	Everything about your first six months depends on this answer, and it is better made deliberately than by drift.
Next	Recruit the first Family Ambassador, or prepare to be one	No family should be enrolled without someone assigned to walk beside them.
Next	Start the Parent Council and Youth Council — one or two people each is enough	Start these early, while the village is small enough that joining feels like helping rather than joining a committee.
Next	Stand up the village page and community space	Families need somewhere to land.
Then	Recruit the first ten families	Ten. Not fifty. Prove it small.

7. Before you begin: a self-check

You are ready to move to Document 3 when you can answer each of these in your own words, out loud, to another person. Not word-perfect — in your own words. If one of them stops you, go back to that section or raise it with your trainer.

☐	Why has nearly a trillion dollars a year not moved reading scores?
☐	What does it mean that academic success is multiplicative rather than additive?
☐	What are the three things that have to be built for a child to read, and which one does school build best?
☐	Who builds the comprehension engine, and when?
☐	Name three conditions that can block a child from benefiting from any instruction at all.
☐	What is the difference between a movement and a program, and why does it decide whether this lasts?
☐	Why does a village start with ten families instead of a hundred?
☐	What is a virtual village, and why is it not the destination?
☐	What are the two tiers of organizations already serving families, and what do they have in common?
☐	Why do children keep arriving at kindergarten under-prepared, when so many organizations work in that space?
☐	What is the Youth Success Record, and who owns it?
☐	What is Maya, and what would you say if a parent asked whether she is available today?

☐	What are the three things a Family Ambassador must complete before being assigned a family?
☐	What are the two levels of support, and which one will most families be on?
☐	Name the four tracks, and say who the adult track is for.
☐	What would you say to a parent who asked whether a screener means her child has dyslexia?
☐	What would you say to a principal who assumed you were there to criticize his teachers?

One last thing.

The Maasai are said to greet one another by asking: how are the children? Even those with no children of their own are expected to answer, and the answer they hope to give is that all the children are well.

You are about to start something whose only purpose is to make that answer true in one neighborhood. It will be slower than you want and smaller than you imagined. Ten families is a real beginning. Start there.