LITERACY FOR ALL

Adult Literacy through Libraries

Strategies and Resources
from the American Library Association's
Committee on Literacy and
Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services

ALA
DIVERSITY, LITERACY
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Why Literacy through Libraries?

- Libraries' core values include equity of access and lifelong learning.
- Libraries have open doors.
- Libraries are community anchors, with connections to the community and a reputation for service to the community.
- Libraries provide a unique set of resources: location, space, print and digital information, dedicated and knowledgeable staff.

This toolkit will help you add, expand, and advocate for adult literacy services at your library. These suggestions will help you serve adults developing and improving various literacy skills and establish the library as an essential literacy partner in your community.

"The American Library Association reaffirms and supports the principle that lifelong literacy is a basic right for all individuals in our society and is essential to the welfare of the nation. ALA advocates the achievement of national literacy through educational activities utilizing the historical and cultural experiences of libraries and librarians.

ALA confirms that libraries of all types, as appropriate to their mission, have the responsibility to make literacy a high priority in planning and budgeting for library services. As pioneer and equal partners in the national literacy movement, libraries will continue to take a strong leadership role and must join with other literacy providers to urge local, state, federal, and private agencies to promote active development of literacy on a policy level and to support funding of the literacy services in libraries."

(ALA Policy B.8.1.2, "Literacy and the Role of Libraries")[1]

Definition of Literacy

ALA's Committee on Literacy uses the following definition of literacy from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC):
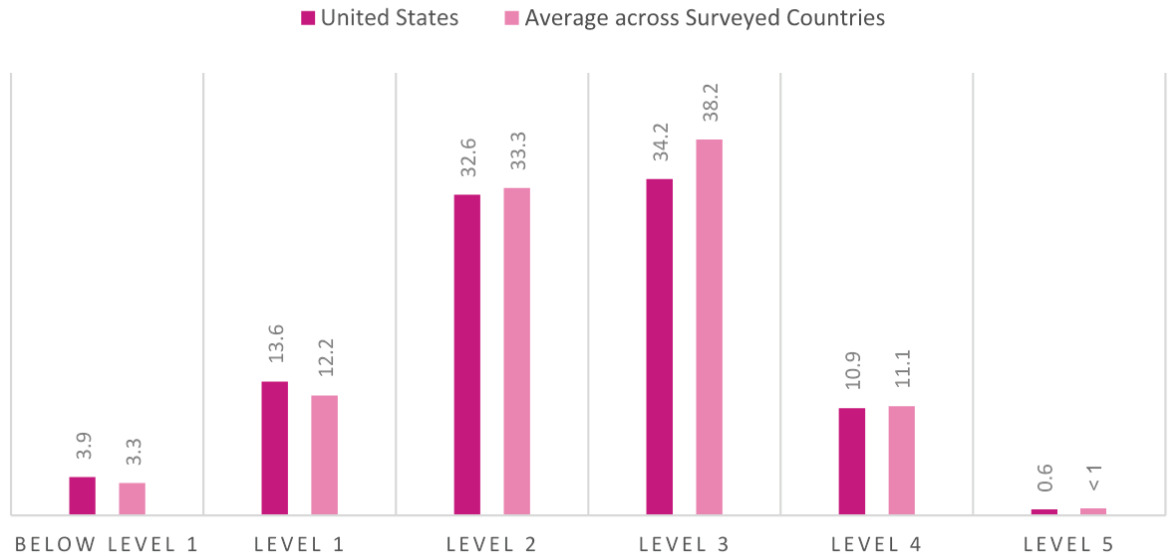
"Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society."[2]

The Numbers

In 2013, the OECD released the data from its Survey of Adult Skills, which surveyed the non-institutionalized populations aged 16-65 in over 40 countries. This chart illustrates how the U.S. compares with all surveyed countries in the area of literacy, as defined previously. The Survey also assessed skills in numeracy and in problem solving in technology-rich environments. [3]

ADULT LITERACY: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS AT EACH PROFICIENCY LEVEL IN LITERACY

■ United States   ■ Average across Surveyed Countries

	United States	Average across Surveyed Countries
BELOW LEVEL 1	3.9	3.3
LEVEL 1	13.6	12.2
LEVEL 2	32.6	33.3
LEVEL 3	34.2	38.2
LEVEL 4	10.9	11.1
LEVEL 5	0.6	<1

Proficiency Level	Sample Skills
Below Level 1	Can read brief texts on familiar topics and locate a piece of information identical in form to what is asked, not required to understand sentence structure, does not make use of features unique to digital texts.
Level 1	Can read relatively short texts and locate a single piece of information, complete simple forms, understand basic vocabulary, read continuous texts with a degree of fluency.
Level 2	Can integrate two or more pieces of information, make low level inferences, navigate digital texts.
Level 3	Can understand lengthy texts and rhetorical devices, evaluate information, and select relevant data from competing information.
Level 4	Can integrate, interpret and synthesize information, make complex inferences, and evaluate arguments.
Level 5	Can locate and integrate information across several dense texts, evaluate arguments' evidence and source reliability, and make high-level inferences.

Key survey findings include: [3]

- 36 million U.S. adults cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third grade level.
- U.S. adults have a higher level of education than those in other surveyed countries but lower basic skills "among those at high school level and below, so overall, U.S. adult skills do not compare well internationally."
- One-third of the low-skilled adults in the U.S. are immigrants, and more than half are black or Hispanic.

A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her child's academic success.
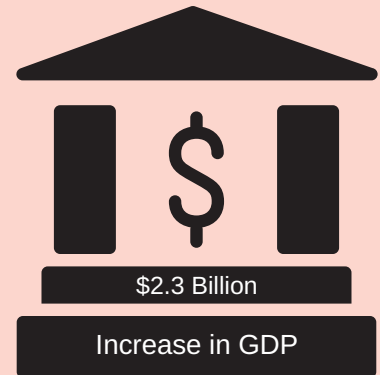
Source: Sastry and Pebley, 2010

1% ▲

A 1% increase in average literacy rates yields a 1.5% permanent increase in the GDP or a $2.3 billion dollar increase.

1.5 million people with the lowest levels of literacy are incarcerated.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2016

$2.3 Billion

Increase in GDP

Source: Coulombe, Tremblay and Marchand, 2004

A 1% increase in the high school completion rate of all men ages 20-60 would save the U.S. as much as $1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.

Source: The National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018

Literacy as a Social Justice Issue

Literacy as a social justice issue means that all people have equitable access to the skills and resources they need to fully participate as literate individuals in society—to communicate, analyze, criticize, synthesize, and create information. It takes into account structural barriers to that access, such as the inequitable distribution of resources, and the impact those barriers can have across lifetimes, generations, and outcomes. The correlation between literacy and income inequality, health outcomes, and rates of incarceration, among other issues of social and economic justice, underscores how literacy intersects with equity, access, and inclusion.

Your Library and Community

Consider some important questions about your library, literacy services, fiscal and human resources, and community. Asset-based [4] and needs assessments of your library's current literacy services and of your community will help you identify opportunities and gaps and build on successful programs to reach and serve adult learners.

1 List the library's current literacy programs and target audiences:
-Book clubs
-Computer classes
-Classes and/or conversation clubs for English language learners

2 Review your library's literacy resources:
-High quality/low level reading materials for adult learners
-Textbooks/workbooks for adults enrolled in local literacy programs
-Manuals and materials for literacy teachers and tutors

3 Identify and recruit in-house literacy experts and advocates:
-Staff and administration
-Trustees
-Volunteers

4 Review your technology and digital accessibility:
-Public access computers
-Educational software and online program access for adult learners
-Frontline staff who can answer technology questions and assist adult learners unfamiliar with technology

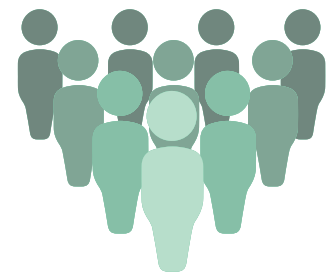## With the above information, gather your literacy team to:

- Discuss the qualities and components that make your current literacy programs successful
- Identify which populations you're reaching and which you're missing
- Brainstorm ways to build on your successes, engage your advocates, leverage your resources, and better serve adult learners.

Partnerships

Like libraries, adult literacy programs are deeply rooted in the community, working with faith-based organizations, school districts, community colleges and universities, and libraries. Community-based literacy programs often provide 1:1 tutoring and small group instruction and rely on a cadre of trained volunteers to provide these services.

To make your library a key adult literacy resource, invite community stakeholders to collaborate. Possible partners could include:

- Community-based literacy organizations
- Local literacy coalitions
- Social justice organizations
- Social service agencies, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, the local YMCA/YWCA, job training facilities, and senior citizen groups
- Faith-based organizations, including churches, synagogues, and mosques
- Community colleges and local universities
- School districts
- Local PBS stations
- Businesses and national corporations with a local presence
- Private foundations
- Elected officials
- Adult learners to tell their stories and advocate for action

Partnerships = Sustainability
A recent study by the American Dream Literacy Initiative, which provides U.S. public libraries with grants to expand services for adult English language learners, found that libraries that formed partnerships were seven times more likely to have developed sustainable English language learner services. [5]

Literacy Action Plans

You've assessed your community's literacy needs and the library's assets, and you've convened your internal and external colleagues. It's now time to create—and implement—your library's literacy action plan. The process includes:

- Developing achievable literacy goals, in collaboration with community partners
- Identifying the capacity and resources (human and fiscal) to achieve the goals
- Determining the action steps and interim milestones for each goal
- Setting a timeline, assessing progress, and making revisions as needed

For more information and interactive tools on assessment, consult *Adult Literacy through Libraries (ALL): an Action Agenda* and its free companion online course. The course includes a Literacy Action Plan Template and examples of plans created by three libraries.

Visit https://proliteracy.org/What-We-Do/Programs-Projects/Literacy-Through-Libraries to access the Action Agenda and course.

Your Library's Literacy Story

Tell your library's literacy story through social media channels and meetings with library stakeholders. Submit stories to the library newsletter and local media. Use learner and tutor testimonials and numbers to demonstrate the impact of your library's literacy program, highlighting:

- Your collection, your programs, and your outreach services
  -New resources
  -Information about the number of learners who are impacted by the program
- Adult learners
  -What's their literacy story?
  -How did they connect with the library?
- Your partners
  -Who are they?
  -How did the relationship with the library develop?
  -What do they contribute?
  -Where would your library be without them?

Library Literacy Hashtags

#librariestransform
#literacy
#adultliteracy
#lifelonglearning
#AdultEd
#adulteducation
#ESOL

Adult Learners: Who are They?

Adult learners are individuals over the age of 16 "who did not complete their K-12 education, or who possess a high school diploma or equivalent but nevertheless have gaps in basic skills such as reading, math, or spoken English."[6] Most are employed and are parents or primary caregivers of school-age children.[7] Adult learners come to the library with a wealth of life experiences and knowledge. They are goal-oriented, focused on meaningful lessons and achievable goals, and motivated to learn.
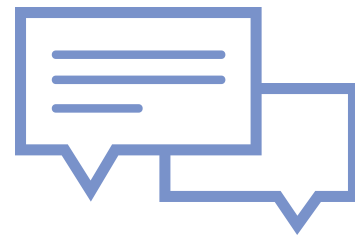

Adult Learners: In their Own Words

"It makes me so happy when I can read notes from my children's teachers, street signs, and mail. I don't think you can imagine what it feels like not being able to read."[8]

--*Cleo*

"I decided to learn English because I knew I wanted to live in the U.S. Without reading, writing, and speaking English, you can't do anything."[9]

--*Brtukhan*

"Before I didn't know how to fill out an application; I didn't know how to answer during interviews. It made my life easier; I didn't have to look for somebody to fill out my application."[9]

--*John*

The Adult Education System

The system is comprised of programs that offer a range of instruction, including basic literacy and numeracy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), high school diploma equivalency, and college and career readiness.[7]

- **Adult Basic Education** (ABE) – education for adults at the elementary level of literacy (grades 0-8), emphasizing communicative, computational, and social skills.[10]
- **Adult Secondary Education** (ASE) – education for adults who have not completed high school and/or are seeking a high school equivalency credential and who have literacy skills at approximately grade 9 or higher.[10]
- **English Language Learning** (ELL) – instruction for adults who lack proficiency in English and who seek to improve their English reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.[10]

Adult Learner Assessments

Assessments are proficiency tests intended to measure the taker's command of a language, basic skills, subject-based knowledge and skills, or digital skills. Some widely-used assessments include:

- **National Assessment of Adult Literacy** (NAAL)
  https://nces.ed.gov/naal/alsa.asp
- **Assessment Strategies and Reading Profile** (ASRP)
  https://lincs.ed.gov/readingprofiles/resources.htm
- **Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems** (CASAS)
  https://www.casas.org/product-overviews/curriculum-management-instruction/sample-test-items
- **International English Language Testing System** (IELTS): https://www.ielts.org/
- **Test of English as a Foreign Language** (TOEFL): https://www.ets.org/toefl
- **General Educational Development** (GED): https://ged.com/
- **High School Equivalency Test** (HiSET): https://hiset.ets.org/
- **Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment**
  https://www.digitalliteracyassessment.org/

Multiple Literacies

Literacy in the 21st Century takes multiple forms, and libraries are taking the lead in providing services in many areas, such as these:

Culinary Literacy is learning *about* food and cooking, including nutrition and food insecurity, and learning *through* cooking, such as math and science concepts.
For more information, see the Free Library of Philadelphia's toolkit:
https://libwww.freelibrary.org/assets/pdf/programs/culinary/free-library-culinary-literacy-toolkit.pdf

Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. For resources and more information: https://literacy.ala.org/digital-literacy/
Texas State Library and Archives Toolkit: https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ld/AEL/LandLtoolkit

Financial Literacy is an understanding of basic financial principles to be an informed consumer and manage one's finances.
For resources and more information: https://literacy.ala.org/multiple-literacies/

Health Literacy involves skills for managing one's health and well being, including making effective decisions and partnering with healthcare providers to live a full, productive life. For resources and more information:
https://publiclibrary.health/
http://www.opendoorcollective.org/resources.html
https://www.webjunction.org/explore-topics/ehealth.html

Information Literacy is the ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. To be information literate, therefore, one needs skills not only in research but also in critical thinking.
For resources and more information: https://literacy.ala.org/information-literacy/

Media Literacy is an informed, critical understanding of mass media, including the ability to evaluate sources and synthesize information.
For resources and more information: https://literacy.ala.org/multiple-literacies/

Other literacies can include:

- Audio
- Critical
- (Multi)cultural
- Numeracy
- Spatial
- Visual

Model Library Literacy Programs

Across the country, in rural and urban, large and small communities, libraries are providing effective and replicable services and programs for adult learners and families. The specifics of how these programs are developed, implemented, staffed, and administered depend on the library's mission, goals, and capacity and on the community's literacy resources and needs. The following examples illustrate library literacy in action, with models that can be replicated or adapted.

Conectando
Terrebonne Parish (LA) Library System
Through an ALA American Dream grant, the library system created Conectando, an umbrella of services to engage adult English language learners and celebrate the Hispanic culture of the community, including courses, story times, and festivals. Among the most successful programs are Historias para Toda, a twice-monthly bilingual book discussion, and Curso Basico de Inglés para Toda la Familia, where students read out loud and roleplay to practice their pronunciation.
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/odlos-blog/Connectando

Families Together: Reading Enrichment for Social/Emotional Learning (SEL)
Lisle (IL) Library District
This program, in partnership with an early childhood center and the school district, helps at risk families improve SEL for birth to 5 year old children by introducing parents to appropriate reading materials and reinforcing the concepts while the adults learn English and SEL strategies and the children build their SEL coping skills through play groups.
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/odlos-blog/families-together

Financial Literacy Workshops for New Americans
Lakewood (OH) Public Library
The library created this program, a financial literacy class for Nepali and Burmese-speaking people, in response to an influx of new immigrants from Southeast Asia and in partnership with Asian Services in Action.
http://www.programminglibrarian.org/programs/financial-literacy-workshops-new-americans

News Literacy: Countering Fake News
Estes Valley (CO) Library
This three-part nonpartisan civic series offers a presentation on "fake news," a community forum about today's media, and a hands-on technology program to practice analyzing news sources.
https://www.estesvalleylibrary.org/services/

Read and Roll
Lac La Biche County (Canada) Libraries
Read and Roll is a seven-week partner program among Lac La Biche County Libraries, Parent Link, and Alberta Health Services, designed for people whose children are three or four years old, which is an important time for pre-school cognitive development. Participants read books and join in activities to explore story concepts. For more information about this program, e-mail programs@llbcl.ca.

READ/San Diego: Adult and Family Literacy Services
San Diego (CA) Public Library
The READ/San Diego program provides literacy instruction for adults through volunteer tutoring. The Families for Literacy Program assists parents and caregivers with reading skills, breaking the cycle of intergenerational low literacy.
https://www.sandiego.gov/public-library/central-library/read

SAGE
Harris County (TX) Public Library
Targeted at seniors, the SAGE program is a series of free workshops and presentations related to health, cultural, and culinary literacies.
http://www.hcpl.net/category/tags/sage

Skills Training
Detroit (MI) Public Library
Detroit Public Library offers adults a range of skills training, including DetroitReads!, a volunteer-based tutoring program for math and reading skills and GED preparation. Services also include one-on-one career and employment help and computer classes and tutoring.
https://detroitpubliclibrary.org/services

Adult Literacy Resources

ALA Advocacy - Literacy: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/literacy
Literacy is one of ALA's key action areas. This page includes literacy advocacy resources, adult literacy toolkits, opportunities to get involved in the work, and selected ALA policy and statements on lifelong literacy.

ALA Literacy Clearinghouse: https://literacy.ala.org/
This site brings together resources from across ALA that promote literacy across the lifespan.

ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services: http://www.ala.org/diversity
Resources, workshops, webinars, grants, and initiatives supporting literacy across the lifespan.

American Dream Literacy Initiative 10-Year Retrospective Report: http://ala.org/americandream
Findings from a multi-year impact study, profiles of grantee libraries, and best practices for serving English Language Leaners.

California Library Literacy Services: http://www.libraryliteracy.org/
A wealth of resources, including a marketing toolkit, roles & goals curriculum, and assessment and accountability resources.

DC Public Library Adult Literacy Resource Center: http://www.dclibrary.org/services/adult
Information on the library's adult literacy programs, including resource manuals for adult developing readers book discussions.

Educate and Elevate: https://educateandelevate.org/
Professional development, a campaign toolkit, and other advocacy tools for adult education.

Florida Literacy Coalition: https://floridaliteracy.org/
Grant opportunities, professional development sessions, and resources in the field of adult literacy.

IFLA Guidelines for Library Based Literacy Programs
https://www.ifla.org/publications/guidelines-for-library-based-literacy-programs
General guidelines and an informal checklist for creating a successful library-based literacy program.

Illinois State Library: https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/literacy/
Grant programs and services for adult and family literacy, including a web-based training program for literacy volunteers.

Illinois Secretary of State Library/Literacy Publications: https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/publications/librarypub.html
Archive of literacy booklets, brochures, and forms, including "How to Start an Adult Volunteer Literacy Program."

LINCS: U.S. Department of Education Literacy Information and Communication System: https://lincs.ed.gov/
Offers a number of professional development opportunities, trainings, and workshops. Visit the companion site (https://learner.lincs.ed.gov/) for the Adult Learner Center - online activities and resources for adult learners.

Open Door Collective: http://www.opendoorcollective.org/
The Open Door Collective (ODC) is dedicated to reducing economic inequality and increasing civic engagement through adult literacy. The site offers resources on serving incarcerated adults, health literacy, and workforce development.

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC): https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/index.asp
Current indicator of the nation's progress in adult skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments.

ProLiteracy: http://www.proliteracy.org
Information and resources on the promotion of literacy, including advocacy, professional development, educational materials, tutorials, webinars, and other resources.

Supporting Adult Literacy in Public Libraries Toolkit: http://www.salipl.org/toolkit
A step-by-step guide to starting a library-based adult literacy program, based on the program at Westland Public Library in Michigan.

Funding Opportunities

American Dream Literacy Initiative: http://ala.org/americandream
One-time grants to U.S. public libraries to expand services for adult English language learners or adults in need of basic education and workforce development.

Dollar General Literacy Foundation: https://www.dgliteracy.org/
Resources and grant opportunities for non-profit agencies and institutions to expand literacy programs for youth and adults.

Federal Grants: http://www.grants.gov
U.S. government portal to find and apply for federal grants.

Foundation Center: http://www.foundationcenter.org
Comprehensive worldwide database of funding opportunities from a variety of philanthropic organizations.

Institute for Museum and Library Services: http://www.imls.gov
Federal-level information, research, policy development, and grant opportunities for libraries.

United for Libraries: Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends, and Foundations
http://www.ala.org/altaff
Information, resources, and tools for trustees, advocates, friends, and foundations.

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