

Tips and tools you can use from the ALA Committee on Literacy
and the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services

Literacy for All: Adult Literacy @ your library

The **American Library Association** affirms 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 for the achievement of national literacy through educational activities utilizing the historical and cultural experiences of libraries and librarians.

ALA Policy 50.6.2, "Literacy and the Role of Libraries"

The ALA Committee on Literacy defines literacy as *the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.*

Adult Literacy in the U.S.

In 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) – a nationally representative assessment of adult literacy levels, with adults defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons.

The NAAL measured adults' ability to perform everyday literacy tasks including:

- Prose Literacy—the knowledge and skills to search, comprehend, and use continuous texts (e.g. editorials, news stories, brochures, and instructional materials).
- Document Literacy—the knowledge and skills to search, comprehend, and use non-continuous texts in various formats (e.g. job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and drug or food labels).
- Quantitative Literacy—The knowledge and skills to identify and perform computations using numbers embedded in printed materials (e.g. balancing a checkbook, calculating a tip, etc.)

The NAAL survey found that 90 million American adults read at the two lowest literacy levels, basic or below basic. These low literate adults lack the literacy skills necessary to read and comprehend the information in complex documents. A closer look reveals that:

- 14% of adults (30 million) function at a ***below basic prose literacy level*** and 29% (62 million) function at a ***basic prose literacy level***
- 12% of adults (25 million) function at a ***below basic document literacy level*** and 22% (47 million) function at a ***basic document literacy level***
- 22% of adults (47 million) function at a ***below basic quantitative literacy level*** and 33% (71 million) function at a ***basic quantitative literacy level***

In addition, 11 million adults are nonliterate in English. These adults fall into two groups:

- 7 million who could not answer simple test questions
- 4 million who could not take the test because of language barriers.

The U.S. Census (<http://www.census.gov/>) features local and national data sets, including Educational Attainment, that can help you learn more about your community's literacy needs.

Why Literacy at the Library?

The library's core values are equity of access and lifelong learning.

The library has open doors.

The library is user-friendly.

The library offers access to print and digital resources.

The library is a place of opportunity.

This toolkit will help you add, expand, and advocate for adult literacy services at your library. These suggestions will help you reach and serve new and nonreaders and establish the library as an essential literacy partner in your community.

Know Your Library

First, you need to consider and answer some important questions about your library, your literacy services, your fiscal and human resources, and your community.

An informal, asset-based survey of your library's current literacy programming will provide information and insight. These lessons learned will help you identify and build on successful programs in order to reach and serve adult learners.

Asset-based assessment is internally focused and relationship driven. New activities are developed based on the library's capacity, skills, and human and fiscal assets.

For more information, please visit:
<http://www.abcdinstitute.org>

List the library's current literacy programs and who they reach:

- Preschool story hours
- Afterschool homework help
- Teen reading activities
- Summer reading programs
- Adult book clubs
- Computer classes

Next, review your library's literacy resources.

- Does your library have high quality/low level reading materials for adult learners?
- Do you have textbooks and workbooks for adults enrolled in local literacy programs?
- Do you have manuals and materials for literacy teachers and tutors?
- Are these resources available in print and digital formats?
- Does your library serve as a literacy tutoring site?

Identify and recruit your in-house literacy experts and advocates:

- Staff
- Administration
- Trustees
- Volunteers
- Friends of the Library
- Loyal patrons
- Others

Review your technology and digital accessibility. Does your library have:

- Public access computers
- Educational software for adult literacy learners
- Computer classes from basic to advanced
- Frontline staff who can answer technology questions, guide online searches, and assist adult learners unfamiliar with technology

With all the information above compiled, gather your in-house literacy team to:

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

"If you work in a public library, literacy is your business. It is your job. It is the product we provide. Call it lifelong learning. Call it adult services. Call it children's services. It is all literacy."

*Mark Pumphrey,
Deputy Director
El Paso Public Library*

Key Terms

Definitions

Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.

Basic literacy skills include reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate.

Information literacy is the ability to recognize the extent and nature of an information need, then to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information.

Learning disabilities refer to a group of disorders related to the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities.

Adult Literacy Assessments

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) measures learner progress on a standardized scale from the lowest literacy skills to high school exit.

General Educational Development (GED) is the high school equivalency exam for adults who have not completed high school. The GED includes five subject tests which, when passed, certify that the taker has high school level academic skills.

National Reporting System (NRS) is an outcome-based reporting system for state-administered, federally funded adult education programs.

Official (GED) Practice Test (OPT) shows preparedness to pass the GED test.

Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) is a diagnostic test used to determine a person's skill levels and aptitudes in reading, math, and English.

Know Your Community

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 provide 1:1 tutoring and small group instruction and rely on a cadre of trained volunteers to provide these services.

A recent survey reported that 74% of public libraries partner with their local community-based literacy programs to serve adult learners.

To make your library a key community adult literacy resource, be the convener and reach out and invite community stakeholders to the library for a literacy brainstorming session. Include representatives from:

- Community-based literacy organizations
- Local literacy coalitions
- Social service agencies, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, the local YMCA and YWCA, Rotary Clubs, job training facilities, senior citizen groups
- Faith-based organizations including churches, synagogues, and mosques
- Community colleges and local universities
- School districts serving grades K-12
- Local PBS station
- Businesses and national corporations with a local presence
- Private foundations
- Elected officials
- Adult learners to tell their stories and advocates for action

"Libraries have a vested interest in assuring that adults are able to read, speak, and understand English. Adults who learn to read at their library, love their library!"

*Sandy Newell
State Library & Archives of
Florida*

During the session, emphasize the library's role as a resource provider. Showcase and promote the library's services, resources, and staff. Conduct an informal, asset-based survey of your community's current literacy programming and identify what's missing. Determine reasonable next steps, such as:

- Scheduling another meeting
- Conducting community interviews
- Reaching out to additional potential partners
- Offering to host occasional or regular literacy partner meetings
- Build action-oriented partnerships with achievable literacy goals and strive for long-term collaborations that will create a multifaceted literacy coalition

Develop a Literacy Plan

You've assessed your community's literacy needs, the library's assets, and convened your colleagues.

Now it's time to build your library's literacy action plan:

- Develop 3-5 achievable literacy goals
- Identify the resources (human and fiscal) you'll need to reach these goals
- Decide who's contributing to this plan—the library, the community, your stakeholders, your patrons, and your advocates
- Articulate the steps that will help you reach your goals
- Develop a timeline to help you stay on track
- Review your progress regularly
- Adjust your course of action and make revisions when necessary
- Keep track of your accomplishments
- Develop a public relations plan to promote the library's literacy activities and raise awareness

"In today's knowledge driven, technology powered economy, literacy is no longer an option, it is a lifeline. What can we do to bring along those who don't have the skills, tools, or resources to participate in our libraries?"

*Juliet I. Machie
Detroit Public Library*

Key Terms

Literacy Programming

Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes are for adults at the elementary level (through grade 8). ABE classes focus on basic literacy and computational skills.

Adult literacy programs help English-speaking adults improve their reading and writing skills to reach their potential as workers, parents, community members, and life-long learners.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is an educational program for non-native English speaking adults who want to improve their listening, speaking, writing, and communication skills.

Family literacy programs address the literacy needs of parents and their pre-school children. Many family literacy programs have four distinct components including children's literacy activities from play to print, adult literacy instruction (1:1 tutoring or small group instruction), family time where parents and children learn and play together, and parenting classes.

One-to-one tutoring is where trained tutors meet regularly with adult students. The curriculum and supporting materials are selected to match the learner's skill level and interests.

Small group instruction is where a trained instructor meets with 3-5 students on a regular basis. Groups are formed based on skill level and instructional content.

Workforce literacy includes programs and services that help adult literacy learners find employment, move into a new job, or enter trade-based training programs.

Beyond Basic Literacy

Financial literacy is the ability to use knowledge and skills to effectively manage one's financial resources.

Health literacy is ability to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

Tell your Library's Literacy Story

Tell your library's literacy story every step of the way. Talk with the library administration, the trustees, your colleagues, community partners, and the media. Submit stories to the library newsletter, the local newspaper, electronic media, and public service announcements (PSAs) on the radio, local cable channel, or PBS station. Use stories, learner and tutor testimonials, and numbers to demonstrate the impact of your library's literacy program. Include information about:

- Your collection, your programs, and your outreach services
 - Feature new resources
 - Share circulation numbers
- Feature adult learners—remember, everyone has a story to tell
 - What's their literacy story?
 - Why did they come to the library?
- Acknowledge and thank your partners
 - Who are they?
 - What do they contribute?
 - Where would you be without them?

"Libraries are the heart of the community, the cornerstone of democracy, the people's university. But it is literacy – the ability to read, write, and communicate – that opens the doors that reveal the voices of the past and the promise of tomorrow."

Dale P. Lipschultz, Ph.D.
Literacy Officer
ALA Office for Literacy
and Outreach Services

"In our urban areas, small cities, and towns, the greatest resource for literacy is the public library. Moreover, it is through the public library and its community involvement and staff commitment that change happens in so many lives."

Dinah O'Brien
Plymouth (Mass.)
Public Library

Adult Learners: Who Are They?

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.

The National Center for Educational Statistics identifies adult learners as individuals over the age of 16 who do not have a high school diploma, GED, or other high school completion certificates.

Adult Learners: In their own words

"Many adult learners are afraid when they come to the library. They're afraid to ask questions and afraid of being embarrassed. Little things – a gesture, a few questions, and some suggestions help reduce this fear. It's the librarian's job to guide us toward the literacy collection."

Marty Finsterbusch, Adult Learner, Executive Director of VALUE, and President, National Coalition for Literacy

Successful and Replicable Library Literacy Programs

Across the country, in large and small communities, libraries are providing effective and replicable services and programs for adult learners. The specifics of how these programs are developed, implemented, staffed, and administered depends a great deal on the library's mission, goals, capacity, and the community's literacy resources.

The following examples illustrate library literacy in action. Their programs, services, and collective wisdom offer service models worthy of consideration and adaptation.

Adult Learner Program Queens (N.Y.) Library

The mission of Queens Library's Adult Learner Program is to provide quality services, resources, and lifelong learning opportunities through books and a variety of other formats to meet the educational needs and interests of its diverse Adult Education population.

http://queenslibrary.org/index.aspx?page_nm=Adult+Literacy+Home

Detroit Reads Detroit Public Library

The Detroit Public Library (DPL) recognizes that the ability to read is fundamental to the quality of life in the City of Detroit. Through Detroit Reads the library, literacy service providers, local business leaders, government and community partners, and the media collaborate to make Detroit a city where 'all Detroiters can read.'

<http://www.detroit-reads.org>

Literacy Link Midwest City (Okla.) Library

Literacy Link teaches reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate adults, ages 18 and over, including free, one-on-one tutoring.

<http://www.literacylinkok.org/>

Onondaga County (N.Y.) Public Library

In Syracuse, the library works closely with the abundance of literacy service providers in the community.

http://www.onlib.org/web/serv_coll/literacy/index.htm

Project Read San Francisco (Calif.) Public Library

Project Read helps English-speaking adults improve their basic reading and writing skills so they may access greater opportunities in their lives.

<http://projectreadsf.blogspot.com/>

Project Read Decatur (Ill.) Public Library/Richland Community College

Project Read is a public library/community college partnership serving adults with less than a 9th grade education with one-on-one tutoring in literacy and math at the library.

<http://projectread.richland.edu/>

The Literacy Program of Greater Plymouth Plymouth (Mass.) Public Library

The Plymouth Public Library, in collaboration with Literacy Program of Greater Plymouth and with the support of a broad coalition of local businesses and government institutions, serves adults in the greater Plymouth area with free GED classes and English as a second language (ESL) tutoring at the library.

<http://home.comcast.net/~litcenter/>

Read/Write/Now Springfield (Mass.) Public Library

Assists adults living in the greater Springfield area to achieve their basic education goals through free adult basic education programs that promote self-directed learning and value the knowledge that adults bring to learning.

<http://www.springfieldlibrary.org/rwn/index.html>

Rogers County Literacy Council Will Rogers (Okla.) Library

The Will Rogers Library collaborates with the Rogers County Literacy Council to provide adult literacy services in Claremore, Oklahoma. The Council is a member of the Oklahoma Literacy Coalition and ProLiteracy and is a Rogers County United Way agency.

<http://www.claremorecity.com/index.aspx?nid=168>

<http://rocoread.org/>

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Resources

ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services

<http://www.ala.org/olos>

Click on "Adult New and Non-Readers" for information, statistics, best practices, and resources.

ALA Committee on Literacy

<http://www.ala.org>

Click on "ALA & Council Committees," then "Literacy" for information on committee charge, policies, structure, current roster, and committee documents.

ALA Family Literacy Focus

<http://www.ala.org/familyliteracyfocus>

Family Literacy Focus is an initiative to encourage and inspire families in ethnically diverse communities to read and learn together. These sustainable and replicable library-based family literacy programs emphasize oral and written traditions and promote reading, writing, and storytelling.

The American Dream Starts @ your library

<http://www.americandreamtoolkit.org>

Resources and information for serving English language learners from the American Dream Starts @ your library, a grant initiative from ALA and the Dollar General Literacy Foundation.

ProLiteracy

<http://www.proliteracy.org>

Information and resources on the promotion of literacy, including advocacy, professional development, educational materials, and other resources.

California Library Literacy Services

<http://www.libraryliteracy.org/>

A wealth of resources within the "Staff" section, including a Marketing Toolkit, Roles & Goals Curriculum, and Assessment and Accountability Resources, and the "Learner" section, including Great Books book reviews authored by adult learners.

DC Public Library

Adult Literacy Resource Center

<http://www.dclibrary.org/services/adult>

Information on the library's programs focused on adult literacy, including the downloadable "A Feel for Books-Book Discussions for Adult Developing Readers: A Resource Manual."

Florida Library Literacy Tip Sheets

http://dilis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/literacy/tip_sheets/index.html

Useful information about starting, funding, managing and marketing a library literacy program.

Illinois State Library

Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor Training

http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/who_we_are/literacy/oltt/home.html

A model web-based training program for literacy volunteers.

Illinois State Library

How to Start an Adult Volunteer Literacy Program

http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/publications/pdf_publications/ldl12.pdf

A manual with detailed information on the initiation and implementation of a volunteer literacy program, including information on assessing community need, recruiting and testing adult learners, and program finance.

Oklahoma Department of Libraries

Literacy Resource Office

<http://www.odl.state.ok.us/literacy/>

Dedicated to Oklahoma's outstanding local literacy programs, dedicated literacy volunteers, and exceptional adult learners, this site features several valuable publications, including a Literacy Resource Manual and Adult Learner Handbook.

Finding Funding

Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends, and Foundations

<http://www.ala.org/altaff>

Information, resources, and tools for trustees, advocates, friends, and foundations.

Dollar General Literacy Foundation

<http://www.dollargeneral.com/dgliteracy/pages/landing.aspx>

Resources and grant opportunities for non-profit agencies and institutions to expand literacy programs for youth and adults.

Institute for Museum and Library Services

<http://www.imls.gov>

Federal-level information, research, policy development, and grant opportunities for libraries.

LINCS Grant Database

<http://lincs.ed.gov/programs/programs.html>

U.S. Department of Education Literacy Information and Communication System, offering a number of professional development opportunities, trainings, and workshops.

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.

OLOS Resources on Delicious



Interested in more resources? See OLOS's annotated list of resources on Delicious:

<http://www.delicious.com/alaolos/adultliteracy>

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