



June 23, 2014

Dear Colleague,

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) at the U.S. Department of Education are working together to encourage effective collaborations between libraries and federally funded adult education programs. The goal of this joint effort is to enhance the skills, employability, and quality of life of youths and adults with low skills.

We are asking public libraries, state and local adult education agencies, and literacy providers to work together to complement and extend the adult education and English literacy services available through adult education programs for youths and adults.

Background

Public Libraries

Public libraries have long been substantial, contributing partners with community organizations, volunteer literacy providers, and federally funded adult education programs to provide people with the digital literacy and foundation skills¹ they need to become productive workers and citizens. Public libraries also are sites for connections to social services, and a source of information and learning for new American citizens and English language learners.

In addition to providing the services listed above, the more than 17,000 public libraries in the United States, including branch locations, play a significant role in America's Internet connectivity. According to the 2010 U.S. IMPACT Public Library Study,² more than 77 million people, or nearly one-third of the U.S. population ages 14 and older, used a public library computer or wireless network to connect to the Internet in 2009. Of the millions of library patrons, 44 percent who lived in households below the poverty line (annual income of \$22,000 for a family of four) visited public libraries with the purpose of accessing the Internet. The study also reports that 42 percent (an estimated 32.5 million people) of library computer users indicated that education was the reason for their Internet use, and 24 percent of those users reported taking online courses or working on online assignments. However, while these numbers show that Internet access is important to library patrons, in another recent study more than 65 percent of libraries reported an insufficient number of public access computers and 41 percent reported inadequate bandwidth.³

¹ OCTAE defines "foundation skills" as a combination of literacy, numeracy and English language skills (i.e., listening, reading, writing, speaking in English, digital literacy, and the use of mathematical ideas), and employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

² Samantha Becker et al. (2010). *Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits From Internet Access at U.S. Libraries*. Institute of Museum and Library Services. Washington, D.C. <http://impact.ischool.uw.edu/us-public-library-study.html>.

³ American Library Association. (2012). *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2011-2012*. Chicago, IL. http://www.ala.org/research/plftas/2011_2012.

Adult Education Program

The U.S. Department of Education's *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998*, enacted as *Title II of the Workforce Investment Act*, is the primary federal program that provides basic skills and English literacy instruction for out-of-school youths and adults. The program assists students in acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to become productive workers, parents, and citizens. In 2012–13,⁴ it served approximately 1.7 million individuals who were high school non-completers or limited English proficient, or lacked the foundation skills to function effectively in society.

However, this program does not reach all who need help. It is estimated that 37 million Americans lack a high school credential and over 12 million do not speak English well or at all.⁵ The recent results of the international Survey of Adult Skills estimated that 36 million Americans are low-skilled in literacy, and 3 million are eager to gain additional education and training but are hampered by barriers such as transportation, child care, and work schedules.⁶ The barriers for those youth and adults who do enroll in adult education often result in their inability to persist in classroom study long enough to reach their long-term goals of high school equivalency, certificate and college completion, or technical training.

OCTAE is working to expand access to rigorous, meaningful learning for youths and adults through innovative uses of technology that supplement and enrich classroom instruction as well as provide self-study opportunities. To take advantage of these resources, learners must be prepared to use technology.

Given that people of all ages are using libraries as learning sites, library staff can benefit from the expertise of the adult education system, and the specialized tools and resources it has developed. Equally important, the adult education system can increase its reach and visibility in communities and extend learning opportunities by explicitly partnering with libraries.

Working Together

At the State and Local Levels

Many states and local communities are already reaping the benefits of partnerships between public libraries and adult education programs. The examples at the end of this document highlight several model projects that feature partnerships. Some formal and informal partnership activities include

- signed memorandums of understanding or other formal agreements;
- co-location of literacy services with adult education programs and libraries;
- collaborations to cross-train staff on digital literacy and other shared challenges as well as to share resources;

⁴ See data from Program Year 2012-2013 in the Adult Basic Education Fact Sheet at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/facts-figures.html>.

⁵ See data from U.S. Census at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/factsh/us-country-profile.pdf>.

⁶ OECD (2013). *Time for the U.S. to Reskill?: What the Survey of Adult Skills Says*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing. Available at http://skills.oecd.org/Survey_of_Adult_Skills_US.pdf.

- collaborations to build awareness about national and regional Internet access expansion efforts, such as Everyone On⁷; and
- referrals to and promotion of partners' services for patrons and students.

At the National Level

OCTAE and IMLS Current and Planned Activities. As part of this federal effort, sharing of resources, training of staff, and dissemination of information about adult education-library partnerships are both planned and under way. Such activities include

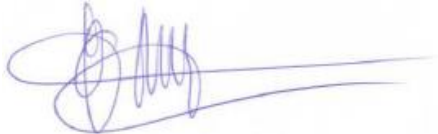
- maintaining, updating, and/or promoting shared locator tools, such as America's Literacy Directory at <https://literacydirectory.org>⁸ and the Digital Literacy Training Locator Tool at www.EveryoneOn.org;
- sharing and promoting opportunities to access low-cost Internet connections and devices, such as Everyone On and Connected Nation;⁹
- developing and promoting self-paced, self-access training for library staff and volunteers to improve their effectiveness in helping patrons gain digital literacy;
- increasing awareness among library staff and tutors about professional development resources and training available on the teaching of foundation skills to youths and adults through <http://LINCS.ed.gov> and the LINCS Regional Professional Development Centers;
- developing literacy tutorials and handy guides to resources developed by OCTAE;
- promoting in-person and online adult education and English literacy resources available through the public adult education system via appropriate websites, newsletters, conferences, and other means;
- collaborating with the National Governors Association, National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, National Coalition for Literacy, American Library Association, Public Library Association, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, Urban Libraries Council, and the Association of Rural and Small Libraries to identify and disseminate examples of partnership activities at the state and local levels among the public adult education system and libraries;
- presenting and archiving webinars for the adult education system and libraries to share examples of partnership activities, and making resources and information on state and local partnerships available on OCTAE's professional development portal at <http://LINCS.ed.gov>; and
- including shared interests in research and technical assistance projects.

⁷ Everyone On, accessible at www.everyoneon.org, is a national non-profit 501(c)3 broker of low-cost Internet service and refurbished high-end devices, and a locator for digital literacy training.

⁸ America's Literacy Directory, available at <https://literacydirectory.org/>, is a service of OCTAE's LINCS portal. Programs are encouraged to keep their entries updated.

⁹ Connected Nation, accessible at www.ConnectedNation.org, is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that expands access to and use of broadband Internet. Its mission is to improve digital inclusion for people and places that are underserved or overlooked.

As libraries strive to be responsive to their communities by offering relevant and dynamic services, providing instruction in foundation skills will assist patrons in meeting their aspirations for educational and employment attainment. Likewise, instruction in digital literacy skills will provide the competencies needed for self-directed study. In sum, partnerships between adult education providers and libraries are a powerful example of shared responsibility for strengthening communities' skills and talent pools.



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APPENDIX: HIGHLIGHTS OF IMLS-SUPPORTED PROJECTS FEATURING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE PUBLIC ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

STATE PROJECTS

California Library Literacy Services Emergency Funding

Emergency federal grant funds were provided for fiscal year 2011 to California Library Literacy Services libraries at risk of losing their adult literacy programs before January 2012 due to state budget developments. The funds supported recruiting and training volunteer tutors; matching tutors and learner pairs and providing them ongoing support; purchasing appropriate materials to address learner needs; and periodically assessing learner progress. Through these funds, 4,096 volunteer tutors were able to contribute 205,044 hours to 10,675 adult learners.¹⁰

Kanu o ka 'Aina Learning 'Ohana, Kamuela, Hawaii

Kanu o ka 'Aina Learning 'Ohana (KALO), a Hawaiian nonprofit organization in Waimea on Hawai'i Island, began in 2012 to provide college readiness and career development services to five target communities located in the South Kohala District, four of which are federally designated Hawaiian Homelands. They use the resources of their newly built Halau Puke Native Hawaiian Library and work in close partnership with six community-based and statewide organizations that specialize in college readiness and career and workforce development. Together, they provide a variety of services to local Native Hawaiian college-ready high school seniors and adults interested in attending college. They also offer activities to develop career-related skills for Native Hawaiians seeking employment, a career change, or increased wages, and to entrepreneurs wanting to start a small business.¹¹

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Free Library Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Free Library Foundation and its partners are using a 2013 planning grant to create a detailed service plan to address the need for the improvement of adult literacy and job training programs in southwest Philadelphia. Project activities include creating an advisory council of community organizations, assessing current services and the gaps in programming, creating a communication plan to outline how to share data, and making recommendations for implementing the plan. The overall outcome will inform decisions about the resources and services provided while strengthening the role of the library as a tool for connecting resources in a community.¹²

Providence Public Library, Providence, Rhode Island

To address the needs of the underserved populations in its area, Providence Public Library is using its FY 2013 grant to create Adult Lifelong Learning Access (ALLACCESS). This program will spur stakeholders across Rhode Island to implement models for increasing access to digital literacy, adult education, and workforce services at both Providence and Cranston, two of the

¹⁰ <http://libraryliteracy.org/docs/ReportToLeg-2013.pdf> (pp. 10–13)

¹¹ http://www.kalo.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=209468&type=d&pREC_ID=464848

¹² <http://search.freelibrary.org/>

state's leading public libraries. They and their statewide partners are demonstrating methods for integrating library, adult education, and workforce services to support adults with low education attainment, low English literacy, disabilities, or low digital literacy. This will clearly establish the important role of community libraries in serving these four key populations, whose needs cannot be met by the current workforce and adult education systems alone.¹³

[Portland State University, Millar Library, Portland, Oregon](#)

Portland State University, in collaboration with its partners, received a national leadership grant in 2011 to conduct extensive mining and analysis of data from more than 23,000 adult users of the IMLS-funded Learner Web, a learning support system for adults. Learner Web helps adults accomplish specific personal goals, such as earning a General Equivalency Diploma, improving their English language abilities, and increasing their digital literacy skills. This research is providing unique and important information about the learning processes of various hard-to-serve populations and how libraries can better tailor tutoring opportunities to meet their diverse needs. Project partners include the state libraries of California, Louisiana, Minnesota, New York, and Texas, the City of Richmond Public Library, Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy at Loyola University New Orleans, Minnesota Literacy Council, Regional Adult Education Network at Cayuga Community College, Literacy Coalition of Central Texas, and South Texas College.¹⁴

¹³ <http://allaccessri.org/>

¹⁴ <http://library.pdx.edu/grants.html>