

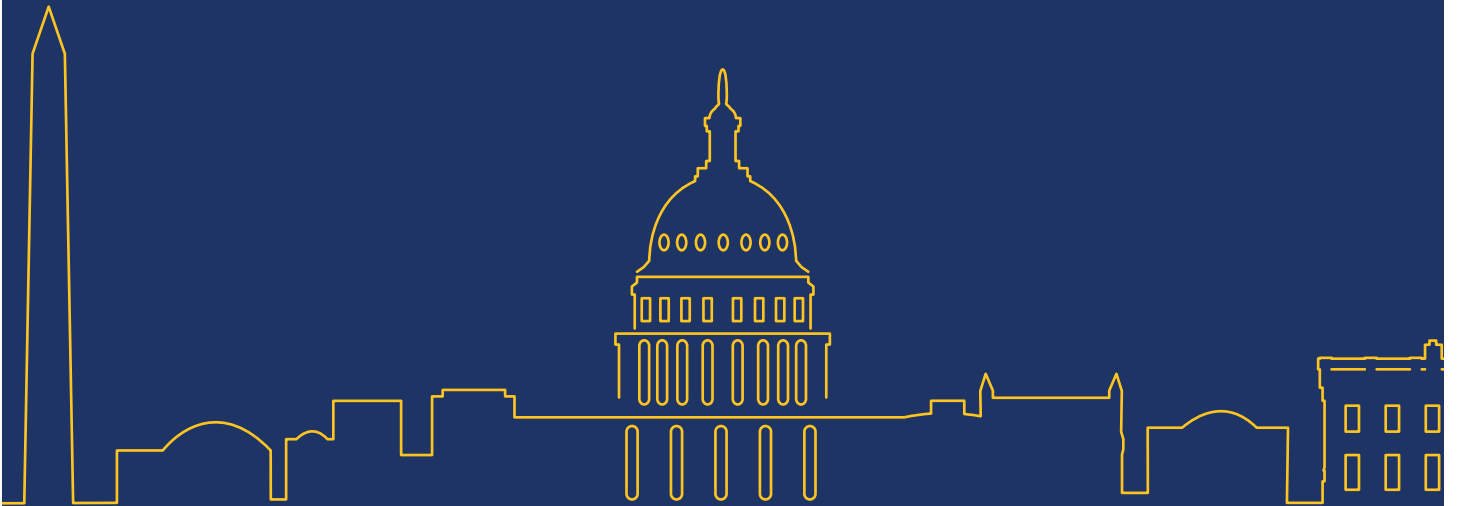


BARBARA BUSH  
FOUNDATION *for*  
FAMILY LITERACY

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR

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ADULT  
LITERACY  
2021



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# INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Conceived and convened by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy seeks to address the urgent and entrenched crisis of low literacy in the United States.

Grounded in partnership and a commitment to evidence-based practices and practical solutions, this collaborative plan will be transformative. It has the potential to redefine how American society supports not just adult literacy but adult education in general, thereby improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities living in vulnerable circumstances.

The Barbara Bush Foundation would like to acknowledge the expertise and thoughtful contributions of our National Action Plan working group members (listed in Annex I), as well as other stakeholders who provided valuable input during the process of building this plan: subject matter experts, practitioners, advocates,

adult learners, and literacy champions. These partners are helping us shape and pursue our common vision: a country where every adult can easily access high-quality, effective support to improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills – regardless of who or where they are.

Finally, the Barbara Bush Foundation wishes to thank our longtime partner, the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, for their generous support of the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy, and Denine Torr, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility & Philanthropy for Dollar General, for her leadership as co-chair of this effort.



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<sup>1</sup>Sources for all figures cited in the Executive Summary are included in the footnotes.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. THE CHALLENGE: PERVASIVE LOW LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES

**More than half (54%) of American adults read below a sixth-grade level. About 43 million Americans—nearly one in five adults—read below a third-grade level, and only 10% of all adults in need of literacy support are currently receiving services.<sup>1</sup>**

**Low literacy reduces income, health, and quality of life for individuals and imposes massive costs on society.** One-third of adults with low literacy skills are unemployed, and the average annual income of those who are employed, at \$34,000, is nearly two times lower than those of workers with even slightly higher levels of literacy. Adults with low literacy are much more likely to be dependent on public assistance programs and they experience higher rates of hospitalization and more frequent use of emergency room facilities – they are five times more likely to report being in poor health than other adults. More than 70% of incarcerated Americans have low literacy skills. A Gallup study commissioned by the Barbara Bush Foundation estimated that the U.S. economy would generate an additional *\$2.2 trillion per year* if all adults could read at or above a sixth-grade level.

**Low literacy affects not only adults but entire families – and persists across generations.** Children of parents with limited reading and writing skills have a 72% chance of being at the lowest level of literacy themselves in adulthood, and 88%

of children under age six whose parents did not complete high school live in poverty. Low literacy is both a cause and an effect of the cycle of persistent poverty and racial inequity in the United States: More than half of adults with low literacy are Black or Hispanic.

**Addressing the challenge of low literacy is both a pressing need and an unprecedented opportunity.** The pace of economic change is accelerating, leaving adults with low literacy—and their children—even farther behind as more and more jobs demand basic literacy skills. The COVID-19 crisis, which hurt low-income workers disproportionately and further reduced the availability of low-skill service jobs, highlights the urgency of addressing low literacy. At the same time, the pandemic has created opportunities. Along with the growing antiracism movement, it highlighted longstanding injustices and offers a chance to raise awareness of low literacy as one of the core manifestations of inequity. The ongoing pandemic has encouraged literacy programs to offer remote, digital learning options. The combination of privacy and accessibility that digital and remote learning options offer has allowed many adult learners, some for the first time, to improve their literacy skills. While many challenges remain, including a need to improve digital literacy, the capacity to reach and teach adults with low literacy has never been more promising.

## 2. THE RESPONSE: A COORDINATED, FIVE-PRONGED NATIONAL INITIATIVE

This National Action Plan for Adult Literacy (NAP) is the result of extensive consultations with experts and educators, as well as employers, funders, public officials, and adult learners. More than 100 stakeholders contributed to the development of this plan.

Our shared vision is a country where every adult can easily access high-quality, effective support to improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills – regardless of who or where they are. The NAP aims to generate a substantial

increase in access, quality, and uptake of literacy support programs, through five interdependent initiatives, together comprising 10 specific actions.

This National Action Plan will support, highlight, and attract new resources to the many efforts that are already underway to increase access, quality, and uptake of adult literacy programs around the country. It will leverage, not supplant, existing resources and it will expedite progress by providing a framework and a forum for coordination.

## NAP INITIATIVES AND ACTIONS

### I. Raise Awareness and Advocate for Change

1. Launch a national grass tops campaign to raise support for adult literacy programs
2. Follow up with a national grass roots awareness campaign to encourage uptake
3. Launch a national Advocacy Accelerator

### II. Expand Outcomes-Focused Research

4. Create a landscape analysis of low literacy and literacy support programs
5. Build a central clearinghouse for data and research
6. Mobilize funding and incentives for rigorous research on adult literacy

### III. Support Adult Literacy Instructors

7. Create and distribute user-friendly, evidence-based training material
8. Support a nationwide credentialing program for adult literacy instructors

### IV. Catalyze Low-Cost, High-Impact Innovation

9. Launch a catalytic grants program to fund early-stage innovations in adult literacy programming

### V. Engage Adult Learners as Movement Leaders

10. Fund and launch an Adult Learner Leadership fellowship program

## 3. NEXT STEPS: LAUNCHING A NAP COORDINATING COUNCIL AND CONSORTIUM

Implementation of this NAP will be guided by a **multisectoral Coordinating Council**, which will include senior representatives from leading national organizations in the field of adult literacy (including adult learners) as well as foundations, government agencies, corporate partners, and employers – serving as champions, guides, and movement leaders.

**Reporting to the Council, a team of professionals focused exclusively on implementing the NAP (called the “Consortium”) will mobilize resources, coordinate efforts, and take responsibility for ensuring that the NAP’s goals are achieved.** The Consortium will lead implementation of the 10 actions, drawing on support from groups of specialists as needed. Across all 10 actions, the Consortium will also mobilize funding and in-kind contributions, facilitate cooperation among stakeholders and broker partnerships, and report progress.

**This National Action Plan is a roadmap rather than a destination.** As implementation of the NAP moves forward, the Coordinating Council, the Consortium, and other stakeholders will build on existing initiatives *and* generate new ideas as new needs and opportunities are discovered. What is most important is to begin now. We must move forward, together, in a coordinated way, cognizant of the need for bold changes and focused squarely on achieving our shared vision of a country in which everyone, everywhere, can access high-quality, effective literacy support services that help them improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills, and thus enjoy a better quality of life for themselves and their children.

**With the full support of such a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, there is every reason to believe that the National Action Plan will be successful in achieving its goals over the next five years and beyond.**

# I. THE CHALLENGE: PERVASIVE LOW LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES

More than half (54%) of American adults read below a sixth-grade level. About 43 million Americans—nearly one in five adults—read below a third-grade level,<sup>1</sup> finding it difficult or impossible to fill out a job application, take a driving test, understand a news article, cast a ballot, or read a book with their children. The problem is not that these adults lack intelligence, capability, or motivation. The problem is that too few of them are receiving help – their literacy learning needs are not being met. Only 10% of all adults in need of reading/writing education in the United States are participating in literacy programs.<sup>2</sup> In New York City, fewer than 4% of adults seeking literacy education can get into classes in any given year.<sup>3</sup> Around the country, 50% of literacy support programs are currently oversubscribed.<sup>4</sup>

Low literacy reduces income, health, and quality of life for individuals and imposes massive costs on society. One-third of adults at the lowest levels of literacy (i.e., PIAAC Level 1 and below) are unemployed.<sup>5</sup> The average annual income of adults with low literacy who are employed, at \$34,000, is nearly two times lower than the incomes of workers with even slightly higher levels of literacy, and about two-thirds of employed adults with low literacy earn less than \$16,000 per year.<sup>6</sup>

## WHAT IS LITERACY?

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is an international, large-scale survey that defines literacy as “understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” The survey ranks literacy levels on a scale of 1 (least literate) to 5 (most literate). Level 3 is considered the minimum level for proficiency in literacy, so “low literacy” refers to the inability to read or write at or above that level. In the U.S., PIAAC estimates that 54% of adults are at Level 2 or below, with nearly 20% at Level 1 or below.

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (BBF) estimates that PIAAC Level 2 is roughly equivalent to a fifth-grade reading level, while PIAAC Level 1 is similar to a second-grade reading level. This approximation is consistent with equivalencies used by the U.K.’s [National Literacy Trust](#) and others.

Associating PIAAC’s adult literacy levels with U.S. K-12 grade levels is a simplification which, admittedly, does not reflect the life skills, experience, and knowledge that adults with low literacy possess. It is, however, an effective way to help non-experts understand what the PIAAC literacy levels describe.

A full description of PIAAC literacy levels can be found at [nces.ed.gov/survey/piaac/litproficiencylevel.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/survey/piaac/litproficiencylevel.asp).

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<sup>1</sup>The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), also known as the Survey of Adult Skills, is a large-scale, international, household study conducted under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In the United States, PIAAC is funded and led by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). PIAAC ranks literacy levels on a scale of 1 (least literate) to 5 (most literate). Level 3 – which roughly equates to a minimum 6th grade reading level – is considered the minimum level for proficiency in literacy. PIAAC survey results indicate that 54% of American adults are at Level 2 or below, with just under 20% at Level 1 (equivalent to 3rd grade reading proficiency) or below. For more information, visit: <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/litproficiencylevel.asp>

<sup>2</sup>ProLiteracy, *Annual Statistic Report 2019-2020*: <https://www.proliteracy.org/Resources-Publications/Media-Kit/Statistical-Report>

<sup>3</sup>Literacy Assistance Center (2020) *Literacy & Justice: A Call for Transformative Action*. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fW4scuzRYn8bUPrx-hZ4tTBjtsCTAcvMM/view> - citing research at: <https://economicmobilitycorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SteppingUp.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>ProLiteracy, *Annual Member Statistical Report 2019-2020*: <https://www.proliteracy.org/Resources-Publications/Media-Kit/Statistical-Report>

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Making skills everyone’s business: A call to transform adult learning in the United States*. Washington, DC: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/making-skills.pdf>

Adults with low literacy also experience higher rates of hospitalization and more frequent use of emergency room facilities; they are five times more likely to report being in poor health than adults with better reading and writing skills.<sup>7</sup> ProLiteracy estimates that up to \$238 billion in health care costs per year are linked to low literacy,<sup>8</sup> while a Gallup study commissioned by the Barbara Bush Foundation estimated that the U.S. economy would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion per year if all adults could read at or above a sixth-grade level.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, it is well known

that the U.S. incarcerates many more people on a per capita basis than almost any other country in the world.<sup>10</sup> What is less well known is that 70% of the nearly 2 million Americans in state and federal prison today are classified as having low literacy skills.<sup>11</sup> Individuals without a high-school diploma (who are more likely to have low literacy skills) are 63% more likely to be incarcerated than college graduates,<sup>12</sup> so low literacy is associated with higher rates of incarceration, which imposes a substantial, direct cost on federal and state governments.

## SPOTLIGHT ON PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Low literacy among the incarcerated is associated with higher rates of recidivism, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that [almost 68% of recently released prisoners were rearrested within three years](#) of being released. But recidivism declines with education. For example, among prisoners with a bachelor's degree, the recidivism rate is less than 6%. The rate of recidivism among individuals who participated in prison education programs is 43% lower than the rate for all recently released prisoners.

About 70% of incarcerated Americans would like to enroll in an academic course or training program, but only 42% are currently enrolled, due to the limited capacity of such programs (according to [a report from the National Center for Education Statistics](#)). The good news is that, around the country, there are innovative, successful prison education programs that could be expanded and/or replicated to make literacy support, job training, and even

higher education available to more incarcerated individuals, thus lowering the recidivism rate – which both saves money and transforms lives for the better. Examples include:

- The [Hampden County \(MA\) Sheriff's Department](#) has served as a model of effective prison education for more than 40 years, offering adult literacy courses, special education, vocational training, and credit courses with local colleges at five facilities in western Massachusetts. These facilities have close relationships with American Job Centers, which enable students to receive job placements, workforce readiness training, and gain access to any other necessary services like mental health and substance abuse programs.
- The [Petey Greene Program](#) is the largest multistate volunteer tutoring program that provides educational services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated

individuals across 50 different correctional facilities. The program has over 1,000 volunteer tutors from 30 different universities. Recently, the program has been exploring the use of “blending learning”—mixing in-person tutoring with remote, digital engagement—to expand its reach and impact.

The [Correctional Education Association](#) leads a number of initiatives to strengthen and expand literacy programs within correctional facilities, and the [Coalition on Adult Basic Education](#) launched the COABE Literacy Behind & Beyond the Walls committee to bring together educators, administrators, and leaders in the criminal justice education space to support educators in bringing adult education programs into prisons across the country, so that incarcerated and re-entering Americans can improve their literacy skills and enhance their chances of finding and maintaining living-wage jobs.

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Bush Foundation, *Engaging Low-Literate Adults in Literacy Learning: Summary of a Targeted Landscape Analysis*.

<sup>7</sup> Berkman, Sheridan, Donahue & Halpern, “Low Health Literacy and Health Outcomes: An Updated Systematic Review.” *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 2011

<sup>8</sup> Vernon, J. A., Trujillo, A., Rosenbaum, S. & DeBuono, B. (2007, October). *Low Health Literacy: Implications for National Health Policy*. Health Sciences Research Commons. Washington, DC: George Washington University. [http://hsrc.himmelfarb.gwu.edu/sphhs\\_policy\\_fac-pubs/172/](http://hsrc.himmelfarb.gwu.edu/sphhs_policy_fac-pubs/172/)

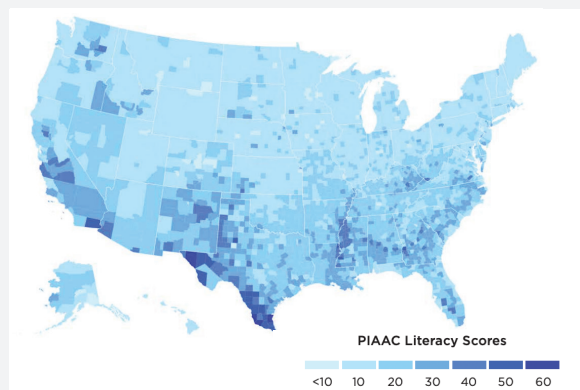
**Low literacy affects not only adults but entire families – and persists across generations,** feeding the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Children of low-literate parents have a 72% chance of being at the lowest level of literacy themselves in adulthood, and 88% of children under age six whose parents did not complete high school live in poverty.<sup>13</sup> The single most important determinant of a child’s future academic achievement is her mother’s level of education.<sup>14</sup> Low literacy is thus both a cause and an effect of persistent poverty and inequity in the United States.

**Low literacy reflects America’s racial inequities as well as its diversity.** More than half of adults with low literacy are Black or Hispanic – Black and Hispanic Americans are about three times more likely to have low literacy skills than White individuals and 77% of adults who attend federally funded literacy programs are people of color.<sup>15</sup> The highest concentrations of adults with low literacy are in rural counties in the south and southwest, along with urban “poverty pockets” in the country’s larger cities, but low literacy is pervasive in all 50 states – every single county in the United States has a low literacy rate of at least 6%, and most counties’ rate exceeds 20%.<sup>16</sup>

Two-thirds of the 43 million adults at the lowest level of literacy were born in the United States, while the remaining one-third are immigrants, among whom the range of English language learning needs is as diverse as the population.<sup>17</sup> Across both groups, individuals’ personal backgrounds and reasons for low

literacy are complex and varied. Some struggle with learning disabilities, which might have gone undiagnosed and untreated in their youth; others were unable to complete school due to physical or mental health challenges or difficult family situations; while others attended schools that failed to meet their learning needs.

## THE LITERACY GAP MAP



The Barbara Bush Foundation’s *Literacy Gap Map* visually represents the relationship of literacy to health, income, and education nationwide—showing low literacy’s intersection with some of today’s most pressing issues. In addition to county-level statistics, the map includes information on all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 22 key metro areas, providing state and local leaders, educators, and philanthropists with critical data to inform resource development and decision making. The map can be found online at [map.barbarabush.org](http://map.barbarabush.org)

<sup>9</sup> Rothwell, J. (2020, September). *Assessing the Economic Gains of Eradicating Illiteracy Nationally and Regionally in the United States*. Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. <https://www.barbarabush.org/new-economic-study/>.

<sup>10</sup> Prison Policy Initiative: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>

<sup>11</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Adult Literacy: [https://nces.ed.gov/naal/prison\\_lit.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/naal/prison_lit.asp)

<sup>12</sup> The Relationship Between Incarceration and Low Literacy - Literacy Mid-South: [literacymidsouth.org](http://literacymidsouth.org)

<sup>13</sup> National Institutes for Health, *Improving mothers’ literacy skills may be best way to boost children’s achievement*, 2010

<sup>14</sup> National Institutes for Health, *Improving mothers’ literacy skills may be best way to boost children’s achievement*, 2010

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *Statewide Performance Report – WIOA Title II Adult Education Program*, 2019

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Bush Foundation, *Literacy Gap Map*: <https://www.barbarabush.org/resource/literacy-gap-map/>

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Bush Foundation, *Engaging Low-Literate Adults in Literacy Learning: Summary of a Targeted Landscape Analysis*, based on PIAAC 2012/2014 report.



Americans with low literacy are diverse in terms of their ages as well as their backgrounds. One-third of them are young adults, who will struggle to find gainful employment in an economy where, by 2024, 80% of all job openings will require more than a high school diploma.<sup>18</sup>

**The pervasive challenge of low literacy has been largely unrecognized. Consequently, solutions have been underfunded and under-researched.** Most Americans are unaware of the “silent challenge” of low literacy, and many people with low literacy do not identify as such. Even those adults who acknowledge their literacy challenges can be reluctant to tell others, for fear of being stigmatized or denied opportunities to advance. Municipal and state governments often do not publicize their rates of low literacy for similar reasons. This drives

the lack of public awareness of the issue, which in turn contributes to a lack of political will and public funding for adult literacy. As noted earlier, only 10% of adults with low literacy are currently accessing services, and many adult literacy programs are oversubscribed. According to the National Skills Coalition, federal funding for adult basic education programs declined by more than 20% over the 15 years leading up to 2017.<sup>19</sup> ProLiteracy reports that only 36% of its member literacy programs received any state or federal funding in 2018, down from 75% in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> To put the situation in context, federal, state, and local governments currently spend \$14,484 per student/year on K-12 public education, on average,<sup>21</sup> versus an average of only \$438 per student/year for adult basic education (ABE).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2015 and American Community Survey data, 2015

<sup>19</sup> National Skills Coalition, *Invest in America's Workforce: We Can't Compete If We Cut*, 2017

<sup>20</sup> ProLiteracy: [https://www.proliteracy.org/portals/0/pdf/research/white%20papers/2019-03\\_united%20way%20white%20paper\\_f.pdf?ver=2019-05-03-144858-000](https://www.proliteracy.org/portals/0/pdf/research/white%20papers/2019-03_united%20way%20white%20paper_f.pdf?ver=2019-05-03-144858-000)

<sup>21</sup> <https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics>

<sup>22</sup> *Career, Technical, and Adult Education Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Request* (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget21/justifications/n-ctae.pdf>; Per the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE), there are currently 1.5 million ABE learners in the U.S. <https://coabe.org/who-we-serve/>

## SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESSFUL PLACE-BASED ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

Despite a chronic lack of funding and limited public awareness, hundreds if not thousands of relatively small, local literacy support programs around the country work hard to help adult learners improve their literacy skills, generating life-changing results. Here are some examples:

- [Trident Literacy Association](#) began in 1972 as a small network of tutors and has now grown into a leading adult education agency in the Charleston, South Carolina area, serving more than 1,000 students every year. Trident takes a tailored and holistic approach to adult learning, creating an individualized learning plan for each student based on the results of an initial exam. Trident also offers programs to help adult learners find employment and has partnered with Charleston County First Steps to provide adult learners with a free early childhood and family literacy program for their children. In 2019, more than 40 graduates earned their GED.
  - [The Goodwill Excel Center](#) in Washington, D.C. was founded in 2016 to support students in earning a high school diploma. Every year, some 370 adult learners enroll at the Center, which offers them more than 35 courses including fundamental reading and writing skills. Goodwill Excel employs a flexible education model offering 8-week terms to help students earn credits faster while maintaining small class sizes and providing tutoring support. Goodwill Excel Center also provides students with several accommodations including transportation assistance and onsite YMCA Child Development Centers.
- Seventy-one percent of Goodwill Excel Center's graduates are either enrolled in college or employed six months after graduation.
- [Strong City Baltimore's](#) Adult Learning Center provides free Adult Basic Education and English Language Acquisition courses to adults in Baltimore, MD. The Adult Learning Center reaches over 500 adults every year and recently worked with [ByteBack](#) to offer digital literacy courses to students. The Adult Learning Center also provides students with supplemental assistance including a one-on-one tutor and a learner advocate who help students achieve other non-academic life goals. In addition to its Adult Learning Center, Strong City Baltimore offers an afterschool and summer program for over 100 children and works to strengthen local community schools.
  - [The Irving \(TX\) Independent School District Adult Education and Literacy Program](#) was founded to increase literacy levels among adults in the Irving community, and more than 650 adults have participated in the program so far. Over 49% of Irving's population speaks a language other than English, so the program offers English as a second language and citizenship courses in addition to digital literacy, GED, and family literacy courses. Recently, Irving ISD's Adult Education and Literacy program received the Trailblazer award from Workforce Solutions of Greater Dallas for its impact in educating adults in the community.

**Limited visibility and insufficient funding have led to a dearth of research on adult low literacy.** The latest government-sponsored, national study of adults with low literacy, the U.S. Department of Education's *National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, was conducted in 2003 – nearly 20 years ago. The most recent update from the Department of Education, published in

2019,<sup>23</sup> relies on data collected nearly a decade ago (2011-2013)—and partially updated in 2017—by PIAAC, using a very small sample.<sup>24</sup> Since the base survey was completed, the U.S. population has grown by about 10% and become substantially more diverse.<sup>25</sup> While the Department of Education and PIAAC data provides basic information on the identity and location of adults

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<sup>23</sup> *Adult Literacy in the United States* (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Sciences, 2019): <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019179.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> The PIAAC survey employs a sample of 5,000 people per nation.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

with low literacy, much less is known about why their literacy skills are low. Much more remains to be understood about adult learners and their needs – and how best to meet them.

The last independent research review, *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research*, dates back to 2012. Published by the National Research Council, the report noted that there was “a surprising lack of research on the effectiveness of...instructional practices for adults seeking to improve their literacy skills. The lack of relevant research is especially striking given the history of both federal funding for adult education programs, albeit stretched thin, and reliance on developmental education courses to remediate college students’ skills.” The situation has not improved much since then. Today, the body of knowledge on adult literacy in the U.S. remains sparse, lacking the high-quality datasets needed for research that can be translated into cost-effective, replicable solutions.

**The work of teaching literacy skills to adults is overlooked and undervalued.** The field of adult basic education, which includes literacy instruction, receives far less attention in academia than early childhood, K-12, or tertiary education. Thus, there is not only a lack of data and research—which means a paucity of high-quality, evidence-based instructional resources—but also a lack of investment in professional development for adult literacy instructors, most of whom are part-time or volunteer and few of whom receive competitive compensation.<sup>26</sup> The lack of competitive salaries and professional development opportunities deter many promising teachers

from entering the field, as does the dearth of proven, accessible training materials.

**For these reasons, access to adult literacy programs has not significantly improved over the past few decades,** and the rate of low literacy has remained stuck at about one in five Americans – despite the tireless and ongoing work of thousands of adult educators and literacy advocates. Improved awareness, increased investment in research and training, and a proactive movement to spur innovations could “bend the trend” on adult literacy—reversing the intergenerational cycle of low literacy and poverty, along with persistent social injustice and racial inequity—that have plagued the United States for far too long.

**Today, addressing the challenge of low literacy is both a pressing need and an unprecedented opportunity.** The pace of economic change is accelerating, and the income gap between high/medium-skilled workers and low/unskilled workers will continue to widen, leaving adults with low literacy—and their children—even farther behind as more and more jobs demand solid literacy skills. At the same time, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American businesses of every size, across every industry, and in every state are struggling to fill open positions with even minimally qualified workers. As of June 2021, the U.S. labor shortage is “a national economic emergency, and it poses an imminent threat to our fragile recovery.”<sup>27</sup> Criminal justice reform has helped drive a marked reduction in the number of people in prison – and a corresponding increase in the number of adults with unmet literacy needs in society, in need of meaningful employment.<sup>28</sup> The COVID-19 crisis, which

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<sup>26</sup> <https://nrsweb.org/sites/default/files/Topic-2-Education-Providers.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> *U.S. Chamber Launches Nationwide Initiative to Address National Worker Shortage Crisis and Help America’s Employers Fill Jobs*. (June 1, 2021) <https://www.uschamber.com/press-release/us-chamber-launches-nationwide-initiative-address-national-worker-shortage-crisis-and>

<sup>28</sup> The Sentencing Project, *U.S. Prison Decline: Insufficient to Undo Mass Incarceration* (<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/u-s-prison-decline-insufficient-undo-mass-incarceration/>)

has hurt low-income workers disproportionately and reduced the availability of low-skill service jobs, highlights the urgency of helping adults with low literacy improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills.

COVID-19 has also created opportunities to innovate and address the challenge of low literacy in new ways. The pandemic, along with the growing antiracist movement, highlighted longstanding inequities in health, housing, safety, education, and employment, and offers an opportunity to raise awareness of low literacy as one of the fundamental manifestations of inequity – as well as appreciation for the benefits that addressing the challenge can generate.

More directly, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis created an opportunity for many adults with low literacy to access the support they need. A number of literacy instructors and adult learners have reported that the option to learn remotely has sparked an increase in participation in literacy programs. While many adult learners lack the hardware, broadband connection, and/or digital skills to engage in remote learning, many others have done so successfully. The combination of privacy and accessibility (e.g., not having to travel to a physical classroom) has allowed many adult learners, some for the first time, to improve their literacy skills. In parallel, the COVID-19 crisis forced many educators to learn to use digital tools and showed them how these tools can be leveraged to enhance learning and expand access: The Evidence-Based Adult Education System (E-BAES) found, in a mid-2020 survey, that 97% of program administrators who responded to the survey had transitioned at least

## LEVERAGING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO REACH ADULT LEARNERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

In 2019, Adult Literacy Partners of Houston earned an opportunity to pilot-test two new apps, Learning Upgrade and Cell-Ed, as part of the Barbara Bush Foundation's Adult Literacy XPRIZE initiative presented by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation.

The pilot consisted of an awareness campaign including e-blasts, social media posts, text sharing, and even groups of team trainers that visited literacy programs around Houston to help teach instructors how to use the apps with their students.

When Houston experienced lockdowns in early 2020 in the wake of the pandemic, only those literacy programs that either had a pre-existing digital delivery option and/or had participated in Adult Literacy Partners' pilot program were able to open their virtual doors and quickly resume providing services. While many primary and secondary schools were still struggling to provide remote learning options, 14 adult literacy providers in Greater Houston were already conducting classes – collectively serving more than 9,000 learners in April and May 2020.

some services to distance learning formats.<sup>29</sup> While challenges remain, the capacity to “reach and teach” low-literate adults has never been more promising.

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<sup>29</sup><https://edtech.worlded.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WEI-for-BMGF-Adult-Ed-COVID19-Response-8.2020.pdf>

## II. THE RESPONSE: A COORDINATED, FIVE-PRONGED NATIONAL INITIATIVE

**This National Action Plan for Adult Literacy (NAP) is the result of extensive consultations with experts and educators, as well as employers, funders, public officials, and adult learners.** In November 2019, a broad array of dedicated professionals came together at the inaugural National Summit on Adult Literacy, coordinated by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (BBF). These professionals organized themselves into working groups—each exploring a specific issue in depth—that collectively prioritized needs and developed a set of detailed recommendations to address them. The Barbara Bush Foundation then shared the working groups’ recommendations with an even larger group of stakeholders to garner their feedback and, in parallel, spoke with adult learners at several sites around the country to understand their diverse experiences and aspirations. Overall, more than 100 individuals—representing virtually all the leading national organizations engaged in adult literacy, as well as employers, government agencies, corporate partners, and funders—provided information and ideas that contributed to this National Action Plan.

**Our shared vision is a country where every adult can easily access high-quality, effective support to improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills – regardless of who or where they are.** The NAP has three broad goals:

1. **Access:** Make literacy support services accessible to everyone who wants them.
2. **Quality:** Ensure that literacy programs are effective and efficient in helping adults improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills.
3. **Uptake:** Encourage more adults to engage in support programs that improve their literacy, digital, and numeracy skills.

**These goals are mutually reinforcing: Improving access and quality will result in increased uptake, while greater uptake will generate more support for further enhancing quality and access.**

**Achieving this vision will require sustained and concerted efforts across five initiatives:**

1. **Raise Awareness and Advocate for Change**
2. **Expand Outcomes-Focused Research**
3. **Support Adult Literacy Educators**
4. **Catalyze Low-Cost, High-Impact Innovation**
5. **Engage Adult Learners as Movement Leaders**

Each of these five initiatives is explained in the following pages, along with a **set of 10 specific actions** that will be launched under the auspices of this National Action Plan, building on and bringing together the many efforts that are already underway around the country.

**The response to the challenge of low literacy must be *bold, multifaceted, and coordinated* across these five initiatives.** The stakeholders agreed that achieving transformative improvement in adult literacy in the U.S. will require fundamental changes in the way literacy support is shaped, funded, and delivered – along with major infusions of new resources, energy, and innovation. Modest, incremental changes will not be enough.

**Moreover, work on all five initiatives must take place in parallel, rather than in sequence – because the challenges are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and because Americans with low literacy and their families need more support now.** Lastly, the response must be simultaneously local and national – with place-based initiatives around the country sharing ideas and resources with each other while, at the national level, adult literacy advocates, innovators, and

researchers promote their efforts and provide them with resources. With so many disparate stakeholders across the country aiming to make transformative changes, it will be critical to have an empowered, accountable, and competent coordinating entity to facilitate partnerships, share resources, and track progress. Section 3 describes the plan for coordinating implementation of the NAP and tracking progress toward its goals.

## **INITIATIVE 1: RAISE AWARENESS AND ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE**

As explained in Section 1, low literacy is a pervasive but largely invisible crisis. Most Americans do not recognize how extensive or detrimental it is, while many adult learners may be reluctant to share their experiences or are simply too busy to lend their voice to the cause. Lacking a clear constituency in support of adult literacy, legislators and local officials typically do not treat it as a high priority. As a result, public funding and policy guidance are limited, which stymies research, innovation, and professional development opportunities for educators. Raising public awareness and advocating for more (and better) public support are therefore both mutually supporting and foundational activities, essential for breaking the cycle of neglect that has hindered progress in adult literacy for so long.

The National Action plan calls for three specific actions under this initiative:

- 1. Launch a national grass tops campaign to raise support for adult literacy** among key stakeholders, including employers; foundations; local, state, and federal officials; and other key opinion leaders. The objectives of the campaign will be to: 1) build a constituency of influential leaders who will persuade government to increase funding

and update policies in support of adult literacy, and 2) inspire these leaders to take direct action themselves (e.g., by providing funds, integrating literacy into employee training programs, supporting literacy programming in correctional facilities, investing in research, and contributing to a grass roots awareness campaign).

- 2. Follow up with a national, grass roots awareness campaign to encourage uptake of literacy support programs among adults with low literacy.** The experience of successful awareness-building efforts focused on seatbelt use, drunk driving, littering, and other issues has shown that a creative, sustained campaign can drive large-scale and lasting behavior change – especially when carried out in partnership with a variety of organizations, including media, government, employers, and consumer-facing companies. Once the grass tops campaign has begun to generate tangible improvements in access to high-quality literacy support programs, the next step is to encourage more adults with low literacy to take advantage of those programs

by advertising them and showcasing the many benefits of improved literacy.

- 3. Build a national Advocacy Accelerator to equip and empower advocates across the country.** The NAP calls for the creation of an Advocacy Accelerator – an entity that will provide training, content, networking opportunities, and other forms of support to champions of adult literacy around the country to enable them to advocate more effectively for increased funding and more supportive policies to promote adult literacy. The Advocacy Accelerator will both build on and contribute to advocacy efforts currently led by organizations like the National Skills Coalition, the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE), and the National Coalition for Literacy.

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER COUNTRIES: SPOTLIGHT ON IRELAND

Ireland's National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) launched the "[Take the First Step](#)" initiative in 2020: a national public campaign to encourage adults to improve their skills in literacy and numeracy. The campaign aims to fight the negative stigma associated with returning to education and help people "take the first step" in reaching out to their local adult education center. The campaign features adult learners and their experiences with adult education and is advertised on radio stations and digital sites.

## INITIATIVE 2: EXPAND OUTCOMES-FOCUSED RESEARCH

Also as described in Section 1, we simply do not know enough about the profiles and needs of adult learners, due to chronic underinvestment in data gathering and research. While programs that receive federal funds are required to collect certain data on adult learners, other programs do not collect this information systematically. In addition to a lack of robust, quantitative data regarding the *demographic* characteristics of adults with low literacy (e.g., their ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, locations, levels of education), there is also an important gap in our understanding of their *psychographic* characteristics – how they learn best, what their fears and aspirations are, how they understand their own reading and writing skills and, importantly, what inspires them to seek help or prevents them from doing so.

There is also an opportunity to generate more specific knowledge about "what works" in helping adults improve their literacy skills—especially as educators experiment with remote and "blended learning" techniques facilitated by

digital technology—and ensure that these best practices are widely adopted across the country. The NAP envisions three concurrent activities under this initiative:

- 4. Create a landscape analysis of low literacy.** The Dollar General Literacy Foundation has launched a new project to build a Literacy Index that measures the "gap between what is needed for adults (and children) to improve literacy and what tools and resources are available to them in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic." The NAP will support this initiative by augmenting Dollar General's qualitative research with quantitative measures that yield hard data, which—in conjunction with the Literacy Index's qualitative findings—will be used to inform the development of replicable, scalable interventions. Specifically, the NAP will build a comprehensive database of literacy programs across the country—including both federally-funded and non-federally funded

programs—with information on the adult learners those programs serve.

- 5. Build a central clearinghouse of data and research on adult literacy in the U.S.** The team charged with coordinating implementation of the NAP will bring together existing data from the U.S. and state-level departments of education and labor, public and private universities, and other sources, along with quantitative and qualitative research on the utility and impact of existing literacy interventions—not just from the U.S., but also from other countries—as well as relevant research on the science of adult learning. Information and insights will be indexed, made available for free or at low cost, and proactively disseminated.
- 6. Mobilize funding and create incentives for world-class research on adult literacy.** The NAP team will work with the adult education, academic, and research communities to prioritize specific research questions, recruit participating programs, and mobilize private and public funding to underwrite targeted, rigorous research focused on generating actionable results. In parallel, the team will work with a select number of universities to create incentives for graduate students and post-doctoral researchers to conduct demand-driven research on adult literacy in the U.S.

## BETTER LEVERAGING EXISTING RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH AND DATA

There are multiple sources of data on adult learners at the national and state level but, collectively, they are inconsistent and incomplete. The U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System (NRS) maintains records from federal- and state-funded literacy programs, but not privately funded programs, for example.

The state of Kentucky has been a leader in collecting and disseminating data on the broader population of adult learners: Adult education programs around the state collect key data and report it into a centralized database, the Kentucky Adult Education Reporting System ([KAERS](#)). [NASDAE](#), the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education, is exploring how KAERS can be adopted as a model for other states to collect data that could eventually feed into a national database covering both federally funded and privately funded literacy programs.

In carrying out these activities, the NAP will support individual researchers in submitting study proposals to public and private funders, such as the National Science Foundation's [Big Ideas](#) program, the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) grants programs in adult education and IES' Transformative Research in the Education Sciences program, as well as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's [Economic Mobility and Opportunity](#) fund.



### INITIATIVE 3: SUPPORT ADULT LITERACY INSTRUCTORS

The lack of awareness of low literacy is exacerbated by the marginalization of adult education as a profession. There is an established system supporting K-12 teachers, and an even more established system for those teaching in U.S. higher education; but there is no comparable infrastructure for adult literacy instructors.

The lack of recognition and funding has led to inconsistency across the profession. As the 2012 National Research Council report on adult literacy observed: “Instructors vary in their knowledge of reading and writing development, assessment, curriculum development, and pedagogy. The training instructors receive is generally limited, and professional development is constrained by lack of funding, inflexible locations, work, and other life demands.”<sup>30</sup>

To address this need, the NAP calls for two complementary activities:

- 7. Create and distribute user-friendly, evidence-based training material.** Teams of experts will start by examining the training material that has been developed with federal and state funding (available through the U.S. Department of Education’s [LINCS](#) collection) to identify assets, gaps, and unmet training needs. Then, working closely with the broader adult literacy community through the new, IES-funded Adult Skills Network and other channels, they will develop and disseminate tailored, evidence-based training content on specific topics identified and

#### ENGAGING EMPLOYERS IN DEVELOPING CONTENT

While the value of literacy goes far beyond job training, enhanced livelihood opportunities can be a powerful motivation for adults to improve their literacy skills. Large employers, perhaps working through organizations like [Business Roundtable](#), could agree on and sponsor a basic set of specific literacy goals for workers and contribute to the development of a standard curriculum in cooperation with adult educators. This could create new incentives for low-literate job seekers to improve their skills, while providing educators with the tools to help them do so.

prioritized by the community, with input from adult learners. Topics might include instructional design and delivery; learning sciences; digital literacy; and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This work will build on existing resources, such as that of World Education’s [IDEAL Consortium](#) (Innovating Distance Education in Adult Learning), which provides guidelines, quality standards, and technical support for states to establish distance and blended learning programs for adult learners, and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), a federally funded research center focused on advancing adult learning.

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<sup>30</sup> National Academies of Science site at: <https://www.nap.edu/read/13242/chapter/11>, p. 239

**8. Support a nationwide credentialing program for adult literacy instructors.** Building on and complementing the activity above, a task force will work with adult educators (through COABE and ProLiteracy) and researchers, again with input from adult learners themselves, to create a nationally validated<sup>31</sup> credential in adult literacy instruction. The credential will be voluntary, free or low-cost for educators, and based on solid evidence of “what works” in terms of pedagogical approaches. It will emulate successful voluntary professional certification programs (such as the Project Management Institute’s PMP credential<sup>32</sup>) that have become widely recognized and even required in various professions. Robust adult education credentialing programs in states including California, Massachusetts, and New York—as well as those used by TESOL for English-language instruction— could be used as models for a national plan.

The National Action Plan will support the work that COABE, ProLiteracy, and other organizations

## SPOTLIGHT ON CELL-ED: PROMOTING EQUITY THROUGH MICROLESSONS

*Cell-Ed* offers learners all-day access to a variety of 3-minute microlessons on topics ranging from basic literacy to high school completion and certificate programs. Each learner is provided with live coaching support as well. The program allows learners to complete these microlessons on any device and without internet access. The program uses scientifically proven learning strategies, allowing users to be 20% more engaged and learn skills up to 84%

*(Sources: Learning without Teachers? A Randomized Experiment of a Mobile Phone-Based Adult Education Program, 2014; Univision 2016)*

have been doing to raise the profile of the adult education profession, with the goal of placing adult education on par with K-12 education – with adult educators and programs recognized, respected, and funded as an integral part of the U.S. educational system.

## INITIATIVE 4: CATALYZE LOW-COST, HIGH-IMPACT INNOVATION

Only a small fraction of adults with low literacy pursue formal learning, and many of those who would like to do so lack the additional support they need to participate in whatever programs are available (e.g., child care, transportation, and other non-instructional services).<sup>33</sup> While the advent of digital learning platforms has made online adult basic education more accessible, many learners face financial and practical

obstacles—e.g., lack of broadband access or suitable devices, unfamiliarity with digital tools, heavy work and/or caregiving responsibilities—that prevent them from pursuing and completing online programs.<sup>34</sup> These barriers have only been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Achieving the goal of equitable access—in other words, helping learners overcome these obstacles and encouraging more people to seek support—will

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<sup>31</sup> i.e., a professional credential that meets accreditation standards set by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA)’s Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) or an equivalent entity.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.pmi.org/certifications/project-management-pmp>

<sup>33</sup> Dembicki, M. “Wraparound Services and Student Success.” *Community College Daily* (5/9/2019). American Association of Community Colleges: <https://www.ccdaily.com/2019/05/wraparound-services-student-success/>

<sup>34</sup> Pickard, A. (2019). “Barriers to Access in Public Adult Literacy Education.” *Educational Policy*, 0895904819843602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819843602>

require innovation, not just in terms of technology platforms but also in terms of how and where literacy support services are delivered. The NAP will promote low-cost, high-impact innovation in all forms—from “low tech” ideas like bringing literacy promotion and services to accessible locales such as laundromats, transit stations, and barber shops—to sophisticated educational technology (edtech) interventions such as evidence-based, adult cognition-informed smart phone apps that use gaming, virtual reality, and/or artificial intelligence (AI) to make learning affordable, accessible, and personally adaptable.

Specifically, the NAP coordinating team will:

## INITIATIVE 5: ENGAGE ADULT LEARNERS AS MOVEMENT LEADERS

Finally, the NAP sees the active inclusion of adult learners as essential to the success of each of these initiatives. Centering the voices of adult learners is a core feature of the NAP. Adult learners, both individually, and through the efforts of [VALUEUSA](#), the alumni association for adult education and English literacy, have long served as effective advocates and leaders in the field of adult education. Their role will be even more critical as this National Action Plan is launched and seeks to bring about transformative change across the country.

The NAP will engage and empower adult learners to play a leading role in all stages, from development to implementation to evaluation. Adult learners will help drive each of the initiatives described above, serving as activists and advocates, research collaborators, innovation leaders, and key players in shaping teacher training materials and elevating the adult education

**9. Launch a catalytic grants program to fund early-stage innovation.** Building on the Barbara Bush Foundation’s experience with the Adult Literacy XPRIZE and other, analogous programs in public health, global development, and other areas, the National Action Plan will fund and administer a grants program to encourage social entrepreneurs to invest in innovations that promise to increase access, quality, and/or uptake of literacy support services. The catalytic grants program will evolve over time, with its full range of activities and benefits developed with input from relevant stakeholders.

profession. Additionally, adult learners will be actively engaged in the design of the products and programs.

As a first step, the NAP team will:

**10. Fund and launch an Adult Learner Leadership fellowship program.** Recognizing that many adult learners lead busy lives with pressing financial needs, the NAP will administer and mobilize funding for a fellowship program that provides compensation to adult learners to dedicate their time, energy, and intellect to the NAP initiatives. The fellowship program will aim to engage a diverse and representative group of adult learners and will provide not only a living-wage stipend<sup>35</sup> for the duration of service, but also (as needed) coaching and mentorship, free Internet access and a suitable device, and post-service transition support<sup>36</sup> for a designated period.

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<sup>35</sup> including true-cost based allowances for travel, lodging, meals, and dependent care for duration of service.

<sup>36</sup> including job-placement assistance, career mentoring, and work-related support (e.g., funds for professional attire, commuting/dependent care expenses); support as needed to secure safe, adequate, and respectable housing for awardee and awardee’s immediate family; and inclusion in extended network of adult literacy learners, educators, advocates, activists, and community leaders.

This list of 10 specific actions, underpinning five mutually reinforcing initiatives, is by no means comprehensive. It is a roadmap rather than a destination. As implementation of the NAP moves forward, building on and supporting the work that is already underway in these areas, the adult literacy community and its supporters will generate new ideas and initiatives as new needs and opportunities are discovered. What is most important is to begin now. We must move forward together, in a coordinated way, cognizant of the need for bold changes and focused

squarely on achieving our shared vision of a country in which everyone, everywhere, can access high-quality, effective literacy support services that help them improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills, and thus enjoy a better quality of life for themselves and their children.

The next section explains how these initiatives will be carried out, with national coordination and shared accountability for progress toward this vision.

# III. NEXT STEPS: LAUNCHING A NAP COORDINATING COUNCIL AND CONSORTIUM

Achieving the goals of the NAP will require both broad participation and central coordination. This National Action Plan is the product of sustained collaboration among 100+ experts, educators, employers, and others. It also reflects the input of adult learners themselves. To be successful, the NAP must continue to leverage the commitment, creativity, and energy of a broad and diverse group of stakeholders across the country, all of whom have important contributions to make. At the same time, when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible. Broad stakeholder participation must be balanced by a dedicated team of professionals who are empowered to coordinate efforts and accountable for making tangible progress.

**Implementation of this NAP will be guided by a multisectoral Coordinating Council.** The Barbara Bush Foundation will organize the NAP Coordinating Council, which will include senior representatives from leading national organizations in the field of adult literacy (including adult learners) as well as representatives from foundations, government agencies, corporate partners, and employers.

The Coordinating Council members will serve as high-profile champions and stewards of the NAP. The group will leverage their knowledge and networks to raise awareness, mobilize resources, and provide guidance to the dedicated team (called the Consortium) charged with coordinating and monitoring the day-to-day work required to implement the National Action Plan, effectively serving as the Consortium's governing body.

**The Consortium—a team of professionals focused exclusively on implementing the NAP—will mobilize resources, coordinate efforts, and help ensure that the NAP's goals are achieved.** While the Barbara Bush Foundation will host the Consortium, providing office space and logistical

## NAP INITIATIVES AND ACTIONS

### I. Raise Awareness and Advocate for Change

1. Launch a national grass tops campaign to raise support for adult literacy programs
2. Follow up with a national grass roots awareness campaign to encourage uptake
3. Launch a national Advocacy Accelerator

### II. Expand Outcomes-Focused Research

4. Create a landscape analysis of low literacy and literacy support programs
5. Build a central clearinghouse for data and research
6. Mobilize funding and incentives for rigorous research on adult literacy

### III. Support Adult Literacy Instructors

7. Create and distribute user-friendly, evidence-based training material
8. Support a nationwide credentialing program for adult literacy instructors

### IV. Catalyze Low-Cost, High-Impact Innovation

9. Launch a catalytic grants program to fund early-stage innovations in adult literacy programming

### V. Engage Adult Learners as Movement Leaders

10. Fund and launch an Adult Learner Leadership fellowship program

and administrative support, the Consortium will report to the Coordinating Council and it will be accountable to the broader adult literacy community, not just BBF. Its full role and range of activities will be further discussed and defined following the National Summit on Adult Literacy.

The Consortium's principal focus will be to carry out the 10 actions listed above and described in Section 2. As a small team, it cannot do this work alone. The Consortium will organize and coordinate advisory boards, task forces, and other ad hoc working groups as needed to guide and implement actions under each of the NAP's five initiative areas.

Across all five initiatives, the Consortium will carry out the following functions:

1. *Inspire commitments to the NAP:* The Consortium's immediate focus will be to obtain specific, measurable commitments to the NAP from stakeholders, including both cash and in-kind contributions. Once commitments are made, the Consortium will monitor and support individual stakeholders to ensure they are executed.
2. *Facilitate cooperation among stakeholders:* The Consortium will map the landscape of key stakeholders in adult literacy, by state/city, to identify potential partnerships and opportunities to share lessons and best practices as they apply to the five initiative areas. The Consortium will work to bring stakeholders together both within and beyond the field of adult literacy, negotiating partnership arrangements and providing ongoing support as needed.
3. *Report progress and celebrate success:* The Consortium will develop a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework and a system for regularly gathering data on progress against the NAP's goals of increased access, quality, and uptake of literacy support programs. It will also record changes in federal, state, and private funding for adult literacy, policy shifts, and volume of press and social media mentions on the NAP. The Consortium will publish a semi-annual

progress report on the NAP and the broader state of the adult literacy field in the U.S. and disseminate it to NAP stakeholders as well as funders, government leaders, and the press. This will serve as an important accountability mechanism to highlight both progress and challenges to ensure the success of the NAP. Finally, the Consortium will support adult literacy organizations by actively publicizing their successes, which will also help to build momentum and awareness.

**This structure provides for both broad participation and central coordination. It combines inclusion with accountability** and will help ensure that this National Action Plan succeeds in achieving its vision and goals. The NAP is designed to be a living document, with new activities added as the initial ones are achieved. As stakeholders share their experiences more broadly, the field will gain a richer, more nuanced understanding of the challenge of adult literacy. As awareness and appreciation grow, the field will attract more resources, energy, and innovations, reversing the cycles of neglect and underinvestment that have hampered progress for so long. The NAP aims to generate a "virtuous circle" in which well-publicized successes bring more attention and resources, which in turn generate new successes. With the full support and active involvement of such a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, there is every reason to believe that the National Action Plan will be successful in achieving its goals over the next five years, and beyond.

## NAP VISION AND GOALS

### Vision:

A country where every adult can easily access high-quality, effective support to improve their reading, writing, digital, and numeracy skills – regardless of who or where they are.

### Goals:

1. **Access:** Make literacy support services accessible to everyone who wants them.
2. **Quality:** Ensure that literacy support programs are effective and efficient in helping adults improve their reading and writing skills.
3. **Uptake:** Encourage more adults to engage with literacy support programs and work to improve their literacy skills.

# ANNEX I. WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

The Barbara Bush Foundation recognizes and is grateful for the hard work and dedication of the many people who contributed to the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy.

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