

Investing in Multiple Literacies for Individual and Collective Empowerment

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ALL IN

The Adult Literacy &
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II. Introduction

“Literacy is the bedrock of engaged, productive, confident, and connected communities.”
– The Literacy Assistance Center, New York City

Literacy skills activate human potential. They give individuals the power to communicate, make informed decisions, and access resources and opportunities.¹ Literacy represents for most people, the ability to read and write, but reading, writing, and numeracy serve as gateway skills to multiple literacies that interconnect and enable long-term prosperity. In the age of information, the types of literacies needed to participate in society have increased dramatically. These literacies include civic, digital, financial, health, information, and oral literacy, among others, all of which correlate to strong foundational literacy skills. Foundational adult literacy skills are clearly linked to sustained income growth,² better healthcare access,³ improved job prospects for justice-involved and returning citizens,⁴ and stronger language and literacy skills among children.⁵ The purpose of this paper is to clarify how promoting access and integrated support of multiple literacies at the individual level can enable our country’s shared social, economic, and civic well-being. It aims to demonstrate how educators, employers, nonprofit, and government leaders can drive collective investment in multiple literacies and create thriving communities nationwide.

“As our world becomes increasingly digital, the written word becomes the baseline for communication. Literacy is a core factor in determining who has access to the digital world and who will be left behind. Unfortunately, no individual, community, or organization can afford the latter.”
– Daniel Gutwein, Education & N50 Project, Intel

Despite the critical need for multiple literacy skills, rates of literacy access and attainment have not kept pace with technological advancements. Today, more than half (54%) of adults in the United States struggle with foundational reading, numeracy, and [digital problem-solving skills](#), which includes the ability to access and interpret information in digital environments to perform practical tasks, like entering personal information in a form. About 43 million Americans—nearly one in five adults—read below the equivalent of a third-grade level, making it difficult to comprehend everyday texts, such as news articles on unfamiliar topics, medical information, utilities contracts, court or jury service summons, or email communications from a school or agency to support children and family literacy.⁶ Fewer than 10% of all adults in need of literacy support are currently receiving education services.⁷ Gaps in [literacy access](#) reflect existing inequities in society, across lines of race, age, birthplace, and geography. These gaps are often reinforced by policy and practice, and disproportionately affect under-resourced communities and communities of color—and have done so across generations.⁸

The costs of low literacy driven by inequities in this country are staggering, both at the individual and national levels. A [Gallup report](#) commissioned by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy estimates that investing in adult literacy could boost the annual gross domestic product (GDP) by \$2.2 trillion. According to the study, areas with lower rates of attainment in reading and writing stand the most to gain from improved literacy skills, particularly among rural communities in the South.⁹ Educators and advocates in adult education have long understood low literacy to be not just a symptom but a root cause of so many other societal challenges. However, the rapid digital transformation—hastened by the global COVID-19 pandemic—has made it abundantly clear that literacy skills are crucial to individual and collective well-being. This is especially evident in our workforce, healthcare,



and civic engagement systems.

Moving forward, we need to think differently about how we define, support, and measure adult literacy skills development, not in terms of reading levels, but in terms of multiple literacies that yield multiple possibilities. Increasing access to adult literacy skills for those most in need will drive economic advancement for all, resulting in what Heather McGhee (2021) calls a “solidarity dividend,” that is, the collective gains made when people come together to address disparities across lines of difference.¹⁰

III. Context

Low literacy remains at the core of intergenerational cycles of poverty, poor health, and low educational attainment in the United States. Across the nation, two-thirds of adults with low literacy skills were born and educated in the United States. White adults ages 16 to 64 make up the largest percentage of people living with low levels of English literacy skills at 35 percent, while Hispanic and Black adults make up 34 percent and 23 percent respectively.¹¹ Over 70% of the nearly 2 million Americans in state and federal prisons today are classified as having low literacy skills.¹² Immigrant adults are six times more likely to have less than a ninth grade education, and make up a disproportionate number of those with emerging levels of literacy and English proficiency.¹³ Supporting literacy for historically and systematically under-resourced communities is vital to promoting greater equity, inclusion, and advancement in American society.

In today’s economy, employers in manufacturing, retail, and healthcare are finding ways to leverage automation and artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline routine or tedious tasks and boost efficiency. Adults with lower levels of education and literacy are most at risk of job loss or displacement.¹⁴ New job roles continue to emerge, but employers struggle to find workers with the skills they need to enter and advance in these roles. Current research by the National Skills Coalition shows that [92 percent of jobs](#) across industries in the U.S. labor market require digital skills, but one-third of workers lack the foundational digital skills needed to enter and thrive in today’s jobs.¹⁵ Broader discussions about skills frameworks and categories across the emerging [skillstech landscape](#) tend to revolve around a static list of job-aligned skills, but new research highlights the importance of skills clustering and the need to situate skills within a broader context.¹⁶ Alongside technical skills, employers should consider the underlying literacy skills, including digital skills, that are required to perform a specific task or job role to improve their capacity to find, train, and support new and incumbent workers.

“When we hear terms like automation, robots, and AI, our perceptions often limit what we believe learners can adapt to. In fact, digital technologies at work are becoming easier and more intuitive to use for workers, and in some cases, they can make tasks safer. In this economy, with workers hard to find, we must support learners and employers on an upskilling journey that prepare both for jobs that are made more meaningful and fulfilling through advanced technology.”

– Anson Green, Digital and Automation Upskilling, Tyson Foods

Low literacy rates result in inequitable access to health information and medical care, especially in telehealth. Research shows that low health literacy in particular hindered access to health materials on COVID-19 among an estimated 66 million people who struggled to read or understand the



information,¹⁷ increasing risk of disease transmission, serious illness, and other adverse health outcomes among vulnerable populations. While the the American Medical Association (AMA), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that medical information for the public be written in plain language at no higher than an eighth-grade reading level, many states continue to distribute health information with complex language and technical terminology written above a tenth-grade level.¹⁸ Relatedly, the rise of disinformation about the pandemic, as well as other issues, have sharpened the need for greater health literacy and critical information literacy skills. Investing in health literacy skills—in addition to increased access to stable coverage and reliable healthcare—can result in improved individual health and up to \$238 billion in health costs savings each year.¹⁹

“In a rapidly changing information environment, fundamental reading, writing, and digital literacy skills are necessary for developing yet another critical skill in today’s society – information literacy. Whether you’re reading the news, researching a health condition, or shopping for a new product, the ability to evaluate and make sense of information impacts one’s sense of agency and the ability to contribute to and thrive in this new world.”

– Nidhi Hebbar, co-founder of The Edtech Equity Project

The current adult education system—which generally includes adult literacy, high school equivalency, English language programs, family literacy, and workforce preparation—plays a vital role in promoting literacy skills and services for adults across the country. Data show that adult literacy programs make a considerable difference in increasing learners’ social mobility. At the individual level, just a hundred or more hours of adult literacy instruction could result in a \$10,000 increase in annual earnings, a 19 percent increase in literacy skills gains, and a 35 percent higher likelihood of completing a high school diploma.²⁰

“Investing in adult literacy development has measurable economic, health, and other benefits. And more fundamentally, it’s about enabling and amplifying the diverse voices of traditionally-excluded adult learners, their stories, experiences, and knowledge of the world.”

– Priyanka Sharma, Vice President, US, World Education, Inc.

In spite of the benefits, investment in adult education is limited. Federally-funded adult education programs cannot meet the overwhelming demand, and often allocate more resources for programs with short-term measurable outcomes, such as high school equivalency preparation and workforce credential attainment.²¹ This can limit access to high quality adult learning programs for those at the lowest levels of reading and digital skills. Adult educators, who are largely part-time, underpaid, or volunteers, work tirelessly to meet adults’ unique and varied needs, such as basic-level reading and writing, English language acquisition, and digital literacy.²² While investment in traditional adult education programs remains critical, educators alone cannot address the multiple systemic challenges associated with low literacy, and in turn, poor economic, health, and education outcomes. Employers and healthcare providers, among other stakeholders, play a key role in promoting access to integrated literacy skills and services nationwide.



IV. Understanding Multiple Literacies

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 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.”²³ PIAAC identifies numeracy as a skill parallel to reading literacy and defines it as “the ability to use, apply, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas.” These foundational literacies interconnect with other literacies and allow for contextualized learning.²⁴ It is through these literacies that we communicate and understand others — by reading, writing, speaking, listening, and creating.²⁵

Reading requires that we identify words in print and make meaning through them. This interaction allows access to possibilities and new experiences for the reader. Reading is an active process that integrates different components such as background knowledge, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary. Life experience is part of this process and a key component of reading and learning for adult learners. Literacy requires the ability to integrate and synthesize information and then apply that information to different life components. It fosters the ability to apply critical thinking skills and to express ideas and opinions. Skills and concepts associated with reading and writing are universal and transferable across languages. Each type of literacy has a purpose as, “Literacy is not a single skill or quality that one either possesses or lacks. Rather, it encompasses various types of skills that different individuals possess to varying degrees.”²⁶

But what are other types of literacies and how are they connected?

Civic Literacy

[Civic Literacy](#) includes gaining skills and knowledge to participate, advocate, and make change within a community. It encourages citizens to stay informed and understand how to exercise their rights and obligations. Engagement could be attending a community event, a school committee meeting, registering to vote, or participating in school activities for a child. This engagement develops speaking and listening skills which are critical to other types of literacy. Civic literacy skills empower adult learners to share their thoughts and voices in many aspects of local, state, and federal government. Vital to our democracy, developing civic literacy skills [can prepare youth](#) and adults to be informed and engaged members of their communities, thus empowering them to contribute valuable and well-informed solutions. Civic education in an increasingly complex era intersects with digital literacy, information literacy, and English language, among other topics. Civic literacy also supports immigrant inclusion across our society and economy, preparing individuals to navigate American systems, norms, and culture, as well as pursue pathways to [US citizenship](#).

Digital Literacy

[Digital literacy](#) involves a [variety](#) of skills and competencies associated with using technology. These include the basic skills needed to operate smartphones, computers, and other technological devices. It also involves navigational skills to move within and between a range of software programs and digital tools, such as word processing software, email, social media, online games, and search engines. Digital literacy includes the ability to communicate information digitally and responsibly, and these skills enable adults to pursue and accomplish personal and professional tasks.



Digital literacy has a direct impact on many aspects of people's lives, from finding job opportunities to managing a household to supporting family members in their health, educational endeavors, or their own journeys using technology. Today, [digital resilience](#)—which refers to the awareness, skills, agility, and confidence to be empowered users of new technologies and adapt to changing digital skill demands—is critical for active participation in society and the economy.²⁷ Still, nearly one out of three Americans struggle to perform their job effectively due to limited digital problem solving skills.²⁸ Developing digital resilience helps individuals independently problem-solve when digital challenges are encountered. In [practice](#), digital literacy allows navigation of interconnected literacies and promotes workforce development. As noted above, 92 percent of jobs across sectors require digital skills, from construction workers using mobile apps to submit work, healthcare workers using telehealth to provide patient care, and restaurant employees operating online order and delivery systems.

Financial Literacy

[Financial Literacy](#) encompasses a wide range of skills from understanding the many types of financial accounts and services available to understanding fees and charges, balancing a bank account, understanding credit card terms, and accessing online financial information. A common definition of a financially literate person is one who has the attitude, skills, and knowledge to make financial goals that assist in meeting life goals. Numeracy, a foundational form of literacy, is a critical support to financial literacy. Similar to health literacy, developing and expanding both financial literacy and numeracy contributes to quality of life and supports an increased ability to evaluate information and make informed financial decisions. Relevant financial goals include control over daily and monthly finances, ability to absorb a financial shock, ability to remain on track to meet financial goals, and the financial freedom to make choices in life.²⁹ Another aspect of financial literacy is digital financial literacy. Adults need digital skills to interact with devices to support them in making better financial decisions and increasing skills with fintech (financial technology) is critical in our increasingly digital world.³⁰

Health Literacy

[Health literacy](#) helps close the gap between how people can find, understand, and use health information and how those who deliver health information make it findable, understandable, and usable.³¹ This might include reading a prescription label or dosage instructions, reviewing documents that are sent home from medical appointments, reviewing test results through an online portal, navigating a healthcare environment, and understanding what medical personnel are saying during a health visit. It also includes the ability to perform the tasks of chronic disease management (e.g., reading a glucose meter) and making sense of public health information and understanding concepts like risk. Increasing these skills is crucial because literacy is linked directly to health outcomes and disparities.³² Adults who read at lower literacy levels are generally 1.5 to 3 times more likely to have an adverse health condition than people who read at higher levels.

In addition, positive health behaviors are found in patients with higher literacy. For instance, an asthma patient might be more likely to have a better inhaler technique based on performing the steps correctly to use an inhaler.³³ Developing health literacy fosters the development and expansion of skills to find and evaluate information, make informed health decisions, and communicate effectively about personal health. Even more impactful is when health literacy skills are applied in tandem with digital literacy skills. [A Framework for Eliminating Health Disparities Using Telehealth](#) explores this connection and the premise that a “person’s health represents their capacity to be the optimal version



of themselves, perform daily work, and live life in ways that make society more resilient.”³⁴

“Increasingly, digital skills are needed to find, access, and use health information and services. The safe use and successful comprehension of health information also requires critical thinking that intersects both digital and health literacy.”

– Michele Erikson, Executive Director, Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.

Information Literacy

The current information environment deals with enormous challenges, from increased polarization and AI-generated content to the rapid spread of misinformation. Information literacy is the set of abilities needed to recognize when information is needed and then find, evaluate, and use that information effectively.³⁵ This process improves critical thinking skills, and these skills are used in finding information that is reliable and trustworthy, and supported by multiple forms of evidence. Research shows that information literacy is critical to counteracting the harmful influence of fake news in online settings.³⁶ From a broader standpoint, information literacy is also important for maintaining individual and collective [safety online](#), making sure people have the knowledge and awareness to protect their personal information, avoid scams, and distinguish fact from fiction. In this way, information literacy strongly interconnects with digital, health, and financial literacy. Information literacy is also a key component of [media literacy](#), which encompasses the ability to access, analyze, and produce information and interconnects with news literacy, digital literacy, [data literacy](#), and audiovisual literacy.

Storytelling and Oral Literacy

Storytelling represents a powerful form of literacy that precedes the written word and continues to be an influential tool of communication in politics, society, and business, among other contexts.³⁷ As a form of literacy, storytelling is unique in that it does not require an invention (like writing), tool, or device. Maintaining an awareness of and competence in the oral and rhetorical skills needed to engage an audience’s attention, motivate their actions, or carry forward cultural memory serves as a vital skill in a number of contexts. Today, we hear and see the power of orality and storytelling excellence in classrooms, churches, public radio, TED Talks, and social media platforms like Twitter and TikTok. Historically, oral culture and communication has served as a powerful tool of resistance to oppression, particularly among Black and Indigenous communities. Storytelling and public speaking in general, is a leadership skill—embodying empathy, emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate others.

We could extend the previous list of literacies to other areas, such as music literacy, historical literacy, data literacy, and even text literacy as key components for fueling cultural, economic, and political agency and equity.³⁸ This sample, however, demonstrates a range of literacies and how they interconnect to support literacy and skill development as a whole.



V. Supporting Multiple Literacy Skills Development in Practice

In a rapidly changing work environment, more must be done to support access to programs that foster lifelong learning skill development, [digital resilience](#), and adaptability. The following examples illustrate how stakeholders across sectors can partner to promote multiple literacy skills development for adult learners, families, and workers. Several focus specifically on literacy skill-building for immigrants, who make up less than 14% of the total U.S. population but 17% of the [civilian labor force](#).³⁹

Employer-Based Programs

Denny's

Denny's sees their workers as holistic beings, prioritizing well-being for individuals and their families. Denny's recently launched GAIN, a transformational initiative designed for employees to gain more confidence, opportunities, experience, and success. The company recognizes a responsibility and moral obligation to provide an environment where everyone can grow—in their careers, as leaders, champions of inclusion, and most importantly, as people. GAIN has four areas of focus including: 1) GED® High School Equivalency Preparation which unlocks potential through foundational adult education and GED preparation; 2) College Credit for Learning which includes skills-based training and development toward academic credit, certification, and/or credentialing; 3) Life Skills, which adopts a family literacy approach to promoting essential life skills that impact diverse communities within and beyond their restaurants, and 4) Career Pathways, which engages high schools within neighboring communities to bring talent into the Denny's family. This program was designed to enrich the lives of the people who work hard for the company in collaboration with award-winning educational advisor Dr. Kim Cliett Long. Through GAIN, Denny's aims to inspire growth, create potential opportunities, elevate communities, and successfully impact their bottom line.

Tyson Foods, Inc.

At Tyson Foods, upskilling frontline factory and food processing workers is a business priority, particularly when it comes to digital literacy skills. As the company expands digitally-based business process improvements—such as safer and increased production through automation and more efficient payroll systems—it is committed to creating upskilling opportunities for the company's 120,000 hourly team members, including new immigrant workers. Many Tyson team members have limited to no digital skills or access to home internet. Tyson believes that the skills and confidence developed at work can support greater inclusion and stability for team members and their families in their daily lives. In addition to promoting the digital literacy skills needed to operate machinery, many Tyson locations offer language and life skills through [Upward Academy](#), which includes foundational adult education, English language acquisition, high school equivalency preparation, as well as financial literacy and civic literacy, with a focus on citizenship preparation. To promote [digital inclusion](#), Tyson offers classes online or in the plant, before and after shifts, on-site digital literacy labs, and a device loaning program for employees. They collaborate with lead organizations, such as World Education's [EdTech Center](#) to integrate innovative professional learning models and resources.



Non-Profit-Based Programs

The Family Place Public Charter School is a community-based nonprofit that aims to promote stability and well-being for immigrant and low-income families in the Washington, D.C. area. The curriculum is designed to be culturally and linguistically relevant to learner needs, the majority of whom are Spanish-speaking adults from Central America. It promotes English language, reading, numeracy, and digital literacy through contextualized real-world learning experiences. English language instruction is integrated with digital literacy skills training, leveraging daily digital activities such as using a QR code, navigating to and scrolling through a website, and summarizing findings from an online search, to boost language skills and abilities. Curriculum design is informed by learner access, needs, and aspirations. Carlye Stevens, lead digital literacy and English language instructor shared, “I used to rely on using Chromebooks because I felt it would be easier to teach all students on the same device. After reading the [digital literacy resource guide](#), however, I realized it is more beneficial to create mobile phone-based lessons because that’s the type of device students most often use. They already have some familiarity with their phones and can access wifi in the school, but students are developing literacy skills in new ways.”

UnidosUS, the nation’s largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization, works with [community-based organizations](#) and corporate partners to design high-quality programs to provide Latinx communities with the [training and skills](#) they need to launch and excel in their careers, including workforce, digital, and financial literacy. With support from Verizon, UnidosUS created [Latinx@Work](#), a contextualized curriculum that integrates digital and workforce readiness skills, preparing Latinx adults to access and apply for jobs online. With sponsorship from T-Mobile and AARP, [Latinx in Business](#) supports more than 200 small business owners and entrepreneurs in developing digital and business literacy skills. With generous support from Google.org, UnidosUS has also developed programs to support digital skills at every level. In partnership with community-based providers in the United States and Puerto Rico, they created Latinx in Tech, a program that expands access to in-demand technology careers by offering learners the opportunity to earn an industry-recognized [Google Career Certificate \(IT Support, Project Management, UX Design or Data Analytics\)](#) while participating in a culturally and linguistically relevant professional skills curriculum available in both English and Spanish. UnidosUS also developed Digital Skills for Life, a 20-hour foundational training that covers the basics, including internet exploring skills, online communication skills, social media, computer hardware, software and websites, safety/security skills, and digital content creation.

Health-Based Programs

ACTIVATE is an equitable digital health platform for remote patient monitoring and person-centered care coordination for chronic illness management. It was co-designed by The MITRE Corporation and University of California, Berkeley in collaboration with underserved communities, including low income, rural, and agricultural workers who are at risk for disproportionately poor health outcomes. The ACTIVATE platform integrates remote patient monitoring devices such as glucose meters, blood pressure monitors, and fitness trackers, and makes the data available through a secure clinic and patient dashboard. This information can be integrated with electronic health records. The ACTIVATE digital health pathway is a conceptual model for operationalizing care coordination and patient engagement which includes: validated screening tools to assess patients’ digital readiness and health literacy, digital health navigators to help patients set up and use tablets, smartphones, the internet, and monitoring devices, health coaches to enhance patient self-management skills



and health literacy, and integration of program components within the clinical workflows of the health center. Pathways for diabetes and hypertension have been implemented with community health centers in California that have resulted in meaningful improvements in health outcomes in hemoglobin A1c and blood pressure. By addressing digital health literacy and other barriers, ACTIVATE enables underserved rural populations to access and benefit from digital health.

“Digital health is an essential component of healthcare. Among barriers to digital health are connectivity, access to remote patient monitoring devices, digital health literacy, programs designed for specific culture and setting, and sustainable funding. We need to target all of these inequities to improve health outcomes.”

– Dr. Katherine Kim, The MITRE Corporation

Wisconsin Health Literacy (WHL), a division of Wisconsin Literacy, Inc. partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to implement a Vaccination Community Outreach program statewide, focusing on communities with the lowest vaccination rates for COVID-19. WHL set out to improve vaccine confidence and reduce barriers to access through: a) increased health, digital, and science literacy; b) accurate, easy-to-understand health education tools, and; c) trusted messengers of vaccine information. In a [five-part virtual Train-the-Trainer series](#), community partners learn strategies to improve [health literacy](#), [digital literacy](#), and [science literacy](#), talk about vaccines in their community, and find and recognize reliable information online. Outreach Specialists weave digital literacy lessons into health education activities, such as how to access an online health portal or use a QR code. WHL also provides technical assistance for 70 community-based literacy agencies, supporting efforts to deliver virtual adult education classes and build digital skills among adult learners and the educators who serve them for improved learning and work opportunities. The Health Literacy division is also working with several partners to build staff capacity to equip patients with the necessary digital health literacy skills to access and understand healthcare systems, patient portals, telehealth, and patient monitoring devices.

VI. Conclusion: Investing in Multiple Literacies Through Collective Impact

Promoting multiple literacies among adults in the United States is possible. It will require investment, collaboration, creativity, and agility across industries. Investing in workforce skills that include [digital skills](#), for example, moves society closer to the achievement of greater individual and collective economic mobility. The shift toward skills-based hiring and training presents a powerful opportunity for cross-sector collaboration toward a more inclusive economic recovery for all.⁴⁰ It could create more points of access for career entry and higher earnings for millions of adult learners, without the need for a college degree.⁴¹ This type of collaboration builds agility, leveraging the strengths of each organization and increasing capacity for upskilling and reskilling interventions at the local level. In addition to economic benefits, building literacy skills also has the potential to improve our collective health, civic discourse, children’s achievement, and national security and global status.



“If any time in recent history has indicated the need for multiple literacies, it’s the COVID–19 era. The shift to online learning and remote work, the need to make sense of rapidly changing health information, and the importance of evaluating information sources have all highlighted that adults need literacy in multiple domains. Add to that the increasing need for digital skills in the workplace, and it’s clear that adults need literacy development across their roles as individuals, family members, citizens, and workers.”

– Lisa Soricone, Ed.D., Senior Research Director, Jobs for the Future

Research shows that adults are especially motivated to develop skills to improve opportunities for themselves, their families, and communities.⁴² Each learner has a unique story and learning journey. Understanding how [specific factors](#) relate to adult learning, such as communication skills, background knowledge, motivation, and primary language is critical to supporting individuals in meeting their goals. What we know about adult learning, however, does not always align to the resources available in adult literacy programs. Promoting access to high quality literacy skills development and support requires cross-sector innovation in program design, development, and implementation.

Literacies evolve. In this era of digital transformation, the challenge is providing equitable access to literacies, which in turn affords the people with those literacies with the power to secure their rights, privileges, and benefits in society. These literacies are needed not only to participate in the workforce, but to achieve civic fluency—the range of skills and competencies needed to navigate a full, human, adult life in community⁴³—over time. For this reason, we need to promote the skills, resources, and resilience that adult learners need as ongoing learning and skill development becomes a way of life.⁴⁴

The adult learning ecosystem has long operated from a place of scarcity. Less than 10 percent of adults in need of literacy services are currently enrolled in adult education programming due to issues of program capacity, funding, competing priorities, and/or relevance of available services. Adult literacy affects every aspect of our shared society. The magnitude of this challenge is great, but it is solvable. Moving forward, we have to expand the adult learning ecosystem to pull together diverse resources and innovative ideas across sectors to meet 100 percent of adult literacy needs in this country. Investing in multiple literacies for individual and collective empowerment is one step towards meeting these needs.

VII. Call to Action

[The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network](#) (ALL IN) is a collective impact initiative that was conceived and convened by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. ALL IN aims to transform the national conversation about adult literacy, reduce the stigma associated with meeting literacy needs, and support millions of adults in the United States in addressing their unique needs and achieving their goals. This initiative is tasked with carrying out the goals of the first-ever [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#), which is a multisector, multiyear initiative designed to drive inclusive, collective action to address systemic challenges in adult and family literacy. The plan was created by more than 100 stakeholders across the adult education system and outlines five key, mutually reinforcing initiatives. These five initiatives promote specific actions and tasks for individual and group engagement:



1. Raise Awareness and Advocate for Change

- Share this paper to increase awareness in your network!
- Subscribe to the ALL IN newsletter and follow us on social media to receive the latest updates: <https://allinliteracy.org/>
- Tell us about how this challenge impacts you and/or your community, particularly as it relates to local multiple literacy needs and efforts. Email: allin@barbarabush.org.

2. Expand Outcomes-Based Research

- Fund, conduct, partner, and/or [promote research](#) to generate more specific knowledge about “what works” in helping adults develop multiple literacy skills across learning contexts.
- Identify, document, and/or amplify examples of programs that demonstrate gains not only in terms of degree and credential outcomes, but in identifying and meeting the needs, goals, strengths, and aspirations of the [whole learner](#).

3. Support Adult Literacy Instructors

- Create and distribute [user-friendly, evidence-based learning materials](#) and [professional development materials](#) that can be used across learning contexts, e.g., among educators, employers, healthcare providers, and volunteers.
- For employers and health providers: Partner with local adult literacy educators and experts to create and implement employer-based or health-based literacy training programs, such as those described in this paper. Consider opportunities for [Integrated Education and Training \(IET\)](#) models.

4. Catalyze Low-Cost, High-Impact Innovation

- Fund, design, and/or promote multi-dimensional [skills-based learning](#) that meet adult learner needs in the places they live and work—at companies, construction sites, hospitals, pharmacies, libraries, health clinics, places of worship, and/or bus stops through tech-enabled learning.
 - For employers: Focus on creating cultures of [lifelong learning](#) for workers at every level and consider how literacy skills intersect with [industry- and occupation-specific skills](#).
- Identify, design, and/or evaluate digital skill-building programs that effectively use technology, while advocating for [digital equity](#) in access, devices, and skills. Consider, for example, that the vast majority of American adults—[now 85%](#)—own a smartphone.
- Improve coordination of services through improved data collection, systems, and sharing.

5. Engage Adult Learners as Movement Leaders

- Mobilize resources to engage a diverse and representative group of adult learners in your organization to gain perspective (e.g., patients, residents, inmates, or employees)
- Consider what you can learn from adult learner experiences. Check your [biases](#), assumptions, and beliefs about adult learners in your community.
- Share your experiences with us. Click this link to learn how you can contact us: <https://allinliteracy.org/contact-us/>



As we look to build a stronger democracy and a more effective, inclusive, and abundant economy, we can strengthen our collective foundation through investment in multiple literacies and empower all Americans to achieve their goals. The adult learning ecosystem today and into the future must engage a diverse group of stakeholders—educators, workforce providers, companies, publishers, faith leaders, military leaders, local, state, and federal government representatives, and community members, including adult learners—to co-design systems, programs, and supports that are meaningful to those at the center of the challenge.⁴⁵ Achieving this vision is only possible with a shared commitment to recognizing and supporting the underlying literacy skills that adults need to thrive.



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