ALL IN: Research Small Grants Initiative

Request for Proposals

The [Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network](#) (ALL IN) is a new collective impact initiative formed by national thought leaders in the adult learning field and beyond and is charged with carrying out the goals of the [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#) (NAP), a multisector, multiyear initiative designed to drive inclusive, collective action to increase adult literacy nationwide. We are working to transform the conversation about literacy, reduce the stigma associated with meeting literacy needs, and support millions of adults in the United States in achieving greater economic, health, education, and life outcomes over the next five years, and for generations to come.

The need is great. Extrapolating from Survey of Adult Skills data gathered by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), it is estimated that 54 percent of adults in the United States have some need to boost literacy proficiency. About 43 million Americans—nearly one in five adults—read below the equivalent of a third-grade level.[1]

In response to this need, ALL IN aims to think differently about how we define, measure, and support literacy skill development, not in terms of reading levels, but in terms of multiple literacies[2],[3] that yield multiple possibilities, such as digital, health, and information literacy. To that end, ALL IN is pleased to offer this opportunity for short-term, community-engaged research projects that can unearth instructional and programmatic innovation, make visible teacher

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[1]Highlights of the 2017 U.S. PIAAC Results Web Report (NCES 2020-777). U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/current_results.asp.We use "adult equivalent" because grade level characterizations can serve to distort the full character of adult literacy attainment.

[2] Cacicio, S., Cote, P., & Bigger, K. (2023). *Investing in Multiple Literacies for Individual and Collective Empowerment.* [White Paper]. The Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network. https://allinliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Investing-in-Multiple-Literacies-for-Individual-and-Collective-Empowerment.pdf

[3] ALL IN acknowledges the seminal work of the New London Group in establishing the concept of multiliteracies; multiple literacies shares a focus on the impact of technology and distributed digital information on literacy. For more information, see: New London Group.(1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social factors. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 60–92

knowledge, and offer insights in line with broad goals of the [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#) related to **access**, **quality**, and/or **uptake**. World Education and researchers within World Education's network are leading construction of the research initiative, the RFP process, and the review and selection process.

Description of Small Grants Opportunity

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. We recognize that adult literacy is a relatively minimally funded educational area and that [currently, investments made by the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES)](#) focus on much-needed large scale research projects to fund development interventions to "test" with adult learners. We also acknowledge the wealth of practitioner knowledge that shapes the delivery of adult literacy in educational programs in the US.

This initiative offers an opportunity to lend empiricism to the inquiry and reflection that guides the decisions and actions that teachers make every day. The overarching goal is to support researcher - teacher partnerships to unearth innovative adult literacy instruction or programming. The expected approach is community-engaged research. Community-engaged research in education is a collaborative and participatory approach that emphasizes the active involvement of researchers, educators, and community members in the research process to address educational issues and promote positive change. It is mutually beneficial and useful for both researchers and community partners (Stoecker, 2009; Van de Ven, et al., 2007).[4,5] It involves going beyond traditional research methods and incorporating the knowledge, perspectives, and expertise of teachers, recognizing the value of local knowledge, cultural context, and lived experiences in generating meaningful insights and solutions. Through collaborative efforts and shared decision-making, community-engaged research in education aims to enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of educational practices and policies, ultimately contributing to the well-being and success of individuals and communities. Proposals reflecting a range of approaches to community-engaged research are invited, including broadly framed research-practice partnerships (Coburn & Penuel, 2016)[6] or, more specifically defined methodologies (eg., action research as framed by Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Oquist, 1978, among others).[7,8,9]

The goal of this RFP is to support short-term community-engaged research projects that can lead to improvements in adult literacy instruction and programming, in line with key goals of the National Action Plan for Adult Literacy related to **access**, **quality**, and/or **uptake**.

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[4] Stoecker, R. (2009). Are we talking the walk of community-based research?. *Action research*, 7(4), 385-404.
[5] Van de Ven, Andrew H. Engaged Scholarship: A Guide for Organizational and Social Research: A Guide for Organizational and Social Research. Oxford University Press, 2007.
[6] Coburn, C. E., & Penuel, W. R. (2016). Research–Practice Partnerships in Education: Outcomes, Dynamics, and Open Questions. Educational Researcher, 45(1), 48–54. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X16631750
[7] Checkland, P., & Holwell, S. (1998). Action research: Its nature and validity. Systemic Practice and Action Research, 11(1), 9–21.
[8] Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic Inquiry. Sage
[9] Oquist, P. (1978). The Epistemology of Action Research. Acta Sociologica, 21(4), p. 143–163.

1. **Access**: Make literacy support services accessible to everyone who wants them.

2. **Quality**: Boost potential for literacy programs to help 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.

We will select up to **6 research projects** that build on prior research about quality adult literacy instruction and make visible teacher knowledge that extends that research. Awarded researchers or research organizations will receive between $5,000 - $25,000 to implement projects over a 3-9 month period of performance. Scope of proposed research needs to align with the amount requested. The total amount of the awards given will be $75,000. Proposed research may include either new and original research or build on existing or preliminary research that could be enhanced through a community-engagement approach.

Each research team will receive technical assistance on the topics of literacy program implementation and instruction and research support. In our efforts to expand outcomes-focused research, ALL IN aims to build a central clearinghouse for data and research. We will prioritize projects that can share anonymized data sets with the broader adult literacy field.

Areas of Interest

Inquiry that aligns with the goals of ALL IN's National Action Plan for Adult Literacy might include challenges encompassed in these example research questions and themes.

Access

How can adult learners 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?

- Adult learner perceptions and awareness related *to access to literacy support and learning services*
- Program models that create pathways for lifelong learning and make space to incorporate lifewide learning[10,11]

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[10] Jackson, Norman Jeffrey (2011). *Learning for a complex world: A lifewide concept of learning, education and personal development*. Authorhouse.
[11] *Reder, S., Gauly, B., & Lechner, C. (2020). Practice makes perfect: Practice engagement theory and the development of adult literacy and numeracy proficiency. International Review of Education, 1-22.* https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/ling_fac/65/

Quality

How can we think differently about how we define, measure, and support literacy skill development, not in terms of reading levels, but in terms of multiliteracies that yield multiple possibilities?

- Interventions and assessment encompassing a multiliteracies/multiple literacies approach
- Inclusive instructional approaches that maximize opportunities to build on learner strengths and prior knowledge (ie asset based instruction)

Uptake

How can we encourage more adults to engage with literacy support programs and improve their literacy skills? How can we measure persistence and commitment to learning?

- Understanding the adult learner experience, including with virtual learning
- Innovation in program models that leverage digital technologies and result in retention in learning
- Planning for or extension of current longitudinal data collection related to adult literacy and learning

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include:

- Researchers and education practitioners based and operating in the United States;
- Organizations that are nonprofit and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code except for Colleges, universities, hospitals, health systems, or their fiscal sponsors

Expectations of Awardees

- Researchers work in partnership with practitioners identified in the proposal
- Communicate challenges related to timeline, budget, or small grant deliverables
- Meet with technical advisor at least once during the research process
- Participation in one showcase webinar at the end of the project
- Blog post describing research process and findings (all projects; guideline TBD)

Project Timeline

June 22, 2023	RFP Release
June 22, 2023	ALL IN Community Update Meeting, including RFP Q&A
September 13, 2023	Application Submission Deadline
October 11, 2023	Awards Announced
October 16, 2023	Project Start Date
April 30, 2024	End Date

How to Apply

Proposals should be submitted to ALL IN by 5 PM Central Time on September 13, 2023 through this submission form. Proposals should be no longer than 10 pages, including all references and supporting materials. Selection for awards will be announced by October 11, 2023. Research projects will run from October 16, 2023 through April 30, 2024.

Applications will be considered based on the following criteria:
- Proposed research responds to a challenge relevant to adult literacy practitioners and is aligned to All In themes,
- The proposal includes brief synthesis of key prior research and reports of professional practice and an indication of a theoretical framework that will shape the research,
- The research question is answerable through community-engaged research,
- The description of research includes information about how participant practitioners will inform research at multiple stages of the research process
- The partnering practitioner(s) or organization(s) is/are clearly described
- The proposed timeline and budget present realistic achievable goals
- Researchers have access to and IRB process and agree to share back information about IRB approval result*
- Teams agree to participate in a showcase webinar, write a blog post about some aspect of the research, and describe other dissemination plans.

*Please email Jen_Vanek@worlded.org if you have any questions or concerns about this requirement.

For answers to general questions about this initiative related to funding, dissemination, review protocol and more, please view our **FAQ**.