

Co-Designing Library-Based Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers

The American Library Association (ALA) in partnership with members of the new [Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network](#) (ALL IN), including the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (BBF), National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), ProLiteracy (PL), and World Education (WE), is pleased to submit a joint proposal to co-design Adult and Family Literacy Support (AFLS) Centers for libraries nationwide. This project aligns with Agency Goal 1 of lifelong learning, Objective 1.1 of learning opportunities for all, and Program Goal 1 of building capacity, and Objectives 1.2 of collaboration and 1.3 of continuous learning. The proposed project, *Co-Designing Library-Based Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers*, will establish an interactive toolkit for building library capacity to meet the diverse and rapidly-evolving literacy needs of adults and families in the United States, especially digital literacy skills. ALA requests \$748,849 in IMLS National Leadership Grant funding to implement this two-year project.

Literacy is directly connected to better health outcomes, reductions in recidivism for returning citizens, and better language and learning outcomes for children whose parents and caregivers have higher literacy. From a broader standpoint, literacy is connected to our sustainability as a nation and our national security, ensuring people have the knowledge and awareness to exercise their right to vote and distinguish fact from fiction. However, access to literacy skills and services remains a pervasive challenge across the country. An estimated 54 percent of adults in the United States need to increase literacy proficiency in foundational reading, numeracy, and/or digital skills.¹ The low literacy rate is likely to grow, with only thirty-three percent of fourth-graders in the United States were reading at or above NAEP proficient level in 2022.² The magnitude of the challenge is great, and impossible for anyone organization to solve alone.

ALL IN is a collective impact initiative, convened by BBF, and charged with carrying out the goals of the 2021 [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#). We are committed to driving inclusive, collective action to address systemic barriers to literacy access and attainment for adults and families over their lifespan, especially among communities impacted by poverty, racism, and incarceration. The multi-organizational team will leverage our extensive knowledge, capacity, skills, and experience (institutional and lived) in adult and family literacy research and instruction, digital skills and technology, co-design and community engagement, technical assistance, resource development and dissemination to successfully carry out the shared goals of the project. Three library systems will be directly involved in the design and development of an interactive toolkit for creating AFLS Centers, including Charleston County Public Library (CCPL), Chicago Public Library (CPL), and the Delaware Library Consortium (DLC).

Much like U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services designed a library-based resources to support new immigrants, the Citizenship Corners and Civics and Citizenship Toolkit,³ we envision the adoption and creation of AFLS centers in libraries across the nation, strengthening library capacity to provide effective, trauma-informed literacy services for adults, families, and communities with the highest literacy needs. This includes adults and families impacted by poverty, inadequate or traumatic education experiences, housing insecurity, job instability or unemployment, learning differences or disabilities, and returning citizens.

Project Justification. Extrapolating from Survey of Adult Skills data gathered by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), about 43 million adults in the United States—nearly one in five—read below the equivalent of a third grade. This means they can do no more than read simple, short texts when locating information. An estimated 54 percent of adults have some need to boost literacy proficiency, and 62 percent of the population have only minimal digital problem-solving skills.³ They may struggle to access and interpret information in digital environments to perform practical tasks. Some even struggle with simple tasks like entering personal information in a paper or digital form.

People with low literacy skills are at higher risk of financial, health, and other social vulnerabilities. Today, an estimated 92% of jobs require digital skills, but one-third of workers have low or no digital skills due to historic underinvestment and structural inequities (National Skills Coalition, 2023)⁴. Adults who read at lower literacy levels are generally 1.5 to 3 times more likely to have an adverse health condition than people at higher levels (Dewalt et al., 2004)⁵. Over 60% of adults in incarcerated settings do not have literacy skills needed for success in today's labor market. Nearly one-quarter

lack foundational literacy (Steurer, 2020)⁶. For adults with low literacy skills who are parents or caregivers, the consequences are twofold. The National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that 72% of children with parents who possess low literacy skills will experience low literacy themselves, are more likely to live in poverty, and are five times more likely to drop out of high school (Strauss, 2019). This negative effects on families translates into compounding, dire implications for the nation. The higher the proportion of adults with low literacy proficiency, the slower the overall long-term GDP growth rate (Strauss, 2019)⁷. The economic shock and after-effects of the pandemic exacerbated race, gender, and class inequities across society, following long standing barriers to education and workforce opportunities, especially among people of color (National Skills Coalition, 2023).⁸

The publicly funded adult education system in the U.S., supported by Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), was designed to meet the nation’s adult and family literacy needs. Operated by providers such as school districts, community colleges, and community-based organizations, WIOA-Title II programs served just over 1 million adults in the program year (PY) 2022–23⁹, providing a variety of education and training opportunities, ranging from basic literacy and numeracy instruction to specialized training for transitions to postsecondary education or work. Although essential, these services meet less than 10 percent of the overall population of adults with low literacy. Further, this issue cannot be solved by addressing adult or children’s literacy needs alone. Rather, a whole family or family literacy approach is needed to break down the barriers that exist between adult and child education, and prioritize lifelong, multigenerational learning. The caregiver’s education level, especially among mothers, remains the single most important predictor of a child’s academic success (Weissmann, 2012)¹⁰.

The need for flexible, relevant, and publicly available adult and family education opportunities is clear, and libraries are well-positioned to remediate the literacy equity gap. As trusted institutions, libraries afford access; create public, multigenerational space; and support curiosity across diverse learners. They are free to use, with low barriers to entry. Libraries serve as informal literacy support centers, given that patrons increasingly seek foundational reading and technology support to navigate complex health and social services online, such as housing and job applications. With more locations than McDonald’s restaurants in the U.S., public libraries are well positioned to increase adult and family literacy equity, expanding literacy support services and partnering more effectively with schools, families, and community-based organizations, but they face persistent challenges in resources, coordination, and alignment. While libraries cannot replace the incredible work done by trained adult education practitioners, they can be strategically aligned and trained to be more-informed and help meet the needs of the adult and family education ecosystem.

Led by an outstanding group of national organizations working to collectively transform the adult and family literacy field as members of ALL IN, this project offers the unique opportunity to empower libraries and their practitioners to serve as literacy partners. We will co-design, develop, pilot, and test models for *Library Adult and Family Literacy Support (AFLS) Centers*, resulting in a comprehensive, interactive toolkit for community literacy-building and train-the-trainer materials for replication in libraries nationwide. This new model for family literacy-building service coordination and provision will efficiently build on the strengths of each member of the ecosystem, prioritizing the lived experiences and literacy needs of local adult learners and families and break new ground in the campaign for literacy equity.

Key Frameworks - Family Literacy

ALL IN believes in a multifaceted, multigenerational literacy approach to solving the national literacy challenge. To guide the creation of AFLS centers, the team will draw on a family literacy approach as defined by the NCFL in alignment with federal law, looking specifically for examples of how libraries promote: (1) interactive literacy activities between parents and children; (2) support in parenting activities; (3) parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, economic self-sufficiency, and personal goal attainment; and (4) age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (National Center for Families Learning, 2023).¹¹ Studies on family literacy programs demonstrate increases in academic outcomes for both participating parents/caretakers and their children. Outcomes from NCFL’s family literacy work with the Face and Child Education program over three decades show overwhelmingly positive results for thousands of American Indian families, including but not limited to K-3rd grade children scoring significantly higher on standardized reading and math tests than children who did not participate in the program (National Center for Families Learning, 2023).¹² A 2020

RAND Corporation study on two-generational programming that included the four components of family literacy reported that participating adults/caretakers benefited from the program’s educational and professional opportunities, including English literacy and parenting (Cannon et. al, 2020)¹³.

Most often parents and their children, particularly those with low literacy levels, learn in separate spaces. Children participate in library offerings while their parents may separately attend adult literacy classes. This limits opportunities for parents and their children to engage in learning together. By assessing library literacy needs through the family literacy framework, proposal partners can identify ways in which adult and child literacy offerings can be connected both functionally and thematically for exponential impact. Through ongoing conversations with library partners, it seems that libraries have made significant progress in understanding and meeting children’s literacy needs, through summer reading programs, after-school tutoring or media programs, partnerships with schools and school libraries, and other initiatives. We anticipate that of the four components of family literacy, the greatest gap in literacy services will be in supporting adult and parent learning needs, especially digital literacy skills. Leveraging this knowledge in the development of our key frameworks and proposed products will enable the team to ensure a holistic approach to prepare library staff to serve literacy needs faced by its patrons.

Co-Design

ALL IN partners will implement a co-design approach to establish AFLS centers and accompanying, contextualized resources at the three participating library systems. *Co-design* centers the experiences of individuals or communities who are most proximate to the problem (e.g. adult learners, librarians, library staff) in understanding and solving that challenge. Co-design efforts and activities carried out in this proposal draw on several evidence-based methods such as McKercher’s (2020) *Beyond Sticky Notes* which defines co-design as an approach to designing with, not for, people. This approach involves “sharing power, prioritizing relationships, using participatory means and building capacity.”¹⁴ The concept of co-design also involves addressing power dynamics between the conveners (e.g. ALA, NCFL, WE) alongside library leaders, staff, and patrons. Our goal is to recognize and grapple with the social structures, especially across lines of class, race, geography, and gender, etc. and share power to advance equity in research, decision-making, design, and delivery all while maximizing the potential impact and relevant application of products developed.

Our team has extensive experience applying inclusive or co-design approaches to conduct research and development in various contexts. For example, NCFL partnered with the Public Library Association (PLA) on a 2020-2022 planning grant, exploring a co-design approach to better serve and engage low-income, Spanish-speaking families in diverse geographic locations. WE has received over \$2M in a multi-year investment from AT&T for Community Based Digital Navigators, to support diverse organizations across the country through the codesign of effective digital navigator services in diverse communities. Their team found that digital navigator services are most effective when they are co-designed with the community and embedded into existing services, such as workforce literacy, health literacy, education, food insecurity, libraries, and all other facets of the literacy ecosystem. The Director of ALL IN previously led a project to create a set of inclusive design principles for Learning and Employment Records in collaboration with workers in frontline sectors about their experiences in pursuing education, training, and employment opportunities¹⁵.

Project Participants and Beneficiaries: Library Communities

Across the nation, public libraries report a growing demand for adult literacy skills and supports, including digital skills. ALL IN selected three library systems because of their variation in size, structure (state or local systems), urban and rural settings, and alignment with the populations most in need of formalized literacy services. The concept for this work was developed in part due to conversations with leaders across the three library communities who identified similar challenges in meeting diverse patron needs, especially in foundational reading and digital literacy. In 2022, CCPL determined that 39% of reference inquiries were technology related. The library, with its 18 branches and mobile library/outreach services provides services through the mission of connecting its diverse community to information, fostering lifelong learning and enriching lives, but lacks capacity to meet the digital literacy skills needs, especially in rural branch libraries. The public libraries in the DLC, in partnership with the state’s leading adult literacy organization, Literacy Delaware, have already begun to launch efforts to understand the Delaware literacy landscape, gaps in services, and to seek opportunities to address those gaps, especially the large waiting lists for adult literacy services throughout

the state. Library staff report the need for training and resources that provide foundational information on teaching reading based on the science of reading and digital skills to provide context for their work, including screening tools to identify adults in need of literacy services. CPL has identified a need for more capacity-building in support of adult literacy in many of the 81 locations across the city. Staff have developed skills in warm referrals and promoting resources but are challenged to meet the deep demand for both English language learning and Adult Foundational Education. Nationally, *the State of America's Libraries 2023* report a need for mental health and trauma resources, job upskilling and business-entrepreneurship programs, school libraries advancing instruction, and an increasing push towards open access and digital instruction in libraries (ALA, 2023)¹⁶.

In the short-term, the beneficiaries who are most directly impacted by the training will include more than 50 library administrators and staff in each of the three library communities associated with this project (library staff involved range from 15-25 per community, at scale with the library system). Beyond the 50+ library staff involved directly in the co-design and ongoing technical assistance, this project will support capacity-building and resources for over 250 library staff across 11 library communities, including the three library systems directly involved in the grant and up to eight additional library systems involved in a related ALA project, funded by the Mellon Foundation as described below. In addition, over 500 libraries will receive access to the Train-the-Trainer toolkit (Interactive and PDF versions available) through webinars, conferences, and direct email communications via ALL IN partner outlets as described below. All digital reports and materials produced, including the Library Landscape Scan, Train-the-Trainer Toolkit for Creating AFLS Centers, and Final Impact Report, will be made publicly available and widely disseminated across the ALL IN Communications footprint (as described in the attached Digital Products Plan). The resources and services generated by this project have the potential to impact over a million library patrons. Each year, CPL serves more than 4 million visitors. CCPL serves over 400,000. DLC serves one million residents of Delaware.

We will amplify our reach and impact by making our offerings available to partner libraries involved in a parallel ALA project funded by the Mellon Foundation. As part of the Mellon Foundation work, ALA is currently engaging 8-10 library systems across the country to explore three models of increasing support for literacy programming and greater literacy equity, including: 1.) *Library as Literacy Center*, creating in-house instructional programs to support foundational skills from reading and digital literacy to arts literacy and social-emotional skill building; 2.) *Library as Place of Instruction by Partner Providers*, reducing rental costs and allowing literacy services organizations to devote more resources to programs and equitable pay and 3.) *Library as Convener of Literacy Networks*, devoting both physical and virtual resources to maximize the effectiveness, efficiency, and complementarity of literacy services in the community it serves, reducing overlaps and gaps in services. These three models would support improved access and achievement outcomes consistent with the libraries' local circumstances and available resources.

Building on Knowledge, Capacity, & Resources to Promote Adult, Family, and Digital Literacy in Libraries

ALA in partnership with ALL IN has a long history of supporting literacy-based initiatives in public libraries and communicating lessons learned. This team will draw on experts in literacy, adult learning, technology, research, professional development, and technical assistance, as well as library science to effectively meet the diverse needs of library patrons. This project will build on the expertise of each organization, such as the Mellon Foundation work described above. In addition, this project will build on key findings from a collaborative grant funded by IMLS from 2012-2014 that was led by ALA's Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services (ODLOS), New York State's Onondaga County Public Library, and ProLiteracy to produce the Adult Literacy through Libraries National Library Literacy Action Agenda. The agenda generated concrete recommendations in seven priority areas that will inform our current work, including: collection development, technology and digital literacy, collaboration and strategic partnerships, professional development, community planning and program evaluation, raising awareness and influencing policy, and sustainability. In 2015, IMLS provided additional funding to develop training and resources to help library workers create customized action plans. Several resources provide a solid foundation on which to build AFLS centers, such as models for conducting a community needs assessment and supporting library worker-led literacy action agendas.

NCFL and WE will build on an extensive body of work to collaboratively lead co-design sessions and develop the toolkit for AFLS centers, leveraging expertise in promoting family and digital literacy across library communities and other learning contexts. Since 1989, NCFL has provided capacity building through training, technical assistance, and coaching

on the family literacy model to libraries, K-12 schools, higher education institutions, community-based organizations, and government agencies in 150 communities across 39 states. In 2018-2019, NCFL trained over a dozen local California library systems on how to apply the tenets of family literacy to strategically integrate adult and child services, and will be expanding its reach through a new contract with the state in 2024. Through a current IMLS National Leadership grant for Libraries award,¹⁷ the Public Library Association and NCFL are working to support replicable, family-informed practices, programs, and resources for authentic engagement of Spanish-speaking families across libraries.

To advance technology-enabled practices for supporting adult literacy, language, and workforce skills, WE partnered with nine public libraries from across the nation through the Propagating Promising Practices for Literacy and Workforce Development at Libraries (P3) project. The P3 project yielded several important findings about the use of technology in libraries, such as: 1) Library implementation of the P3 practices is most impactful when, in addition to addressing the immediate needs of patrons, it builds the digital skills and experiences that patrons can transfer to new learning; 2) Libraries should plan for multiple contacts to effectively onboard adults to digital resources; 3) Staff and volunteers need training to support patrons in using a range of digital and online resources; and 4) Technology-supported learning is enhanced by library partnerships with education and community based organizations that embrace collaboration and help to recruit participants.

As advisors to the project, The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (BBF) and ProLiteracy will draw on extensive work in informational training and technical assistance and resource development in adult and family literacy across multiple learning contexts across the nation, from community- or employer-based programs to public libraries, including Delaware Libraries and Charleston Public Library. The BBF team offers high quality, research-based resources to promote adult and family literacy, such as [ReadLife Bookshelf](#) (RLBS), a free digital resource for adult learners, children, families, and educators. Additionally, BBF staff bring expertise in promoting effective collaborations and partnerships across various continuums of literacies—including the spectrum of literacy building activities across age-groups, thus complementing the multigenerational capacities of libraries with thoughtful programmatic networking of organizations and communities. ProLiteracy provides funding, comprehensive training and professional learning, approachable research, and leading-edge digital and print materials to support foundational reading skills for the more than 40 million adults who struggle with low literacy. It is critical to note that the Barbara Bush Foundation is also the convening organization for ALL IN, a collective impact network tasked with carrying out the goals of the 2021 [National Action Plan for Adult Literacy](#). The Director of ALL IN will provide core support to ALA in streamlining communication, marketing, and report and resource dissemination across member organizations.

Project Work Plan. The project will take place over two years. The purpose of year 1 activities is to better understand the existing landscape of literacy offerings nationwide through the lens of the family literacy framework. This will inform the creation of a training framework by ALL IN partners in the second half of year 1 that leverages each national organization's distinctive yet complementary expertise to address identified gaps in service provision and the specified literacy needs vocalized by those being served. Year 1 deliverables include the following:

- **A landscape scan completed** to capture existing models, practices, barriers, as well as aspirations for literacy-building via branch libraries across urban, suburban, and rural communities, with ALL IN member input.
- **A draft framework for AFLS Centers** based on landscape scan findings, intentionally including library leaders, staff, and community-based organization partners to develop equitable and resilient ecosystems
- **A report** issued on the landscape scan, highlighting organizations involved, methods used, lessons learned, and community-centered recommendations for building and supporting adult and family literacy centers in libraries.

Landscape Scan Activities (September 2024 - February 2025). In Year 1, we will conduct a national landscape scan to understand how libraries—in particular, branch libraries with limited services and capacity—are meeting adult and family literacy needs, and where they aspire to improve services via virtual and in-person settings. WE will lead the development of the landscape scan to capture existing models, practices, barriers, as well as ideas for library-based literacy-building activities in libraries across urban, suburban, and rural communities. The research team, led by WE, will include data collection and analysis support from researchers in each ALL IN member organization (ALA, ALL IN/BBF, NCFL, PL) and 2-3 leaders in the three library communities. We aim to identify challenges faced by librarians and library

staff in identifying and meeting diverse patron literacy needs across the four components of family literacy, gain a sense of their training and experience, explore technical assistance models and products to build staff capacity, and take into account the variability when working in different sized and resourced communities. The landscape scan will incorporate both national, regional, and branch-based perspectives.

The scan will include an extensive literature review on the use of adult and family literacy practices in libraries as well as a current digital scan of literacy initiatives in libraries across the nation. The team will classify initiatives according to the family literacy components of NCFL's federally recognized model, including: 1) Adult Education, 2) Parent Education, 3) Children's Education, and 4) Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time,¹⁸ highlighting those that successfully integrate all four components. As part of the scan, we will identify efforts that specifically support foundational reading, numeracy, and/or digital skills for adults with low literacy. Guided by libraries and providers, we anticipate that library systems will have significantly more expertise and stronger programming, tools, and/or resources in place to support children's education and PACT. For example, we have already learned that all programming aimed at young children in the Chicago Public Library involves a component of parent-child interaction designed to encourage pre-literacy skills as well as parent education pieces. CPL is also leading a *Jump into Reading Pilot* with 9 sites supported by additional staff training on the Science of Reading and explicit reading instruction, including parent tools to support children's reading. We anticipate that CPL needs more development in their capacity to meet adult foundational education, especially in reading, digital, and potentially workforce literacy skills. Of the four family literacy components, the greatest gap in literacy services across the nation will likely be in expanding access to adult and parent education, especially digital literacy skills. This is based on anecdotal evidence and will be confirmed or revised based on landscape scan findings.

In addition, the team will conduct interviews with key stakeholders such as library administrators, staff, and patrons who seek literacy skills or resources from their local libraries, to provide qualitative understanding of the quantitative data obtained in the scan. The team will design and administer two questionnaires to gather additional insights, challenges, and experiences related to literacy services via libraries: 1) for leaders and staff, and 2) patrons in the three library communities identified.

Importantly, ALA will extend the questionnaires to libraries involved in another project funded by the Mellon Foundation, amplifying our library community involvement from three to 11 library systems. We will identify what services are available and start to discern what additional training would be necessary to help staff meet the diverse literacy needs of their patrons. The scan will especially highlight practices that result in effective, trauma-informed services, such as protocols for warm referrals or resources designed to support marginalized populations that frequent local libraries, such as, unhoused communities, un- or underemployed workers, returning citizens, and immigrant and English learners. For example, CCPL does not have a structured referral system for adult comprehensive reading/literacy needs. However, many librarians and staff provide organic referrals to local literacy providers such as Trident Literacy Association and Charleston County School District Adult Learning, especially for the rapidly growing number of Spanish-speaking workers in the community. Throughout the process, the landscape scan will explicitly capture community assets, programs, tools, and resources that libraries use to meet diverse adult and family literacy needs.

Developing a Draft Framework for AFLS Centers with Recommended Resources (February - July 2025). Throughout the landscape scan process (Oct. 2024 - Feb. 2025), ALL IN members will collaborate on interpreting and analyzing the findings to inform the creation of a framework for the establishment of AFLS centers in library systems and at their branches. This framework will leverage the expertise and existing, research-based resources from ALL IN members to be responsive to the trends in library literacy needs that are identified across the nation. Upon completion of the landscape scan in February 2025, ALL IN members will compile relevant literacy resources into a training package that is organized by the components of the family literacy framework (adult education, children's education, parent time, and parent and child together time). ALL IN members will meet virtually on a bimonthly basis, reviewing resources to determine details on how they should be packaged based upon factors such as: resource types (physical or digital), the capacity needs of libraries to utilize resources, type of content, different dosage and duration associated with resources, possible intersections between content themes, recommended sequencing of resources, and the specific audience for each resource. In the spirit of family literacy's multigenerational philosophy of literacy, ALL IN members will think about ways in which separate adult and child education resources may be intentionally combined for family engagement in learning.

This compilation of resources will support libraries nationwide in how to provide the foundational elements of an AFLS in their branch locations. For example, NCFL will draw from its robust menu of family literacy training, technical assistance, and coaching materials to contribute to the draft AFLS framework. This includes the learnings and materials developed by NCFL to train over a dozen local California library systems on how to apply the tenets of family literacy to strategically integrate adult and child services. Further, there is opportunity for NCFL to contribute its learnings and current materials being developed in an IMLS National Leadership grant for Libraries award¹⁹ led by the Public Library Association (PLA), where NCFL is partnering with PLA to co-design replicable, family-informed practices, programs, and resources for authentic engagement of Spanish-speaking families across libraries.

WE will contribute its expertise in digital literacy and technical assistance provision to advance technology-enabled practices for supporting adult literacy, language, and workforce skills to the AFLS training framework's compilation of resources. Its offerings are informed by its [Propagating Promising Practices](#) for Literacy and Workforce Development at Libraries (P3) project, which yielded important findings about the use of technologies in libraries. For example, should the library express a high need for digital skills training, WE has several options such as the [Digital Skills Library](#) or [Skillblox](#) which can be rolled out to the library systems. As a final example, there is opportunity for the BBF team to leverage its [ReadLife Bookshelf](#) (RLBS), a free digital resource for adult learners, children, families, and educators and [Promoting Digital Literacy for Adult Learners](#), a comprehensive resource guide designed to build capacity in educators, tutors, and mentors who are working with adult learners on building digital literacy skills. The guide, developed in partnership with Digital Promise, also offers extensive and ready-to-use [train-the-trainer materials](#). This powerful collaboration of national partners enables the time and funding to unite high-quality literacy resources and impact library systems. It also encourages deeper intentional integration of each partner's offerings to further strengthen what is visible and available to adult learners and families that they serve. An example of this deeper integration would be a collaboration between ALL IN members, WE and NCFL, to combine their separate offerings.

Year 2: Guided Action Research with Partner Libraries and Library Staff

Year 2 activities will engage library leaders, staff, and patrons in the project to co-design and pilot a Train-the-Trainer Toolkit to create AFLS Centers in their own library communities. The toolkit will build the critical skills and competencies needed by library leaders, staff, and volunteers to establish AFLS Centers that meet the specific literacy needs of their patrons. Year 2 deliverables will include the following:

- **Develop and publish Train-the-Trainer Toolkit** that provides a clear definition of an AFLS and aims to build librarian and library staff capacity to meet diverse literacy needs
- **Deliver in-person 2-day kickoff training** provide ongoing technical assistance for local library teams who are implementing the toolkit via 3 webinars
- **Final Impact Report**, completed by a premiere third-party evaluation firm, will deliver a white paper summarizing the effectiveness of the project.

Develop an Extensive Train-the-Trainer program (August 2025 - October 2025). WE and NCFL will lead co-design sessions with participating library systems to develop a Train-the-Trainer Toolkit for building AFLS Centers, leveraging community knowledge, insights, experiences, and ideas to craft a toolkit that will resonate with other library communities across the nation. Each library system will appoint an AFLS coordinator to serve as the point person for Year 2 of the project and to support participant outreach and recruitment for co-design sessions. To ensure that we include multiple and diverse perspectives for the co-design sessions, we will use Maxwell's (2005) purposeful selection strategy in which individuals are deliberately asked to participate in order to provide information that cannot be collected by random sampling.²¹ This strategy will ensure that participants represent diverse experiences and perspectives related to literacy skills and services needed. The landscape scan will inform the exact dimensions of the participant group, but we anticipate identifying approximately 12-15 individuals in each community, such as library administrators, librarians and library staff in main and branch locations (both children's and general), adults (18+) who are seeking literacy skills (prioritizing foundational reading and digital skills), patrons who are parents/caregivers seeking literacy skills or supports, community-based organizations or local adult education partners, K-12 school librarians, etc. We will prioritize individuals from communities with the highest literacy needs, as identified in the landscape scan (e.g. people impacted

by poverty, inadequate or traumatic education experiences, housing insecurity, job instability or unemployment, learning differences or disabilities, and returning citizens). We will also take into account diversity in age, gender, education and language background, and frequency of library use. We will design flyers to generate interest in participation, specifically geared for adults with low literacy. All participants will receive specific information about the purpose, expectations, benefits, potential risks, and stipends related to co-design participation.

NCFL and WE will facilitate a one-day convening with co-design participants (as described above) to discuss the findings of the landscape scan in each community and co-create a shared definition of Adult and Family Literacy Support Center, drawing in line with the four components of the family literacy model. During this session, we will also surface challenges that each community faces in meeting the specific adult and family literacy needs. For example, in Charleston, we may learn that digital literacy skills are a priority for adults interested in the growing number of jobs in manufacturing in the Lowcountry region. We will also review the existing resources that may be leveraged to meet community needs. Concurrently, the ALL IN Partners will provide ongoing guidance and resources to enrich the development of the toolkit.

Deliver in-person 2-day kickoff training and provide ongoing technical assistance webinars (Nov 2025-April 2026)
Once the draft toolkit has been co-designed in partnership with the libraries, NCFL and WE will deliver an in-person, two-day training to deliver the train-the-trainer resources to specific library system staff. The AFLS coordinator that is appointed at each library system will support that system's library staff in using the draft toolkit to test and iterate on the strategies identified in the initial co-design process. The coordinator will also be responsible for working directly with the ALL IN member organizations, specifically WE and NCFL, to improve the toolkit based on lived experiences and use. The training will include sharing broader findings of the landscape scan and presenting existing tools and resources from ALL IN member organizations that library partners can readily plug into their AFLS centers, such as those described above. To explore existing resources, such as [World Education's EdTech Strategy Toolkit](#), or generate new resources and tools based on specific library literacy needs, WE and NCFL will lead community-driven [maker spaces](#) during the second part of the meeting, defined as "informal sites for creative production where people of all ages blend digital and physical technologies to explore ideas, learn technical skills, and create new products" Gruen (2018²⁰). The team anticipates uncovering multiple opportunities to synchronize and merge each other's respective resources for greater impact like the one above through the development of this draft AFLS framework.

To ensure maximum integration of new skills and learnings, continuous support and solutioning around implementation, and maximum impact for library patrons, NCFL and WE will offer three 90-minute webinars (every other month in December 2025, February 2026, and April 2026) with each local library community. These webinars are intended to allow the local teams to have a within-system discussion about how implementation is working at each community site, prioritize discussions around remaining challenges, and enable WE and NCFL to pivot and showcase new expertise when and if relevant. The webinars are intended to allow library staff to deepen their understanding of the framework discussed in the in-person training and also introduce any new local staff to implementation strategies.

Designing the Train-the-Trainer Toolkit (April 2026-June 2026). After 6 months of testing resources and services, the research team will finalize and design the **Train-the-Trainer Toolkit** for creating AFLS Centers. The toolkit will provide a detailed description of the family literacy model, a brief overview of the project and landscape scan, a clear definition (based on co-design sessions) of an Adult and Family Literacy Support Center, and strategies for establishing a need-based Center in your own library community. It will highlight effective case studies, quotes, and examples of practices that work to promote adult and family literacy nationwide, with specific call-out boxes for providing services for individuals and communities with the highest literacy needs (as described above). The toolkit will be available in a downloadable PDF format with links, and disseminated widely across the ALL IN member organizations channels, conferences, etc. The team will also create an interactive format to be used via mobile phone or web version using an AI-powered tool such as Glide as an in-kind service to ALA. The interactive Toolkit will be offered under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

Tracking Progress and Evaluation (ongoing). Throughout the Year 1 & 2 activities, ALA, in partnership with a premiere third-party evaluation consulting firm, will deliver a white paper summarizing the effectiveness of the project. This all-

encompassing document can be accessed by the end-user of the training and will be produced to report on the quality of all resources developed, support channels administered, credentials obtained, and the sustainability of an innovative initiative that brings leading organizations (literacy ecosystem) together for the betterment of a specific cause. To capture this at scale, our evaluation team will be advised to connect with communities across library types, funding structures, cultural environments, and leadership capacities.

To increase the visibility of this work and allow for potential scaling, each ALL IN member will leverage learnings and products developed (landscape scan, toolkit) within their newsletters, annual conferences, press releases, social media distribution lists, co-written newsletters and webinars, and all existing platforms of dissemination. For example, WE and BBF will share project findings and deliverables through monthly newsletters, reaching approximately 26,000 and 14,000 subscribers respectively, and over 200,000 via social media posts to maximize visibility. The expansive presence of these organizations in the literacy ecosystem provides visibility to thousands in libraries, adult education and family literacy, research organizations, and those who impact literacy policy throughout our country. Additional activities to scale the project impact can include Pre Conference events during the ALA Annual Conference & Exhibition, Submission of a White Paper to Library Quarterly, and Submission of Library Blog entries for web distribution, sharing lessons learned and strategies to implement at NCFL annual conference. In addition to these coordinated efforts by participating organizations, ALL IN will promote the dissemination of project findings through its own website, which saw 22,000 visitors last year.

Diversity Plan. In this project, our EDI approach will intentionally address barriers to equitable access and participation no matter one's race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identification, physical and cognitive abilities and learning needs; geographic isolation and distribution, socioeconomic level, or other factors. We will develop partnerships with organizations, including CBOs, that are essential to our work and offer stipends to community leaders and members for their participation and co-design. ALA will build on its membership of the ALL IN coalition to deepen our collective impact across the adult learning ecosystem, ensuring that community-based libraries are key collaborators in reaching the unique and diverse literacy needs of adults and families nationwide. We will intentionally include library leaders, staff, and CBO partners to develop equitable and resilient ecosystems for providing AFLS centers, such as innovative ways to engage patrons through technology use. WE will collaborate with NCFL to innovate library-based approaches to professional development, such as integrating community-driven maker spaces to drive adult and family literacy access and attainment. NCFL will facilitate cross-sector convenings with libraries, families, local school staff, CBOs, and others to gain alignment around multigenerational literacy and learning in a community, while emphasizing family voice as central to conversations. Participants will be informed about the value of their contributions and paid for their time.

Project Results. This project will build capacity and provide resources for **250 library staff** across 11 library communities, including the three library systems directly involved in the grant and eight library systems to learn how to lead and leverage Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers. Over 500 libraries will receive the toolkit through webinars, conferences, and direct email communications via ALL IN partner outlets as described below. ALA, with support from ALL IN members, will generate specific products: 1) An action research landscape report, 2) A comprehensive, replicable Toolkit for establishing Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers, including resources for advancing adult/family literacy through libraries, including small, but significant branch locations, and a set of train-the-trainer materials for libraries to build initial and ongoing staff capacity to support literacy-building activities across the community.

These resources as well as replicable practices, models, and alliances can be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend and leverage the benefits of federal investment. By reaching this critical mass of public libraries, serving as an anchor institute for adult and family literacy-building activities, adult literacy will become part of the main role and identity of thousands more libraries. Hundreds of thousands of adults and families will benefit from increased literacy services, impacting education, civic engagement, and workforce outcomes to improvements in community health and well-being. Libraries are enduring, evolving institutions that democratic societies will always need to nurture civil society, and inform public discourse at all levels, ensuring everyone in our communities has a voice through literacy.

Endnotes

1. The Program 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 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>
2. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card, provides important information about student academic achievement and learning experiences in various subjects. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/?grade=4>
3. <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/outreach-tools/learn-about-the-civics-and-citizenship-toolkit>
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8. Bergson-Shilcock, A. & Taylor, R. (2023). Closing the Digital Skills Divide: The Payoff for Workers, Businesses, and The Economy. National Skills Coalition.
9. Statistics cited in this paragraph and the next are from National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education, available at <https://nrs.ed.gov/rt/reports/aggregate/2021/all> for the 2021-22 program year, or at <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/adultedbasic/funding.html#:~:text=The%20FY%202022%20appropriation%20includes,Education%20formula%20grants%20to%20States> for annual federal funding amounts.
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12. Ibid.
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17. See: Award Number LG-254862-OLS-23.
18. The four components described here are aligned to the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.
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Co-Designing Library-Based Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers.

Schedule of Completion for IMLS NLG-Libraries-FY24

The American Library Association (ALA) in partnership with members of the new [Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network](#) (ALL IN), including the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (BBF), National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), ProLiteracy (PL), and World Education (WE).

| Co-Designing Library-Based Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers: <i>At a Glance</i> | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|----|
| Timeline: August 1, 2024 - July 31, 2026 | | | | | | |
| Tasks/Process | Lead Org(s) | Supporting Org(s) | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 |
| Year 1: Landscape Aug 2024-July 2025 | | | | | | |
| Project Kickoff; MOUs | ALA | ALL IN | | | | |
| Conduct Library Landscape scan | WE | ALL IN/BBF, NCFL, PL, WE | | | | |
| A draft framework for AFLS Centers | WE, NCFL, PL, libraries | ALA, ALL IN/BBF | | | | |
| Issue Landscape Scan | ALA | ALL IN/BBF, NCFL, PL, WE | | | | |
| Year 2: Co-Design & Build Capacity Aug 2025-July 2026 | | | | | | |
| Develop an extensive Train-the-Trainer program for creating AFLS Centers | NCFL, WE, 3 library leads | ALA, ALL IN/BBF, PL | | | | |
| Co-Design, test, and iterate on toolkit with library communities. | WE, NCFL, co-design with communities | ALL IN/BBF, PL | | | | |
| Iteratively evaluate effectiveness and document learnings | ALA + 3rd Party Contractor | ALL IN/BBF, NCFL, PL, WE | | | | |
| Issue report on | | | | | | |

Co-Designing Library-Based Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers.

Digital Products Plan for IMLS NLG-Libraries-FY24

Submitted by American Library Association

In partnership with members of the Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network

Type of Digital Products

The American Library Association (ALA) in partnership with members of the new [Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network](#) (ALL IN), including the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy (BBF), National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), ProLiteracy (PL), and World Education (WE) will publish three digital assets as a result of our project, *Co-Designing Library-Based Adult and Family Literacy Support Centers*. All digital products will be free and open resources.

Year 1

- **Library Landscape Scan** (Report in PDF)

At the end of Year 1, American Library Association in partnership with members of the Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network will publish the **Library Landscape Scan**, highlighting organizations involved, methods used, lessons learned, and community-centered recommendations for building and supporting adult and family literacy centers in libraries. The report will be co-designed, branded, and published in PDF format. We anticipate that the report will be approximately 15-20 pages including: acknowledgements, an overview of the project and partners involved, brief literature review, findings of the landscape scan, highlights from each library community, including relevant pull-out examples and quotes, and recommendations for co-designing Adult and Family Literacy Centers. The team will collaboratively write a release blog and social media toolkit to link and disseminate the landscape scan. The social media toolkit will provide social media copy and images to disseminate the landscape report across channels including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). Each organization will add the Library Landscape Scan to their website and publish the blog. The report will be a free and open downloadable resource, issued with a suggested citation. This report will lay the groundwork for resources developed and published and Year 2 (as described below).

To design and disseminate the landscape scan, we will draw on the success [Digital Resilience in the American Workforce \(DRAW\)](#), a joint initiative of Jobs for the Future, World Education, and Safal Partners, with support from The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), to better prepare adult education practitioners who support learners that struggle to fully engage in tasks that demand the use of digital technologies. For this project, each organization published a blog to highlight the project and share the co-developed landscape report: [Digital Resilience in the American Workforce: Findings from a National Landscape Scan on Adult Digital Literacy Instruction](#).

Year 2

- **Train-the-Trainer Toolkit for Creating ALFS Centers** (Resource: Interactive Toolkit and PDF with clickable links)

At the end of Year 2, American Library Association in partnership with members of the Adult Literacy and Learning Impact Network will publish a free and open source **Train-the-Trainer Toolkit for Creating Library-based Adult and Family Literacy Centers**. The toolkit will be available in multiple formats, including: 1) a downloadable PDF with clickable links and 2) an interactive version via mobile phone or desktop using an AI-powered software such as Glide.

The full PDF will be designed to be linked and downloaded just as [Promoting Digital Literacy for Adult Learners: A Resource Guide](#), a digital guide published in 2022 by The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy and Digital Promise to support educators, tutors, and mentors who are working with adult learners on building digital literacy skills, the toolkit will also include sample facilitator guidelines and powerpoint slides. This toolkit and accompanying materials will be designed for library administrators and leaders who are responsible for establishing AFLS Centers in their library community and training the staff involved. This toolkit will help libraries build the critical skills and competencies needed by library leaders, staff, and volunteers to establish AFLS Centers that meet the specific literacy needs of their patrons, in line with the four components of family literacy. The toolkit will provide a detailed description of the family literacy model, a brief overview of the project and landscape scan, a clear definition (based on co-design sessions) of an Adult and Family Literacy Support Center, and strategies for establishing a need-based Center in your own library community. It will highlight effective case studies, quotes, and examples of practices that work to promote adult and family literacy nationwide, with specific call-out boxes for providing services for individuals and communities with the highest literacy needs (as described in the narrative). We will also create an interactive format to be used via mobile phone or web version, using an AI-powered software (which will be built and created in-kind by World Education). Please refer to World Education's "EdTech Integration Strategy Toolkit" as an example via: <https://etctechtoolkit.glideapp.io/dl/a400f7?full=t>. The interactive Toolkit will be offered under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

The team will collaboratively write a release blog and social media toolkit to link and disseminate the **Train-the-Trainer Toolkit for Creating ALFS Centers**. The social media toolkit will provide social media copy and images to disseminate the landscape report across channels including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). Each organization will add the Library Landscape Scan to their website and publish the blog. The Toolkit will be a free and open downloadable resource, issued with a suggested citation, and housed in each of the ALL IN member websites, including ALA's Resource Guide section (<https://www.ala.org/tools/topics/guides>).

- **Impact Report (Year 2)**

At the end of Year 2, a premiere third-party evaluation consulting firm will deliver a white paper summarizing the effectiveness of the collaborative project. The **Impact Report** will report on the quality of all resources developed, support channels administered, credentials obtained, and the sustainability of an innovative initiative that brings leading organizations (literacy ecosystem) together for the betterment of a specific cause. The report will include feedback from the library staff and communities involved about the preliminary effectiveness of the process and establishment of AFLS Centers. It will be issued in PDF format. We anticipate that the report will include an overview of the project and partners involved, observations about the co-design process, strategies for effective community-based engagement with libraries and library patrons, and evaluation of the quality of training materials developed for co-designing Adult and Family Literacy Centers. The report will be a free and open downloadable resource, issued with a suggested citation.