International Literacy Day and National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week

TOOLKIT 2015
ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT
The media provides an important channel for getting the message out about the adult literacy crisis in the United States and around the world. There are several media strategies to help your organization or community partnerships spread the word about events, reach potential supporters, and build relationships. ProLiteracy shares with you this media toolkit as a guide to assist you in promoting your program and adult literacy in your community to local media in advance of and during International Literacy Day and National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week (AEFL).

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FACTS
ABOUT INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY

International Literacy Day focuses attention on the need to promote worldwide literacy.

- UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, estimates that nearly 800 million people—one-fifth of the world’s adult population—do not know how to read or write; women make up two-thirds of this number. More than 67.4 million school-age children do not attend school.

UNESCO founded International Literacy Day.

- The first International Literacy Day was observed on September 8, 1967, and it continues to be celebrated on September 8 every year.

ABOUT ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY WEEK

Every year, the adult literacy and basic education field requests that Congress recognize one week as National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week. This year, that week is September 20-26, 2015.

The goal of National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week is to work side-by-side in every state, territory, and district to heighten public awareness, strengthen alliances, leverage resources, and increase the number of people who understand the vital role adult education and family literacy plays in our nation’s well-being.

ABOUT ADULT LITERACY

International

Globally, literacy rates are on the rise: they are up 2.3 percent in the past 10 years and 10.6 percent in the past 20 years. While women still lag behind—representing 64 percent of all low-literate adults—they have made significant gains over time. Since 1985, the female adult literacy rate has risen 15 percent, which is about double the growth of the male literacy rate.

The region of South and West Asia is home to more than one-half of the global low-literate population (51.8 percent), while sub-Saharan Africa represents 21.4 percent.

United States

More than 36 million American adults struggle to read, write, do math, and use technology above a third grade level. The recent Program for the International Assessment of Adult Literacy (PIAAC) examined the United States and 23 other industrialized countries and found:

- The U.S. mean literacy score was below the international average—ranking 16th out of 24 countries.
- Only twelve percent of adults in the U.S. performed at the highest proficiency level on the literacy scale.
- Only nine percent of adults in the U.S. performed at the highest proficiency level on the numeracy scale.
- Only six percent of adults in the U.S. and 8 percent of adults under 35 in the U.S. performed at the highest proficiency level on the problem-solving/technology scale.
ADULT LITERACY IN THE UNITED STATES

Current federal appropriations for adult basic education in the U.S. total just over $600 million, which provides funding to serve just three million individuals.

There is a correlation between a low literacy rate and a low paycheck.
• Just 35 percent of individuals with below basic skills are employed full time, while 64 percent in the proficient category have full-time jobs.
• The salaries of adults with below-basic literacy skills are, on average, $28,000 less than salaries of adults with proficient skills.
• Single mothers who lack a high school degree are much more likely to be on welfare than women who have a high school degree.
• Women with low literacy are twice as likely as men to be in the lowest earnings category of $300 a week or less.
• Minimum wage workers increased wages by 18 to 25 percent within 18 months of exiting an adult education program.

Health
• Low literacy adds an estimated $230 billion to the country’s annual healthcare costs.
• People with low skills are four times more likely to have poor health (two times the national average).

Employment
• The percentage of employed adults in the U.S. who performed at the highest proficiency level was lower than the international average of employed adults who performed at the highest proficiency level.
• The U.S. has the highest levels of income inequality and literacy skills inequality.

Education
• Americans with a high school diploma or less scored lower in literacy, on average, than their counterparts in the other 23 countries.
• People who come from low educated families are 10 times more likely to have low literacy skills.
• The difference in literacy proficiency between people with the lowest and highest education levels was greater in the U.S. than in any of the other 23 countries.

Demographics
• The percentage of black and Hispanic adults in the U.S. who performed at the highest proficiency level on the literacy scale was lower than the percentage of white adults.
• Literacy differences between native-born and foreign-born Americans were greater than the average internationally.
• The difference in average literacy scores between the youngest and oldest Americans was smaller than in any other country.

Civic Engagement
• Low-literacy Americans are far more likely than high-literacy Americans to express low political engagement and understanding.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
MAKE THE MOST OF THE OPPORTUNITY

Before you launch into any endeavor that raises awareness of your program and the need for adult education and language services, review how you currently “make your case” about literacy to your stakeholders:

• Think about the content and accuracy of your written materials, including press releases, websites, social media accounts, brochures, and newsletters.
• Use current resources, including those produced by ProLiteracy.
• Be consistent in the use and meaning of terms and language.
• Remember your audience. Avoid jargon and provide examples that help explain to the general public what you mean by “low literacy.”
• Statistics take on more meaning when you combine them with personal stories or testimonials.
• Make sure the statistics you use are up-to-date and can be verified.
• Keep informed about federal policy and state trends. What is happening in Washington, D.C. and in your state capital? Commit to taking timely and persistent action over the long term.

For a brochure featuring current facts and statistics about adult literacy, visit the ProLiteracy “Member Central” web page and download ProLiteracy’s “Facts Brochure” under Media Resources.
SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Plan an event or hold a news conference to commemorate International Literacy Day or AEFL week. Invite the news media, key elected officials, political candidates (federal, state, and local), students, and the public.

2. Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece focusing on International Literacy Day or AEFL week, the importance of adult literacy, and the U.S. adult literacy standing internationally and send it to local news outlets.

3. Research local radio and television talk shows in your area. Contact hosts and make yourself available to discuss adult literacy on International Literacy Day or during AEFL week. Arrange to bring an adult literacy student with you.

4. Contact your governor, mayor, or leading county official and ask him or her to sign an International Literacy Day proclamation (see Samples section).

5. Ask your local library to set up a display of books written by authors in countries that have low literacy rates. Supply the library with fact sheets.

6. Partner with local companies in your area to display information about International Literacy Day and/or AEFL week and literacy rates throughout the world and in your community. For example:
   a. Starbucks has a strong corporate responsibility program that includes support programs in countries from which it purchases coffee. Contact your local Starbucks stores and ask permission to display information about International Literacy Day, AEFL week, and literacy rates. (See “Letter of Introduction” in Samples.)
   b. Barnes & Nobles also works with organizations in the communities where they have stores. Ask to speak to the individual at the store (or other bookstores in your community) responsible for community relations and discuss ways you can work together to use International Literacy Day and AEFL week to promote the issue of adult literacy.

7. Set up an information booth about your literacy program in a heavily trafficked area of your local shopping mall. Contact the public relations, marketing, or community relations departments to arrange permission.

8. Organize a “read aloud” event in a mall, store, library, coffee house, or other public location. Have volunteers take turns reading aloud. Use books by authors in developing nations; call it “A Moment of Reading Aloud—Breaking the Silence About Adult Low Literacy.”

9. Encourage students in your adult literacy, English language learning, and GED programs to write letters to your community representatives and to Congress about the importance of adult literacy and the need to support adult education. Use ProLiteracy’s advocacy web pages to find contact information for elected officials.

10. Encourage students to visit public officials to discuss the importance of literacy. Be sure to supply them with talking points and information about your organization.

11. Use social media to raise awareness about adult literacy. See our website (http://www.proliteracy.org/the-crisis/piaac--survey-of-adult-skills) for suggested messaging.
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES THAT INCLUDE POLITICAL OFFICIALS

1. Initiate a local, regional, or statewide meeting to develop an action plan mapping out where adult education and literacy will be in your state by next year, in five years, and in 10 years.

2. Educate and inform elected officials at all levels about literacy efforts. This includes:
   - Governors. Research your governor’s position on literacy and adult education. Was either mentioned in his or her state-of-the-state address?
   - Candidates running for federal, state, and local office. In particular, note the states where competitive senate and governor races are occurring. Work with all candidates and parties to help them incorporate the (nonpartisan) literacy concepts in their official positions on education.
   - State senators and assembly members
   - County executives/supervisors
   - Mayors and local councilors

3. Identify and contact local and state people and groups who sponsor candidate forums and get your question about how candidates stand on adult literacy on the forum agenda. Often, newspapers, radio and television stations, and League of Women Voters groups sponsor candidate forums. Be prepared to educate them about the purpose of your organization.

4. Work with state and national political parties to help them incorporate the adult education and literacy concepts into the education portion of the party’s official platform (official stand on all the issues). Find out each party’s respective schedules and process for rewriting their platform. National party platforms are rewritten every few years based on input from states.

5. Make new friends. Many groups have published social or civic agendas (social priorities, positions, or platforms that explain their stands on issues). Work with as many groups as possible, including but not limited to: League of Women Voters, labor unions (especially teacher’s unions), Urban League, special language-related or culturally-focused groups, health councils, faith-based groups, youth groups, and civic organizations. Make a special effort to connect with regional or state groups devoted to education. Work to get your message about adult education and literacy included in their official published position on the issues.

6. Ask your governor and mayor to work to get literacy on the agenda of National Governor’s Association and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

7. Contact your U.S. Representative, U.S. Senator, or President Obama and thank them for passing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the key piece of federal legislation that funds adult literacy and basic education. Need to find your elected officials? Check out our website: http://capwiz.com/proliteracy/home/ and use the Find Your Officials function.
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

1. Organize a special event to take place in schools, and invite key people from government, business, education, and the media to attend and participate. Ask an adult learner involved in a literacy program to give a testimonial. Rather than holding a formal symposium, consider asking students for creative suggestions for events.

2. Establish a one-day hotline parents and community members can call if they have questions about reading education, learning disabilities, literacy programs, and resources. Staff the hotline with reading professionals and volunteers from local literacy organizations.

3. Have older students make books of their own that can be shared with younger students at their schools.

4. Form links with a school or educational group in another country and use this contact as a way to generate interest in your school’s or group’s activities, while also helping promote literacy in other regions of the world. Letter-writing campaigns, book collections, and other activities can generate interest among the media and the public.

5. Create a partnership with a television or radio station, magazine, or newspaper. Ask to join forces on a specific project; don’t just ask for coverage of one event. Remember that media outlets have an interest in promoting literacy, too.

6. Approach a manufacturer in your region about helping your organization heighten awareness about a reading or literacy topic. A regional supermarket chain, for instance, might agree to print a literacy message on its shopping bags. A local dairy might agree to carry a series of tips for parents on its packaging.

7. Approach a local bookstore about donating books for disadvantaged children or to use as prizes for reading awards at schools.

8. Initiate an annual contest or award. Be creative—hold a writing contest for students or for senior citizens, a recognition award for the learning disabled student who has made the most progress, a contest for the best home video about reading, an award for the best literacy tutor in your state/province, etc.
SAMPLES
September 1, 2015

Dear “5K” participant:

We are thrilled that you are able to join us for our inaugural “Literacy 5K” event, Tuesday, September 8, 2015. This event will be a great way to raise awareness for literacy, have fun and get fit in the process!

Please remember:

- **Where:** Clinton Square, downtown Syracuse
- **When:** Tuesday, September 8
  - 11:30 a.m. start
- **What:** A 5K run through Onondaga Lake Park

Enclosed you will find a copy of the day’s program and a ProLiteracy brochure for your review. Please do not hesitate to call with any questions you may have.

I look forward to seeing you Monday!

Sincerely,

Michele Diecuch
Director of Programs
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

For a Word file of this template, please email Michele Bellso, director of marketing and communications, at mbellso@proliteracy.org.

August 1, 2015
Starbucks
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear XXXXXXX:

Please join (organization’s name) in celebrating International Literacy Day, September 8, and National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week, September 20-26.

International Literacy Day and AEFL week help bring our attention to the nearly 800 million adults worldwide who cannot read, write, or perform simple math calculations. This is a time when individuals, organizations, and countries throughout the world renew their efforts to promote literacy and demonstrate their commitment to providing education for all.

Here in (community or state), XXXXX adults lack the literacy skills they need to get better jobs, help their children with homework, or participate fully in our community. (Org name) is a (volunteer/community-based/adult education) organization that provides free basic literacy, English as another language, and GED instruction to adults and out-of-school youth throughout (community). We recruit and train volunteers to work with adults one-to-one or in small groups to help them reach their educational goals.

We know that Starbucks does a great deal for its coffee communities around the world; International Literacy Day and AEFL week are occasions to show the same support for the adults in our community who are working to improve their literacy skills. We would welcome the opportunity to work together with you to recognize and celebrate International Literacy Day and AEFL week in (community).

I will contact you soon to discuss how we can work together to raise awareness about the importance of literacy skills in the U.S. and throughout the world.

Sincerely,
PROCLAMATION

For a Word file of this template, please email Michele Bellso, director of marketing and communications, at mbellso@proliteracy.org.

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2015
BY THE (elected official) OF THE (city/county/state) OF (name)
A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the need for a highly literate citizenry increases as (city/county/state) moves toward an increasingly technological future; and

WHEREAS, more than (figure) percent of the (city/county/state) adults experience literacy issues that impact severely on their lives and families, their ability to work productively, and their full participation as citizens and residents of our (city/count/state); and

WHEREAS, (insert paragraph about adult literacy program statistics; e.g. the following: More than 80,000 students enrolled in Michigan adult education programs between 2006-2007, including 9,839 who received GED certificates and more than 10,000 who learned English as a second language. 38 percent of those enrolled were Hispanic, 36 percent were Caucasian, 23 percent were Asian, and 3 percent were African American); and

WHEREAS, the (names of literacy programs requesting the proclamation) work with (names of partners, e.g., local news media, local businesses, etc.) in inviting (e.g., the community, residents of, newspapers, television, and radio stations) to join in highlighting the economic and societal importance of literacy;

NOW, THEREFORE, I (elected official name and title), do hereby proclaim September 8, 2015, as INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY in (city/county/state), and urge my fellow citizens to learn more about the importance of literacy and to become involved with literacy in their communities.
For a Word file of this template, please email Michele Bellso, director of marketing and communications, at mbellso@proliteracy.org.

Instructions: On your organization’s letterhead, copy this press release format and fill in your local program information according to the instructions for each paragraph (and closing) below. Check with your local newspapers and television and radio stations to see how they prefer news releases to be submitted (email/mail/fax). Call your contact person at each media outlet to let them know to expect it.

**News Release Template**

**News Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:**
- Contact Person
- Title
- Telephone Number
- Cell Phone number
- Email Address

**HEADLINE**

(This is one of the most important components of the press release as this needs to grab the attention of the editor. It should be in bold type and a size that is larger than the body text. Preferred fonts—Arial, Times New Roman, Verdana.)

**The Subtitle Goes Here**

(Use the subtitle for additional information. Use the same font as the headline, but a smaller size and upper and lower cases.)

**<City>, <State>, <Date>**—Your first paragraph of the release should be written in a clear and concise manner. It needs to contain information that will entice the reader. Your story must be newsworthy and factual.

Your text should include pertinent information about your event. Be sure to include the date, location of the event, and any other pertinent information. Answer the questions “who?” “what?” “when?” “where?” “why?” and “how?”

You should include a quote from someone who is a credible source, include his or her title or position with the company, and explain why he or she is considered a credible source.

—more—

For more information please contact:

Contact Name for Organization
Phone Number
Email (if applicable)

Amy Schmitz for ProLiteracy
(315) 214-2580
aschmitz@proliteracy.org

Local Program Works to Address Adult Literacy Crisis

(September 8, 2013, City, State Abbr.)—On September 8, the world will mark the 46th annual International Literacy Day to remind us all that reading, writing, and basic math remain an elusive target for nearly 800 million adults around the globe, including XX in our community. (Organization Name) in (location) is part of a national network of organizations that work every minute of every day to end the adult literacy crisis.

According to ProLiteracy, the largest membership organization advancing the cause of adult literacy and basic education in the nation, more than 30 million adults in the U.S. lack the most basic literacy skills, and 15 percent of Americans without a diploma don’t have jobs. ProLiteracy provides more than 1,000 community-based literacy organizations, including (Organization Name), with tools to help educate adult learners and help them meet the demands of today’s workforce.

“About one in six adults is still not literate, and approximately 67.4 million school-aged children are not enrolled in school,” said (Name, title, Organization Name). “Here at home, in our own community, we know that (fill in with local stats on literacy, high school completion, GED test takers, etc.). Literacy helps families be healthier and safer and provides people sustainable opportunities to support themselves through work, contributing ultimately to the economic growth of our region and our country.”

“Low literacy costs the nation more than two hundred billion dollars each year in lost productivity, as well as an additional one to two billion in health and safety issues,” said Kevin Morgan, president and CEO of ProLiteracy. “Every dollar spent on adult literacy and education provides returns to the country through higher employment, added tax revenues, reduced welfare payments, and less crime.”

In recognition of International Literacy Day, (Organization Name) is (insert activity/activities planned for day with specific locations and times).

For more information on (Organization Name)’s services, visit (Local Website) or call (Phone Number).
ABOUT <Organization>—Include a brief description of your program along with the products and services it provides.

# # #

(At the end of the release, use hashmarks to indicate that the release is ended. The usual method of transmitting your release is via email.)
Local Program Works to Address Adult Literacy Crisis

(September 8, 2015, City, State Abbr.) – On September 8, the world will mark the 48th annual International Literacy Day to remind us all that reading, writing, and basic math remain an elusive target for nearly 800 million adults around the globe, including XX in our community. (Organization Name) in (location) is part of a national network of organizations that work every minute of every day to end the adult literacy crisis.

According to ProLiteracy, the largest membership organization advancing the cause of adult literacy and basic education in the nation, more than 36 million adults in the U.S. lack the most basic literacy skills, and 15 percent of Americans without a diploma don’t have jobs. ProLiteracy provides more than 1,100 community-based literacy organizations, including (Organization Name), with tools to help educate adult learners and help them meet the demands of today’s workforce.

“About one in six adults is still not literate, and approximately 67.4 million school-aged children are not enrolled in school,” said (Name, title, Organization Name). “Here at home, in our own community, we know that (fill in with local stats on literacy, high school completion, GED test takers, etc.). Literacy helps families be healthier and safer and provides people sustainable opportunities to support themselves through work, contributing ultimately to the economic growth of our region and our country.”

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In recognition of International Literacy Day, (Organization Name) is (insert activity/activities planned for day with specific locations and times).

For more information on (Organization Name)’s services, visit (Local Website) or call (Phone Number).
TIPS FOR WRITING NEWS RELEASES

Write news releases that get noticed—publicity is priceless! Knowing how to write a release in a format that will be read by reporters can be more effective than advertising and is inexpensive. News releases must be well written, newsworthy, and presented in a factual manner. Most of all, they must be credible.

Important factors in establishing credibility are:

• The news release is well written and presented properly.
• Information is presented in a factual manner. The media does not accept sales pitches or embellishment. Don’t write an advertisement.
• The information is relevant to the recipient.

Writing the content:

• Keep it short. News stories are made up of simple, short sentences with simple words. Break up long sentences into two. The release should be between 300-500 words and no more than two pages.
• Make it newsworthy and timely. Identify the current need for the product and/or service.
• Be factual. Do not embellish the facts with opinions.
• Write it from the reader’s perspective. The information must be relevant to the recipient.
• Write a powerful headline. What you say here determines whether the reporter will continue reading the release.
• Write a strong opening paragraph. It should contain the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of the product and/or service.
• Give a detailed explanation. This will help establish the value to readers. If you’re announcing a new program, be sure to include information on all key points.
• Don’t use important words more than once in a paragraph.
• Don’t begin a sentence with the same word with which you just finished the previous sentence.
• Edit the story and take out any unnecessary or redundant words. Have other people proof it as well. Remove typos.
• Be careful with your facts, spelling, and grammar.
• Include photos if you can, or make them available digitally on a website.