



# Advocacy Toolkit for Adult Education and Literacy

How to Increase Public and Private Support Using PIAAC Data

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Cover Photo by Carey Reid

Adult learners, teachers and supporters entering an Adult Literacy Awareness Day rally at the Massachusetts State House, March 2007





Photo by Carey Reid

Adult learners and teachers at an Adult Literacy Awareness Day rally in the Massachusetts State House Auditorium

## Introduction

Low adult literacy intersects with almost every social and economic issue facing Americans. We know that 43 million Americans are considered low literate—meaning those reading at or below the third-grade level.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, most of the public, policy makers, corporations, and foundations are not aware it is a problem. Adult educators must act by making a strong case in support of adult education and literacy and how it can positively impact adults, their families, and their communities. More importantly, we must act to help stakeholders—of all types—understand why contributing to adult education and literacy programs is an important and worthy investment.

This toolkit describes how adult education and literacy (AEL) programs<sup>2</sup> can use recent adult basic skills data, program activity and successes, and learner impact stories to approach all funders at the state and local levels, including:

- State legislators
- County/district legislators
- Individual donors
- Corporations and corporate foundations
- Charitable foundations

### IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR ME?

Although the toolkit will be useful for anyone who wants to advocate for AEL, it is designed for three audiences in particular:

- Individuals new to advocating for AEL
- AEL program directors
- State and citywide AEL associations and coalitions

<sup>1</sup> PIAAC Gateway <http://piaacgateway.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Adult education and literacy includes basic literacy, digital literacy, adult basic and secondary education, high school exam preparation, English for speakers of other languages, and preparation for post-secondary education and training.

### THE TOOLKIT IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR MAIN SECTIONS:

1. Effective Advocacy Using PIAAC State and County Synthetic Data
2. Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask
3. Advocating with State and Local Legislators
4. How to Advocate with Donors, Foundations, and Corporations

Each section begins with key takeaways followed by the details of how to approach, communicate with, and persuade others to act on behalf of AEL, with bulleted best practices for each audience. Part 3, on advocating with state and local legislators, in particular, includes how state legislative processes are typically organized; what effective public policy advocacy looks like; examples of how AEL advocates have successfully accomplished their public policy advocacy goals; best practices in advocating with policy makers, including grassroots advocacy, social advocacy, cultivating champions, and more; and the details of calling, writing, and meeting with legislators and conducting statehouse rallies for AEL.

In a post-pandemic world, it is now possible to meet virtually with legislators to carry out detailed advocacy work. We have a section dedicated to doing that: **Tips for Meeting Remotely with Legislators.**

Lastly, Part 4 discusses how to advocate with individual donors, foundations, and corporations and begins by explaining the similarities in advocating in both the public and private sectors followed by detailing strategies to use with each audience in the private funding realm.

### TOOLS TO HELP YOU ACCOMPLISH YOUR ADVOCACY GOALS

Answering the key questions at the end of each section will guide you in planning your advocacy efforts.

The appendices provide detailed case studies on select state AEL associations that do advocacy and can help you to connect with an advocacy association in your state (where one exists); examples of advocating with PIAAC data locally; identify what you can legally do as an advocate based on your unique funding situation; and offer additional tools and resources used by advocates in carrying out the work.



#### FEEDBACK

**ProLiteracy encourages readers to provide comments and suggestions to help revise and improve the toolkit. Please email [info@proliteracy.org](mailto:info@proliteracy.org).**



## Effective Advocacy Using PIAAC State and County Synthetic Data

### PART 1

### Key Takeaways

- ✓ PIAAC synthetic data estimates the literacy and numeracy rates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and all counties in the U.S.
- ✓ Advocates can compare and analyze these data, and seek evidence of the relationship between low literacy and low numeracy as it intersects with societal issues today, such as poverty, poor health, and economic mobility.
- ✓ Using the PIAAC Skills Map, advocates can identify locales of skilled populations and which states and counties suffer with low literacy.
- ✓ Advocates can use tools like ProLiteracy's Adult Literacy Impact Report Template and PowerPoint presentation template to advocate for funding to help mitigate these issues.
- ✓ To get the most from your advocacy efforts using PIAAC synthetic data, first explore the answers to key questions that will help you to plan effectively. You will find help with this in **Planning Your Advocacy – Key Questions to Ask Yourself.**



## What Is PIAAC?

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is a large-scale international household study conducted under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that assesses the key cognitive and workplace skills that adults need to participate successfully in 21st century society and the global economy. The study was conducted among 24 countries. In the U.S., PIAAC was led by the [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#) of the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>3</sup>

### BACKGROUND

PIAAC assessed a broad range of abilities and competencies of adults aged 16-74 in these domains:

1. Literacy
2. Numeracy
3. Problem solving in technology-rich environments

Data were collected using an extensive background questionnaire. Information from the background questionnaire help describe the relationship between the cognitive skills assessed in PIAAC and other key indicators such as demographics, educational attainment, employment status, and everyday skills used at work and at home. In the United States, the study was conducted in English or Spanish.<sup>4</sup>

In the U.S., three rounds of data collection were conducted during the first cycle:

- Round one (main study): 2011–12; results released in 2013
- Round two: 2013–14; results released in 2016
- Round three: 2017; results released in 2019–20.

Cycle II, Round 1 was completed during 2022 and 2023. The initial results were released in December 2024, but a more detailed analysis has yet to be completed.

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<sup>3</sup> PIAAC Gateway <http://piaacgateway.com/>

<sup>4</sup> PIAAC Gateway <http://piaacgateway.com/>

## LITERACY AND NUMERACY LEVELS

Participants' scores were divided into three levels in literacy and numeracy.

PIAAC Proficiency Measures	Literacy	Numeracy
<b>At or Below Level 1 0–225 Points</b>	Adults at this level can be considered at risk for difficulties using or comprehending print material. Adults at the upper end of this level can read short texts, in print or online, and understand the meaning well enough to perform simple tasks, such as filling out a short form, but drawing inferences or combining multiple sources of text may be too difficult. Adults who are below Level 1 may only be able to understand very basic vocabulary or find very specific information on a familiar topic. Some adults below Level 1 may struggle even to do this and may be functionally illiterate.	Adults at this level can be considered at risk for difficulties with numeracy. Adults at the upper end of this level can understand how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide and can perform basic one-step mathematical operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with given values or common spatial representations (e.g., calculate how many bottles of soda are in a full box with two level box when only the top level can be seen). Adults who are below Level 1 may only be able to count, sort, and do basic arithmetic operations with simple whole numbers and may be functionally innumerate.

PIAAC Proficiency Measures	Literacy	Numeracy
<b>Level 2 226–275 Points</b>	Adults at this level can be considered nearing proficiency but still struggling to perform tasks with text-based information. Such adults may be able to read print and digital texts, relate multiple pieces of information within or across a couple documents, compare and contrast, and draw simple inferences. They can navigate in a digital environment to access key information, such as finding two main benefits of one product over another. However, more complex inferencing and evaluation may be too difficult.	Adults at this level can be considered nearing proficiency but still struggling to perform numeracy tasks. Such adults can successfully perform tasks that require requiring two or three steps involving calculations with whole numbers, and common decimals, percentages, and fractions. They can conduct simple measurement and interpret relatively simple data and statistics in texts, tables, and graphs. However, more complicated problem solving (where the information isn't explicit or is in an unfamiliar context) may be too difficult.
<b>At or Above Level 3 276 Points or More</b>	Adults at these levels can be considered proficient at working with information and ideas in texts. They have a range of higher literacy skills, such as the ability to understand, interpret, and synthesize information across multiple, complex texts; the ability to evaluate the reliability of sources; and the ability to infer sophisticated meanings and complex ideas from written sources.	Adults at these levels can be considered proficient at working with mathematical information and ideas. They have a range of numeracy skills, such as the ability to recognize mathematical relationships and apply proportions; the ability to understand abstract representations of mathematical concepts; and the ability to engage in complex reasoning about quantities and data.

For more information about how PIAAC was conducted and related reports, visit the PIAAC Gateway website <http://www.piaacgateway.com/>. A second cycle of PIAAC will be conducted in 2021–22; national and international data will be released in December 2024.



### PIAAC STATE AND COUNTY SYNTHETIC ESTIMATES AND THE PIAAC SKILLS MAP

In April 2020, NCES released the [PIAAC Skills Map: State and County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy](#).

These state and county estimates are based on data from three rounds of U.S. PIAAC data collection between 2012 and 2017, as well as data from the American Community Survey 2013–17. Small area estimates are available for U.S. adults age 16–74 at levels 1, 2, and 3, as well as average literacy and numeracy scores on the PIAAC scale of 0–500. The mapping tool also compares national, state, and county estimates.

#### *What are synthetic estimates?*

A synthetic estimate is a prevalence estimate for a local area that is calculated by using descriptive or demographic data for local areas in combination with national or state data. For the PIAAC state and county estimates, PIAAC data from round 1, 2, and 3 participants along with America's Community Survey (ACS) data were utilized.

### HOW TO USE THE PIAAC SKILLS MAP

The PIAAC Skills Map contains several interactive features that you can use to explore, compare, and analyze data from both PIAAC and the American Community Survey (ACS):

- **At-a-glance:** National heat maps on the main page use hues to show the magnitude of the adult literacy issue at the county and state levels, including mouseover popups with initial comparison detail.
- **County Summary Cards:** County summaries are available by double clicking on a county in the national map that compares county to state data.
- **Comparison charts of all counties within a state:** An in-depth comparison chart is available as a download link within the County Summary Cards.
- **Cross-reference demographics:** Users can select and explore variables of demographic data, which are then displayed in bar charts within the County Summary Card.
- **Users can also select and explore these variables:** Poverty, employment status, occupation and/or health to compare with PIAAC literacy or numeracy levels. These, too, are displayed in bar charts within the County Summary Card.
- **An Excel file:** An Excel file is available from the Download Data button on the left panel of the main skills map page. It contains all of the data in the tool in Excel table format, including the skills measures and demographic data for each state and county. One could use this excel file to manipulate the data and present it in different formats.

### BARBARA BUSH FOUNDATION’S LITERACY GAP MAP

Additionally, the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy has created the [Literacy Gap Map](#)—an interactive heat map illustrating the relationship of literacy to health, income, and education in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and counties across the U.S.

The Literacy Gap Map draws from a variety of sources, including PIAAC state and county estimates; Community Health Status Indicators (CHSI) to Combat Obesity, Heart Disease and Cancer; the American Community Survey; National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2003); National Assessment of Educational Progress reading scores; and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) data tables. Users can select and view data points in literacy, language, economic status, education, digital access, housing, and demographics for any county or state.

While the Literacy Gap Map shows synthetic state and county PIAAC data for levels 1-3 in literacy, a more detailed account of PIAAC literacy and numeracy data can be visualized in the PIAAC Skills Map.

The Literacy Gap Map includes “snapshots” that provide state-level data on literacy and key quality of life indicators including health, education, and income. The new resources also include snapshots for 22 cities—including Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C.—to illustrate low literacy’s impact on key metro areas. These resources can be found by going to the [“What does literacy look like in your state?”](#)

## How to Advocate for Adult Education and Literacy Using PIAAC State and County Synthetic Data

In June 2020, the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released a new analysis of PIAAC synthetic data, indicating the top five states and counties that have the highest and lowest adult literacy and numeracy rates in the nation.

In a Cision PR Newswire report, NCES Commissioner Lynn Woodworth asserted, “As we adjust and respond to the changing economic and educational landscapes in the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world, reliable data are critical for understanding where the skilled workforce is, where more training is needed, and which areas are likely to take longer to recover ... With these latest data, policymakers, business leaders, and educators are able to better understand the status and needs of their local communities.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/where-are-americas-most-and-least-skilled-workers-301078279.htm>

The disparities called out nationally also appear within states and regions. By using both the PIAAC Skills Map and the Barbara Bush Foundation’s Literacy Gap Map, advocates can seek evidence of the relationship between low literacy and numeracy and:

- people of color
- poverty and access to housing
- workforce development and economic mobility
- education and internet access
- poor health and access to health insurance

—and possibly more—across counties within a state.

With evidence of these relationships, advocates can make inferences when creating effective, compelling messaging that will appeal to policy makers and private and public funders and these funders’ interests. AEL advocates can identify which counties within their state are more likely to struggle in a COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world and use this evidence to strengthen their case.

**Part 2: Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask** goes into depth about accomplishing this. In the meantime, what do we mean by advocacy and advocating for adult education and literacy?

### WHAT IS ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY?

When teaching “adults,” we refer to people age 16 and older. Adult education and literacy programs include:

- **Adult Basic Education (ABE):** education provided for persons at lower literacy levels—grades 0–8—with emphasis on communicative, computational, and social skills
- **Adult Secondary Education (ASE):** education for persons who have not completed high school and/or are seeking a high school equivalency credential
- **English Language Learning (ELL):** instruction for adult immigrants who lack proficiency in English and who seek to improve their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English; also referred to as English as a second language (ESL) or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Adult Education and Literacy also includes digital, health, and financial literacy in addition to preparation for high school equivalency exams and post-secondary education and training.



### WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

By definition, advocacy is:

4. The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal  
([merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocacy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocacy))
5. Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy  
([www.lexico.com/en/definition/advocacy](https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/advocacy))

We advocate to:

- Influence public policy and legislation at the federal, state, and local levels.
- Help corporations and charitable foundations understand why it is critical to invest in adult basic skills.
- Educate the public to bring the issue of adult basic skills to the forefront to encourage increased support from all audiences.

See **Appendix D** to learn more about these different types of advocacy (lobbying, educating, advocating). Whether you are addressing public officials or corporations, charitable foundations, and private donors, stakeholders must understand how adult learners—and the programs that serve them—are integral to the strength of adults and families and the well-being of their communities.

### Planning Your Advocacy – Key Questions to Ask Yourself

Whether you plan to advocate with policymakers or private funders, you will need to think through several key decision points and determine whether you have the resources to carry out the advocacy. The following checklist includes key considerations in planning to advocate:

- What is your advocacy goal?
- What are you asking for?
- Who will you reach?
- How will you reach them?
- Who do you involve in advocacy activities?
- How will you prepare?
- How will you present your case?
- How will you follow up?

### WHAT IS YOUR ADVOCACY GOAL?

By using the PIAAC synthetic data, what does your group, program or organization want to accomplish?

- Increase public and/or private funding for adult education and literacy (including ELL/ESL/ESOL)?
- Focus on the need to serve under-served populations such as certain immigrant groups, older adults, English language learners with little or no English reading and writing skills, etc?
  - Improve program quality, for example:
  - Increase funding to hire more full-time teachers or other practitioners?
  - Reduce waiting lists for classes?
  - Improve program (in-person or online) curriculum?
  - Improve program quality following or adapting the model used in New York City (Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders, by Ira Yankwitt and Sierra Stoneman Bell<sup>6</sup>)?
  - Other?
- Improve data tracking (city/town, county, state) for participants in AEL programs to gauge the long-term impact of participating in instruction? (such as reducing poverty, increasing earnings, improving health outcomes, reducing involvement with the criminal justice system, reducing recidivism rates etc.)



#### NOTES

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lacnyc.org/investing-in-quality.html> What are you asking for?

### WHAT ARE YOU ASKING FOR?

An “ask” is what you are requesting from a person or an organization. In the private sector, this might be an ask for funding a certain project or for an individual donation or corporate sponsorship. In the public sector, you may be asking for funding, policy, or laws that would improve access to quality AEL programs. While deep consideration must be taken into developing the ask, (we will explore that in more detail in **Part 2: Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask**) what are your initial thoughts on what to ask for?



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### WHO WILL YOU REACH?

Which policy makers, funders, or influencers would you like to reach?

For example:

- City/town council members
- Mayor, city/town manager
- County-level policy makers
- State legislators (house, senate)
- Governor
- Business leaders and business association leaders (Chamber of Commerce, Regional Employment Board)
- Labor leaders
- Public health leaders
- Public library board leaders (state, city, town)
- Members of a school committee
- Members of the state board of education
- Charitable foundations
- United Way
- Potential individual donors
- Print media
- Broadcast media
- Digital social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Other:

Of these, which are your top priorities (which may have the most influence or power)?



NOTES

### HOW WILL YOU REACH THEM?

Decide how you will reach policy makers, funders, and influencers.

- Introduction from a colleague or board member
- Write a letter
- Call them
- Set up a meeting
- Give a presentation at a meeting



NOTES

### WHO WILL YOU INVOLVE IN ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES?

- Adult learners
- Teachers, tutors, and program administrators
- Other constituents, for visits with legislators
- Volunteers (instructional or non-instructional)
- Business or labor leaders
- Community and public health leaders
- Corrections reform leaders
- Other key stakeholders or allies



NOTES

### HOW WILL YOU PREPARE?

What are the key talking points that you want to emphasize?  
(See **Crafting Compelling Hooks** in Part 2 for tips).



NOTES

### HOW WILL YOU PREPARE YOUR TEAM?

If you involve adult learners, how will you prepare them to comfortably explain how their participation in an AEL program has helped them, their family, or their community? (See **Adult Learner Participation** in Part 3 for tips.)



NOTES

### HOW WILL YOU PRESENT YOUR CASE?

How will you present the PIAAC synthetic data (email, PowerPoint presentation, online, or in-person meeting for example)? If you have a slide show, will you include interactive digital maps showing where highest concentrations of low-literate adults live in your state or county/ies.



NOTES

In your presentation of the PIAAC synthetic data, are you prepared to explain the following and why they are important?

- OECD
- PIAAC Survey of Adult Skills
- PIAAC synthetic estimates



NOTES

What material will you bring to leave behind with your audience? (For example, printouts of the data by state and/or county/ies? ProLiteracy's Adult Literacy Impact Report customized for your area? ([See ProLiteracy's Template and examples in Part 2.](#))



NOTES



### HOW WILL YOU FOLLOW UP?

- A thank you letter, email, or phone call to the policy maker, staffer, aide, or other audience
- A written reminder about your specific ask
- In the case of legislators:
  - Identifying those who appeared to be interested, and urging that they form a legislative AEL caucus or group to push legislation or appropriations (line items) forward
  - Asking (a) legislative champion(s) to initiate a “Dear Colleague” letter to support new or revised legislation or significant increase in funding
  - Other ideas to which you think they would be receptive for ratcheting up their support of AEL?

Do you need to report the results of your visit to your city/town, county, or state AEL advocacy organization? What format would be most suitable for that report?



### NOTES

With this firm understanding of what PIAAC synthetic data is, how it can be used to effectively advocate for adult education and literacy and used with a plan for advancing the work, you can move forward with greater confidence in your advocacy journey. In Part 2: Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask, we will explore how to use PIAAC synthetic data to craft compelling advocacy messages, and what’s involved with the ask.



## Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask

### PART 2

### Key Takeaways

- ✓ Effective messaging consists of framing the issue, creating compelling hooks, and describing how adult education and literacy can help.
- ✓ ProLiteracy's Impact Report Template and PowerPoint template help programs to effectively organize data to support program messaging.
- ✓ Making the right ask is critical and can make or break an advocacy campaign.

### Creating Effective Messages

No matter the target audience for advocacy, creating effective messages is essential. By itself, adult education and literacy is sometimes a difficult cause to sell. However, framing it as critical to the success of big budget items, like employment, economic development, children's success in school, food safety, health, and even sometimes public housing, opens doors to funding that AEL programs otherwise would not be able to tap. So what do you say to get your audience's attention?

While there is no formula, effective messages contain these three basic components:

1. AEL framed within the context of larger issues
2. Compelling hooks
3. AEL is shown it can help alleviate a problem (such as reducing poverty, increasing health knowledge, gaining English skills to enter the workforce, rebuilding the local economy, etc.).

Related to #3, it's important to research what issues are already important to the audience you're addressing.

We will refer to this as “hooking” adult education and literacy to others' interests.

### **FRAMING ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LARGER ISSUES**

When considering the current societal issues in your community, which rise to the top? Which advocacy groups are directly addressing these issues? Upon which issues are local and state legislators taking a stand? How are private foundations and corporations shifting their priorities to address the reality of current times?

For instance, consider:

- Rebuilding the post-pandemic economy
- Inequalities or injustices related to economic class, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and age
- Unemployment, skills gaps, economic mobility
- Poor health, lack of health insurance, inability to understand health information
- Digital equity (access to technology, internet, and digital literacy skills training)
- Immigrant rights, integration, justice, and immigration reform
- Children's education, out-of-school youth, parental low literacy, and intergenerational illiteracy
- Homelessness, hunger, poverty, welfare, and dependency
- Substance abuse
- Incarceration, recidivism

These are just some of the main societal issues that intersect with AEL, so we will use them to talk about AEL.

## CRAFTING COMPELLING HOOKS

Once you have chosen the larger context to address, you can then use various demographic information, research, and/or PIAAC data to create a concise statement that will hook into stakeholders' interests. You might also show how local AEL issues are reflected statewide and nationally. Then demonstrate how adult education and literacy programs can help.

## EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE HOOKS

The following are examples of ways to hook donors. You can use similar text adapted and customized for your program.



### Health

Adults with low literacy skills often have greater health concerns or conditions because they struggle to understand health materials, or in the case of non-native English speakers, communicate with health providers. These challenges impede their ability to make appropriate health decisions, lead to higher health-related costs, and even possibly put others at risk. Adults who self-report the worst health also have the most limited literacy, numeracy, and health literacy skills.<sup>7</sup> In our county, one in \_\_\_\_\_ adults read at only basic levels ([PIAAC Skills Map](#) or [Literacy Gap Map](#)), and \_\_\_\_\_ percent of adults report fair-to-poor health ([Literacy Gap Map](#)). Adult education programs not only help adults with basic skills, but also support them in understanding health-related information and connect them with appropriate resources in the community.

For example, adults with low literacy skills faced additional health concerns related to COVID-19. Highly literate individuals—even health professionals—learned new information about COVID-19 weekly. For individuals with limited English skills and/or reading skills, actions to combat the virus were even more daunting and confusing.

<sup>7</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006483>



### Economic Downturn and Recovery

People with less education and skills face higher rates of unemployment.<sup>8</sup> \_\_\_\_ percent of adults in our county are unemployed ([PIAAC Skills Map](#) or [Literacy Gap Map](#)) and \_\_\_\_ percent filed for unemployment in our state during the COVID-19 pandemic ([unemployment claims since pandemic](#)). Among adults with a high school education, those with higher literacy skills are more likely to be employed.<sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_ percent of adults in our county are at PIAAC Literacy Level 2 and are now faced with a need for further education and training in order to re-enter the workforce. Adult education and literacy programs help adults get the skills they need to gain employment or get better jobs, which also ultimately helps to revitalize the economy.



### Digital Equity

Tens of millions of American workers lack digital literacy and skills for solving problems in a technology-rich environment.<sup>10</sup> In both urban and rural areas, many cannot access Wi-Fi from a home computer, and will not be as successful at distance learning if their only access is through their smartphones. \_\_\_\_ percent in our county have low literacy skills, and \_\_\_\_ percent of adults in our county can only access the internet through their smartphones ([Literacy Gap Map](#)). We must expand digital equity (internet access, digital device affordability—computers, tablets, etc.—and digital literacy skills) so that adult learners can participate in online adult education classes, apply for jobs and access work-related information, find important health information, carry out daily problem-solving tasks using technology, and help their children with schoolwork at home.

## DEMONSTRATING HOW AEL CAN HELP ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM

Include a statement about how your program or how AEL can help. Then either in your program fact sheet, or when you have the opportunity to meet with the stakeholder, you can back up the statement with data illustrating AEL program impact and success, along with a personal success story from an adult learner.

<sup>8</sup> [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

<sup>9</sup> PIAAC Gateway <http://piaacgateway.com/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/current\\_results.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/current_results.asp)

## ProLiteracy Template: Adult Literacy Impact Report

ProLiteracy has developed a customizable impact report template and PPT presentation template that help you create fact sheets for your AEL program and locality. These tools illustrate how adult education and literacy can positively change the lives of adults. The report template compares other social issues data for county, state and national levels, and provides a section for including a student success story.

The Adult Literacy Impact Report template, and instructions for customizing the template, are available to download from the link below and on ProLiteracy’s website.

- **Customizable Impact Report—Microsoft Word template**  
[https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/losowski\\_proliteracy\\_org/IQClqzG8c8HFTYJiQsptXwPGAZJuihzROQS3W6-5zgbLsvU?e=gH8o39](https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/losowski_proliteracy_org/IQClqzG8c8HFTYJiQsptXwPGAZJuihzROQS3W6-5zgbLsvU?e=gH8o39)
- **Instructions for customizing template**  
<https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ProLiteracy-2025-PIAAC-ImpactReport-Instructions.pdf>
- **Customizable Impact Report—PowerPoint template**  
[https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:p:/g/personal/losowski\\_proliteracy\\_org/IQDrMCOdl1XYTLYmqKSBNR01AcH\\_bp274Dl91xokFpYxl28?e=jCvE4E](https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:p:/g/personal/losowski_proliteracy_org/IQDrMCOdl1XYTLYmqKSBNR01AcH_bp274Dl91xokFpYxl28?e=jCvE4E)
- **PIAAC Skills Map: State and County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy**  
<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>



## Additional Messaging Sources

ProLiteracy offers a vast collection of resources and fact sheets (<http://www.proliteracy.org/resources>) that you can use to create talking points, including:



### FAMILY LITERACY

**A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success,** outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income.<sup>1</sup>

**Children of less-educated parents are much more likely to become low-skilled adults.** U.S. adults with low levels of education who have parents with low levels of education are 10 times more likely to have low skills than are those who have higher-educated parents.<sup>2</sup>

**3X**  
The Earnings



### EARNINGS & EMPLOYMENT

**3X the earnings. Median weekly earnings in 2018 for those with the highest levels of educational attainment—doctoral and professional degrees—were more than triple those with the lowest level, less than a high school diploma.** Workers age 25 and over who have less education than a high school diploma had the highest unemployment rate (5.4 percent) and lowest median weekly earnings (\$592), three times less than the highest level of education.<sup>3</sup>

**The 2020 recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic saw adults with less than a high school diploma suffer the highest unemployment rate compared to all other education levels.**<sup>4</sup>

**\$215**  
**Billion**

### HEALTH LITERACY

**It is estimated that \$215 billion in health care costs a year are linked to low adult literacy skills.** Adults with limited health literacy are hospitalized and use emergency services at significantly higher rates than those with higher skills.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adult Literacy in the United States. (2019, July). <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/2019179.asp>

<sup>2</sup> ProLiteracy Annual Statistical Report. (2021, January). <https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/annual-statistical-report/>

<sup>3</sup> Rothwell, J. (2020, September). Assessing the economic gains of eradicating illiteracy nationally and regionally in the United States. Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. <https://www.barbarabush.org/new-economic-study/>

<sup>4</sup> Vernon, J. A., Trujillo, A., Rosenbaum, S. & DeBuono, B. (2007, October). Low health literacy: Implications for national health policy. Health Sciences Research Commons. Washington, DC: George Washington University. [https://hsr.himmelfarb.gwu.edu/sphhs\\_policy\\_facpubs/172/](https://hsr.himmelfarb.gwu.edu/sphhs_policy_facpubs/172/)

<sup>5</sup> Career Outlook Data on Display. (2020, May). Learn more, earn more: Education leads to higher wages, lower unemployment. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2020/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>

**\$300  
Billion**

### COST OF LOW LITERACY

**Improving adult literacy would have enormous economic benefits.** Low literacy costs the US economy over \$300 billion in lost earnings, lower workplace productivity, higher crime, and more government assistance.



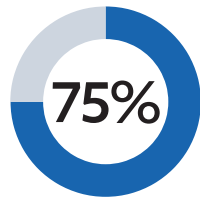
One-in-Five

**54%**

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

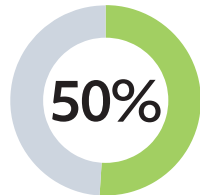
**Nearly one-in-five workers in the US workforce are new to the country.<sup>7</sup>**

**Among immigrants, only half (54%) are proficient in English. are proficient English speakers.<sup>8</sup>** This severely limits their access to jobs, college, and citizenship and increases their vulnerability to living in poverty. Pew Research estimates that between 2015 and 2065, immigrants and their descendants are projected to increase the U.S. population by 103 million people.<sup>9</sup>



### INCARCERATION

**Seventy-five percent of state incarcerated individuals did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate.<sup>10</sup>** Incarcerated individuals who participate in correctional education programs are 43 percent less likely to recidivate than individuals who do not.<sup>11</sup>



### GOVERNMENT FUNDING & PROGRAMS IN JEOPARDY

Adult education is in critical need for services. A decline in federal and state funding in the past 10 years has resulted in programs serving only a fraction of the adults in need. **Currently, 50 percent of adult education programs are struggling with long student waiting lists due to demand exceeding program capacity.<sup>12</sup>** At the present levels of public funding, less than 10 percent of adults in need are receiving services.

<sup>6</sup> Connor, P., Cohn, D. V., & Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2013, December 17). Changing patterns of global migration and remittances. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/12/17/changing-patterns-of-global-migration-and-remittances/>

<sup>7</sup> Budiman, A. (2020, August 20). Key findings about U.S. immigrants. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/keyfindings-about-u-s-immigrants/>

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center. (2015, September 28). Modern immigration wave brings 59 million to U.S. Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2010, October 25). Improving mothers' literacy skills may be best way to boost children's achievement. National Institute of Health. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/improving-mothers-literacy-skills-may-be-best-way-to-boost-childrens-achievement>

<sup>10</sup> Wolf Harlow, Ph.D., C. (2003). Bureau of justice statistics special report: Education and correctional populations. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Davis, L., Bozick, R., Steele, J., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. (2013). Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults. <https://doi.org/10.7249/r2266>

<sup>12</sup> ProLiteracy Annual Statistical Report. (2021, January). <https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/annual-statistical-report/>

Additionally, The PIAAC Gateway (<http://piaacgateway.com/infographics>) contains a collection of infographics that illustrate PIAAC data as it intersects with several societal issues, such as low literacy and numeracy among young adults, millennials' skills and attitudes, problem-solving skills using digital devices, the relationship between performance on the PIAAC and a variety of employment indicators, and more. The National Coalition for Literacy offers current research summaries and reports from its member organizations in topic areas important to AEL advocacy <https://nationalcoalitionforliteracy.org/advocacy/>. The National Skills Coalition provides resources on the need to invest in the skills of America's workers and the effectiveness of these investments, including fact sheets on skills mismatches by state. <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/>.

## Asking for Support

### WHO TO ASK

Advocates make varying asks and each ask is different, depending on whether the audiences are:

- state and local legislators, their aides, or other policy makers,
- private foundations and corporations,
- AEL stakeholders, or
- potential large individual donors.

### WHAT TO ASK FOR

The ask will vary based on the above audiences, and it may be about:

- policy and public funding,
- private funding,
- advocacy support from AEL stakeholders, and
- large, individual donations.

### MAKING THE “ASK”

#### Asking Legislators and Legislative Aides (LAs)

When making asks of legislators or their aides, there are a few considerations to keep in mind:

- Is the ask reasonable?
- Is the ask coordinated?
- What can you ask for?

*Is the Ask Reasonable?*

Consider what is reasonable given the data upon which you are basing your request. Full funding would be ideal, but have you backed up your request sufficiently to show that it would solve the problem? If not, then find the sweet spot that helps your program alleviate the larger social issue while demonstrating the direct impact of its work.

*Is the Ask Coordinated?*

If you are making a state level budget or public policy ask, you should always coordinate that ask with the state association. For similar county/city/town budget issues or policy, coordinate with local groups that may be asking for something similar or whose case might align well with AEL. For more information on coordinating the ask, see **Key Elements Explained for Advocating with State and Local Legislators** and **Consistent Messaging and Ask** in Part 3.

*What Can You Ask For?*

Asks do not always have to be about funding; they could be for public policy or for legislative study of an issue. For example, many years ago, when major education reform was taking place in Massachusetts, and K-12 was asking for large increases in funding, adult basic education programs did not, because they knew it would not be supported. Instead, they asked for a change in the wording of the legislation that included adult basic education in education reform. In subsequent years, because adult basic education had become a state responsibility through education reform, advocates successfully argued for increased state funding. Over time, this has resulted in state funding that now accounts for three quarters of the total public funding for adult basic education in that state.

Asks made at the state level often involve working directly with the legislative aide. If making a funding or public policy ask of the legislator, examples of asks to the legislative aide include:

- Will the legislator support increasing funding for AEL to [insert amount]?
- Would you please find out if the Senator will ...?
- Will the legislator please review draft legislation our association proposes on this issue?
- May I touch base with you in a couple of weeks on [insert proposed legislative change]...?

See **The Power of Legislative Aides** in Part 3 for more about advocating with LAs on budget or public policy issues.

**Never be  
afraid to ask.**

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**YOU DON'T GET  
WHAT YOU  
DON'T ASK FOR.**

### **Asking Private Foundations and Corporations**

You probably already know what to ask for if seeking private support. If it's a grant to fund a program quality project or to increase access to programs, you would calculate the projected expenses in a proposed budget. Asks should be in keeping with the funders' goals coupled with compelling hooks that align with their interests.

### **Asking Advocacy Support from Stakeholders**

Like-minded advocacy groups are sometimes asked to consider opportunities to collaborate with AEL on grant proposals or other projects (and if not, they should be). But the most important (and often difficult) ask of other stakeholders is to testify at legislative or town council hearings about the importance of AEL from their experience as an employer, religious leader, labor leader, business leader, or other. When these stakeholders take the time to give testimony about the need for AEL—or to write their legislators in support of AEL funding—it often gets legislators' attention.

### **Asking for Large Donations from Individuals**

Regardless of the amount you are asking for, your messaging and ask should be inspirational (a real-life situation that has touched an adult learner's life in an important way), credible (think PIAAC data and other research), urgent (the critical issue your program faces that can be addressed through a large donation), and based on what you already know about the donor through your research (see *Advocating with Private Donors* in Part 4 for more). But when making the ask, don't be afraid to ask BIG! **It is your job to ask and their job to decide.**

### **Ratcheting Up Support with the Ask**

No matter your audience, there are ways in which you can help them become more involved—and invested—in AEL.

For example, are there simple ways you might ratchet up legislators' commitment to adult education and literacy in your state? Especially if you are meeting with a legislator, it's important that you not leave the conversation without making some sort of ask, whether the ask is funding or policy related, or not. Sometimes it might be useful to start with non-policy asks. These asks also provide an opportunity to follow up and build rapport.

Examples of non-policy asks of the legislative aide include: Will the legislator ...

- visit our program and meet with adult learners?
- attend the graduation ceremony (or student recognition event, etc.)?
- write about adult education and literacy for our organization's newsletter or blog?
- publish an article about adult education and literacy in the legislator's quarterly public policy update to constituents?
- promote adult education and literacy in public speaking engagements and encourage lifelong learning?
- serve on our program's board of directors?

If the answer is no, then find out what the legislator can do. Remember, they want to help; finding out how they can help is the first step in the right direction.

You may also make non-public policy asks of private funders, stakeholders, and potential large individual donors. Key individuals within each of these audiences could become guest speakers at graduation or special events, for example, and can use their position to raise awareness of and advocate for AEL.





## Drafting Your Messaging and Ask

Take this opportunity to write down your thoughts on what you want your message to be and your ask from a policy maker, private funder, corporation, or other employer or employment sector leader.

1

**What is the larger context problem in which you will frame your message?**

2

**How will you hook into the stakeholder's (policy maker's or other's) interest(s)?**

3

**How can your program help alleviate the problem described in Question 1?**

With effective messaging that hooks into various stakeholders' interests, and a specific, coordinated ask, you are ready to plan your advocacy approach for either public or private funding, or both.



## Advocating with State and Local Legislators

### PART 3

### Key Takeaways

- ✓ Public policy advocacy is needed to ensure adequate public funding for adult education and literacy (AEL). Without this advocacy, AEL programs could see significant cuts or lose funding entirely because policy makers will no longer think it is important or necessary, or because funding is needed for other causes that have well-organized and effective advocates.
- ✓ To see increases in public funding over time, AEL advocates must be in it for the long haul, and make public policy advocacy a proactive way of operating year round, every year.
- ✓ Key elements of effective advocacy unveil how effective AEL regional and state advocacy networks work. These strategies can be adapted elsewhere to advocate for AEL in towns, cities, counties, regions, and states across the U.S.

## Why Advocate with Public Policy Makers?

Local and state legislators make funding decisions for adult education and literacy (AEL) based on what they know about AEL services and, more importantly, how those services impact individuals and communities. They want to know what is needed—from your perspective—so they can best represent those needs when it comes time to vote. If they don't hear from you and other AEL advocates in your town, city, county, or district, they may prioritize other funding over AEL funding. The reverse also holds true—when they do hear from you, year in and year out, and from a large number of their constituents, they may make AEL a higher priority.

Advocating with public policy makers helps them make well-informed decisions about AEL programs and services. This is why it is important to continually make our collective voices heard each year at opportune times—whether sharing information, raising awareness, or asking for funding. The moment you let up on advocacy work, you lose ground—and can lose ground fast!

### WHAT IS EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY?

Effective public policy advocacy builds the field's capacity to have the largest and most positive impact for adult learners and their communities. It influences public policy and funding by using a combination of strategies and tactics to educate government officials and the public on the changes AEL advocates want to bring about. But these changes are rarely achieved without interim steps and infrastructure that create the conditions for change.<sup>18</sup>

That may sound pretty daunting, but you probably do not need to start from scratch or invest a lot of time all at once. Let's first take a look at what it means to advocate effectively with policy makers and, based on your priorities, find out what you can do now to become more involved.

**The most successful public policy advocacy efforts for AEL at the local, state, and federal levels are those with a well-coordinated, strategic campaign, a core planning group, a diverse base of grassroots advocates, and a consistent ask across programs.**

<sup>18</sup> <https://archive.globalfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/original/application/6bdf92c3d7e970e7270588109e23b678.pdf>  
A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy, pages 22-23

## Key Elements of Effective Advocacy

Effective local and state advocacy efforts in AEL all have common elements that contribute to the success of the initiative. Click the links below to learn more about each element.

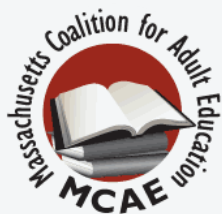
- [A Well-Organized Campaign](#)
- [Consistent Messaging and Ask](#)
- [Timing](#)
- [Targeting the Message](#)
- [Grassroots Activism](#)
- [Adult Learner Participation](#)
- [Social Advocacy](#)
- [Identifying Allies and Building Alliances](#)
- [Cultivating Champions](#)
- [Preparing for the Next Battle](#)

## Examples of Effective Advocacy

The following state or urban professional associations, coalitions, and their member organizations—along with their ally groups and organizations—have all worked together successfully to protect and increase funding for AEL. Click the links below to learn more about each group.

- [Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education \(MCAE\)](#)
- [New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy \(NYCCAL\)](#)
- [New York City Literacy Assistance Center \(LAC\)](#)
- [Arizona Association for Lifelong Learning \(AALL\)](#)
- [Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association \(IACEA\)](#)
- [Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition \(CCLC\)](#)
- [California Council for Adult Education \(CCAEE\)](#)
- [New Hampshire Literacy Task Force](#)

There may be other effective examples in your town/city/state/region. If so, please let us know about them. Email [info@proliteracy.org](mailto:info@proliteracy.org).



### MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR ADULT EDUCATION (MCAE)

(CASE STUDY)

For more than two decades, [MCAE](#) has worked to secure additional state funding for ABE programs and promote public policies that will lead to high-quality educational services, improved working conditions for program staff, and enhanced quality of life for adult learners and their families. As a result of its work, the FY2020 state appropriation for the ABE line item was \$41.05 million—a 23% increase over FY2019.

MCAE's success is built on cultivating and sustaining long-term relationships with state legislative champions through persistent outreach and networking by MCAE leadership. In addition, it mobilizes its members through action alerts and opportunities for action by phone, email, and in person throughout the state budget season.



### THE NEW YORK CITY COALITION FOR ADULT LITERACY (NYCCAL)

(CASE STUDY)

[NYCCAL](#) is a citywide coalition of adult literacy teachers, managers, students, and allies from community-based organizations, City University of New York colleges, and library programs across NYC. Its broad-based membership includes representatives from advocacy organizations and immigrant rights organizations. NYCCAL advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for the 2.2 million adults in NYC who need them. In 2016, NYCCAL was able to secure a nearly five-fold increase in city funding (from \$3.5 million to \$15.5 million) and has been able to maintain this funding every year since.



Literacy Assistance Center

### THE LITERACY ASSISTANCE CENTER (LAC)

#### (CASE STUDY)

[LAC](#) is a not-for-profit capacity building organization with a mission to strengthen and expand the adult education system, and to advance adult literacy as a core value in our society and a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. The LAC is a core member of NYCCAL and has taken a lead role in the fight for funding each year.



Empowering Learners for Life®  
ARIZONA ASSOCIATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

### ARIZONA ASSOCIATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (AALL)

#### (CASE STUDY)

The [Arizona Association for Lifelong Learning](#) (AALL), in collaboration with program leaders and student ambassadors, has been able to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of adult education for decades. This has included a successful advocacy campaign to restore state funding after being zeroed out of the state budget in 2009, and successfully avoiding budget cuts in the years since then. This was made possible through the development and strengthening of relationships with local and state leaders. These relationships were leveraged again recently when AALL led an advocacy effort in defense against vendor bills that aimed to discredit and supplant Arizona's highly successful adult education system. Finally, AALL supported the expansion of Pima Community College's Student Ambassador Leadership Program across Arizona, which led to a COABE-supported expansion of the program nationwide. Now more than 200 adult education students nationally have become trained student ambassadors.





### **ILLINOIS ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION (IACEA)**

#### (CASE STUDY)

[IACEA](https://www.iacea.net/) is the adult education state association in Illinois. IACEA provides leadership, representation and advocacy for adult education and literacy practitioners in order to advance, unify, and professionalize the field. IACEA member organizations represent all facets of the field including public schools, community extensions and evening colleges, corrections, health, community and social welfare agencies, university continuing and extension education, business, arts and religion, media, libraries, and many more.<sup>19</sup> During the Illinois budget impasse spanning from 2015–2018, IACEA saved and helped restore full funding for adult education by advocating to end the impasse and include adult education in stop-gap funding measures.



### **CHICAGO CITYWIDE LITERACY COALITION (CCLC)**

#### (CASE STUDY)

The Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that helps Chicago's adult education organizations secure resources and training so that underserved adult learners can become economically successful. CCLC works with over 40 members in different capacities annually (such as pass-through grants, research, advocacy, professional development, and in an advisory capacity). Members include Illinois Community College Board grantees, Secretary of State Adult Volunteer Literacy grantees, and workforce development organizations. The Coalition led the charge to secure a state budget by facilitating advocacy trainings, leading rallies, and organizing trips to the state capital Springfield.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.iacea.net/>



### CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR ADULT EDUCATION (CCAE)

After being completely erased in 2009 as the California state budget line at the \$750 million annual level, the adult education field passionately and feverishly advocated about the value to the larger community and to the economy that the 10 program areas offered as they existed under the previous education code. Under the guidance of the [California Council for Adult Education](#), and with strong partnerships with [California Adult Education Administrators Association](#) and many others, the adult education field was again funded in 2013 at \$500 million in a new model of 71 regional consortia under seven approved program areas and under the name of [Adult Education Block Grant](#).

The FY 18-19 California budget included a number of wins with the key priorities framework including 1) \$21.6 million to reflect a cost-of-living adjustment for 2018-19 and 2017-18; 2) Renaming of the Adult Education Block Grant as the California Adult Education Program; and 3) trailer bill language providing a cap on the indirect rate that may be charged to an adult school or community college at 5% or less.

Having served 900,000 learners in FY 18-19, the field entered the current program year with the goal of advocating for additional funding and streamlining of education code. The COVID-19 crisis dramatically shifted the advocacy efforts from new asks to providing information about how adult education is supporting learners, who are some of the most vulnerable. Additionally, the field is preparing for the future efforts of upskilling and reskilling many community members who will be re-/entering the workforce after they lost jobs during the pandemic. The field also highlights the importance of supporting parents while their children as K-12 students are engaged in distance learning.

### NEW HAMPSHIRE LITERACY TASK FORCE

The New Hampshire Literacy Task Force is an informal coalition of adult educators that has served as the key element in successful state adult education advocacy campaigns for the past 30 years. Over that period of time, state funding for adult education increased in almost every biennial budget.

All of the campaigns are built upon the strong belief that, while printed materials play a role, policy makers will respond most positively when they have to engage with their constituents. Therefore, the key part of every campaign is student/constituent making contact with policy makers through letters, emails, and phone calls.

Statewide and local program goals are set by the task force for the number of contacts with policy makers. In most campaigns this results in 3,000 contacts with the governor before his or her budget goes to the legislature and 5,000 contacts with legislators during a session.

## Key Elements Explained for Advocating with State and Local Legislators

### TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Run a well-organized campaign by involving key members of your association.
- ✓ Use consistent messaging and the same ask across the campaign.
- ✓ Get the right message to the right people with the right messengers at the right times.
- ✓ Target your messaging by reaching out to legislators chairing key committees.
- ✓ Involve allies and leverage broader movements across sectors through intersectional organizing.
- ✓ Mobilizing is more influential than the “truth and justice” approach to advocacy.
- ✓ Adult learners should comprise 80 percent of all grassroots contacts.

- ✔ Social advocacy amplifies your efforts through multiple channels with multiple strategies.
- ✔ Legislative champions are the best messengers in convincing their peers to fund AEL.
- ✔ Advocating for AEL must be proactive, ongoing and continuous, not a one-time-only campaign.
- ✔ The following key elements are explained for advocacy at the state level, but they also apply to regional and local levels.

### A WELL-ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN

#### *How do I begin organizing public policy advocacy in my region or state?*

Effective public policy advocacy starts with a statewide or citywide AEL practitioner organizing group that may come together around various opportunities—such as the release of PIAAC data or information released about proposed AEL budget cuts. However, the advocacy initiative must be ongoing, whether fighting to preserve your state budget

### BEST PRACTICES

Your state may already have a professional association coordinating public policy advocacy efforts. Contact it to find out whether it does public policy advocacy and, if so, how you can become more involved (See **Appendix C** for the association in your state). But if one doesn't already exist and you do need to create a public policy advocacy organizing group or committee at the local or state level, here are some best practices to help you get started.

- **Organize a small, core group of dedicated practitioners representing the range of AEL providers in your state to create and run public policy advocacy campaigns.** For example, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education's (MCAE) state advocacy work is led by MCAE's director and public policy co-chairs, one of whom currently is also the board chair. The MCAE Public Policy Committee includes ABE program representatives and other ABE experts who collectively recommend the annual public policy agenda for endorsement to the board and support MCAE's advocacy efforts. In New Hampshire, this has been done by the New Hampshire Literacy Task Force, which is made up of the directors of the largest adult education programs in the state.

- Start small—perhaps you and one or two others—to **create recommendations for a public policy advocacy agenda** that focuses on local, state, and federal issues of concern for AEL. The public policy agenda should be vetted and approved by the board (and with legislative champions, where possible), making it easier to be responsive to a rapidly changing political landscape. Also outline a clear procedure for taking action, when needed, which can be easily implemented.
- **Monitor public policy and legislation.** Find out what state legislative committees impact AEL and monitor them. These might focus on pre-K-12 education or higher education, workforce development, public health, senior services, affordable housing, or other. At the federal level, sign up for [ProLiteracy's Action Alerts](#). ProLiteracy already monitors federal activity and will notify you know when and how to take action.
- **Map your association's connections to state legislators.** Who in your association has connections with them—and especially with those legislators who are members of key committees that decide on policy and funding decisions related to adult education?
- **Have an inside-outside strategy.** As an association or coalition, arrange and conduct meetings with legislators on behalf of the organization (inside strategy). Ask grassroots advocates to take action by calling, writing, and meeting with legislators using the same ask and messaging as your association (outside strategy). Request that advocates share the outcomes of their meetings with your association so that someone from your public policy advocacy committee may follow up directly with legislative staff on behalf of the association—either to thank them for their support or to find out why they disagree. Those outcomes will help inform future advocacy strategy and tactics.
- **Hire a professional advocate.** A professional advocate will keep your association apprised of legislative updates, recommend advocacy strategies, schedule and participate in meetings between you and legislators, conduct advocacy trainings for your grassroots, and follow up in-person with state legislators and their staff at the Capitol. CCAE, MCAE, and NYCCAL are among some of the state advocacy groups that have benefitted from a professional advocate.

However, this does not mean that you can abandon an annual grassroots advocacy campaign. The strength of advocating for AEL is organizing adult learners and program graduates who are the legislators' constituents, and who meet with them at least annually.

**Champions are those who make AEL one of their top three legislative priorities.**

(See **Cultivating Legislative Champions** and **How to Cultivate a Champion** sections on pages 59 and 60.)

- **Be flexible and nimble and adjust the plan as needed.** For example, practitioners in states like California have reimagined their Legislative Day to become entirely virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed greater opportunities for staff, students and legislators and their aides to participate. See [Tips for Meeting Remotely with Legislators](#).

### CONSISTENT MESSAGING AND ASK

*How do we coordinate messaging across the state? Why is this important?*

The most successful advocacy is a statewide or community-wide initiative that has a consistent “ask” (what your association is asking for), not program-by-program, where conflicting asks can weaken or prevent legislative action. When different groups ask for different amounts, or offer conflicting legislative language within the same legislative cycle, it is confusing for policy makers to know which ask to support. It sends the message that the field is disorganized and weak. It also disheartens legislators. They want to see the advocacy groups rowing in the same direction toward the same goal, not rowing in circles.

### BEST PRACTICES

- **It is critical to have buy-in from the members on the messaging and ask so that everyone uses the same one.** Asking for differing amounts of funding is confusing, and some messages that the grassroots deliver may be conflicting. This inconsistency can lead to disastrous results—not getting a funding increase or worse—getting cut. Using your association’s approved public policy agenda (see [Best Practices for Organizing Campaigns](#)), develop the ask so that everyone is on board.
- **Frame AEL within the context of other platforms and issues.** In New York City, NYCCAL and LAC framed adult education and literacy within the broader context of immigrant rights, immigrant access, immigrant integration, and immigrant justice agendas. By aligning with the broader immigrant movement—using a strategy called intersectional organizing—advocates joined forces, which was a game changer in securing an almost fivefold increase in funding for adult literacy education in NYC.<sup>20</sup>
- **Create messages that “hook” into policymakers’ interests.** Craft messages that hook adult education and literacy to policymakers’ interests, such as public health, poverty, housing, children’s education, incarceration, and others. See [Part 2: Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask](#) for specific examples.

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2.1.6\\_Forum-3\\_ALE-Research-Journal\\_Vol-2-No-1.pdf](https://www.proliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2.1.6_Forum-3_ALE-Research-Journal_Vol-2-No-1.pdf)

- **Have a strategic, targeted message.** Instead of pushing yourself to an impossible perfect message (which makes it stand in the way of progress), keep it simple and clear. For example, “Save Adult Education” was the message used in Chicago and California to restore funding. [See how California used this simple message.](#)

### TIMING OF YOUR MOBILIZATION OR OTHER ACTIVITIES

*How do you know when to take action and mobilize the grassroots?*

Knowing how a budget and bills move through your state’s processes and when key decisions are being made is critical to knowing when to mobilize and who to involve. The frequency for which your local program or state association will need to mobilize each year depends on the budget cycle, the number of bills the state legislature is considering that impact AEL, and the key access points for each.

### STATE BUDGET-MAKING PROCESS

According to the Council of State Governments (CSG), most, but not all, states begin their operating budget cycle with the legislature in January. Most states also begin their fiscal year on July 1. Twenty states operate on a biennial budget cycle, adopting a budget for two fiscal years at a time. Oftentimes, they revise the budget in the second year of the cycle through a supplemental budget.<sup>21</sup>

For example, in New Hampshire, the governor submits his or her budget to the legislature on the first Monday in February; it goes to the Finance Subcommittee in the House, then to the full Finance Committee, then to the full House. In about mid-April, the Senate begins active consideration of the budget, roughly following the same process as the House. In late June, the House and Senate agree on the budget, which is then sent to the governor for his or her approval or veto.

According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, most states actually begin preparing for the budget in July or August the year prior, within the state agencies, where they are tasked with sending their agency requests to the governor, followed by hearings held that fall.<sup>22</sup> In rare cases where AEL advocates have access to agency board members or high-level administrators within the agency, it may be possible to ask them to request a higher state level line item for AEL for their agency in the governor’s proposed state budget. In some cases, this can be a successful strategy. Then, with legislators, the goal may be to support the governor’s budget request for AEL.

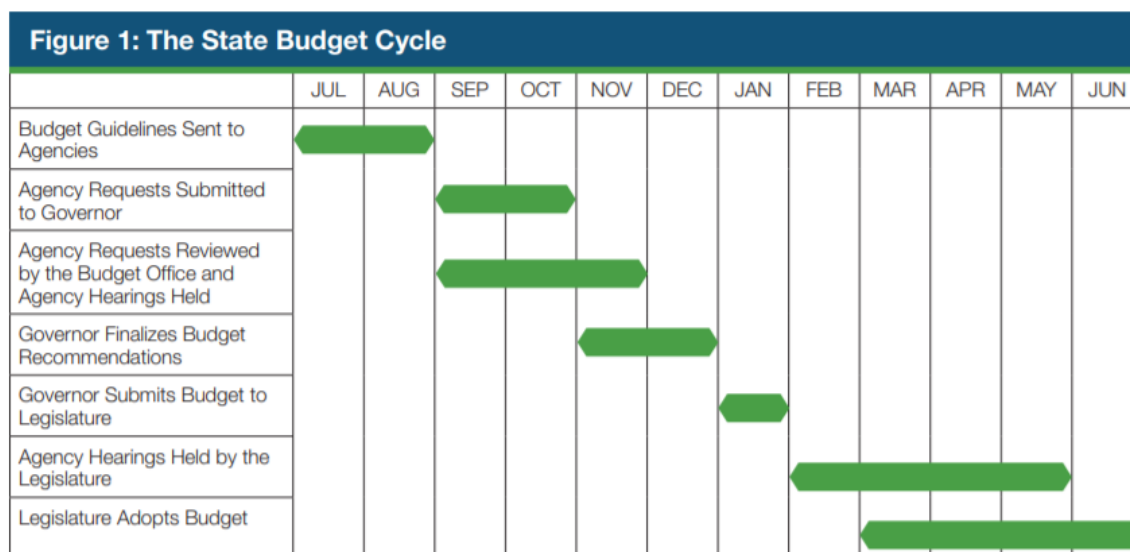
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<sup>21</sup><https://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/content/state-budget-processes-comparative-analysis>

<sup>22</sup>[https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASBO/9d2d2db1-c943-4f1b-b750-ofca152d64c2/UploadedImages/Budget%20Processess/2015\\_Budget\\_Processes\\_-\\_S.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASBO/9d2d2db1-c943-4f1b-b750-ofca152d64c2/UploadedImages/Budget%20Processess/2015_Budget_Processes_-_S.pdf)



**FIGURE 1** illustrates a typical budget cycle for an annual budget. It also illustrates the approximate timeline for biennial budget states during the year in which they develop their budgets.<sup>23</sup>



For your state’s specific budget-making process, visit your state’s legislature website; many of these sites outline the state’s specific budget (and lawmaking) processes.

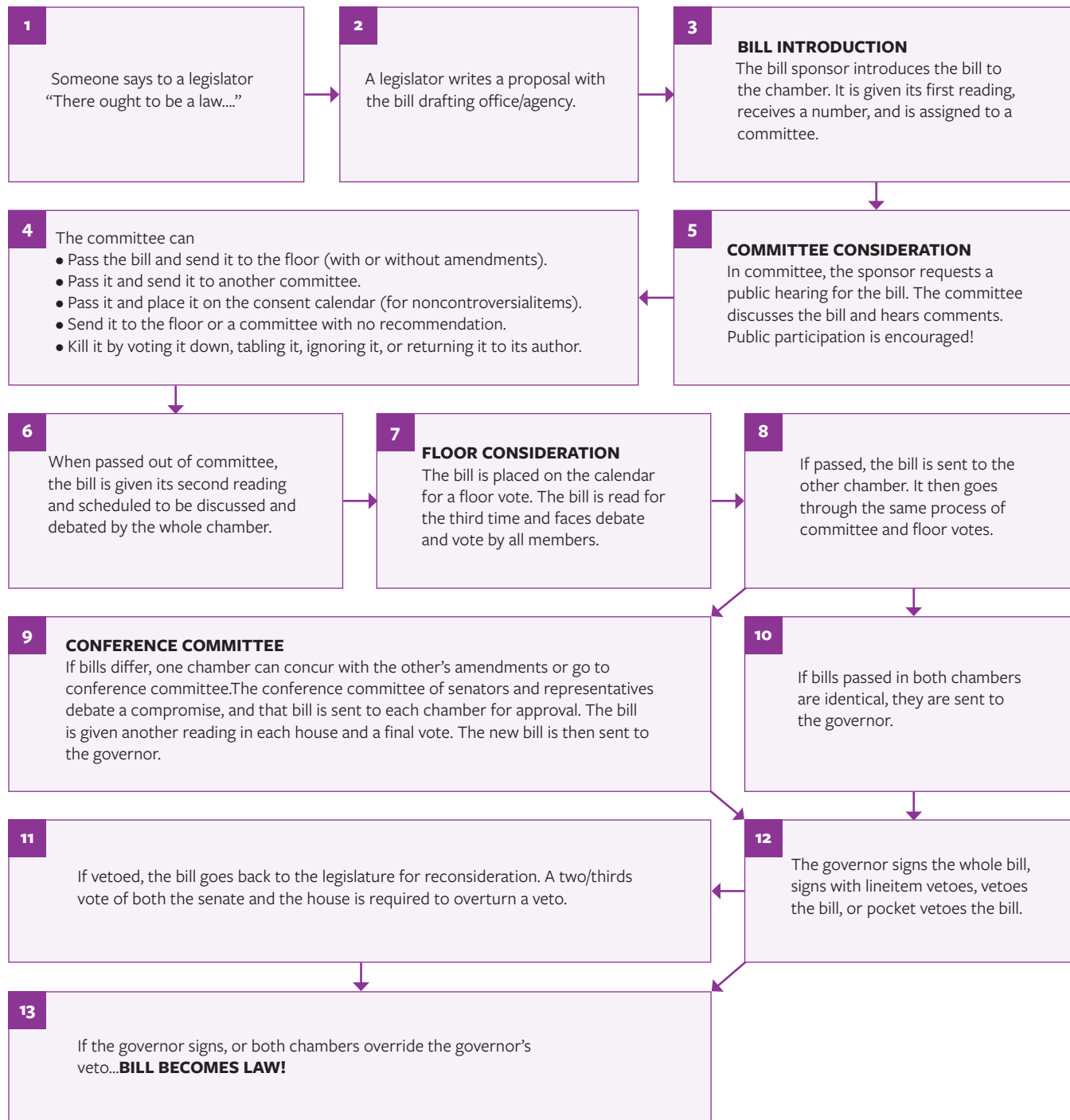
It’s worth mentioning that the federal government’s fiscal year (beginning October 1) is different from most state fiscal years and budget making cycles. Thus, it can be confusing for grassroots advocates when they see different messages for state and federal advocacy.

## STATE LAWMAKING PAROCCESS

The state lawmaking process differs from the budget process, generally beginning when someone has an idea for a law. A legislative sponsor writes a bill, the bill moves through both chambers to be considered and passed, and then goes to the governor for approval.

<sup>23</sup> Figure 1 obtained from [https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASBO/9d2d2db1-c943-4f1b-b750-ofca152d64c2/UploadedImages/Budget%20Processes/2015\\_Budget\\_Processes\\_-\\_S.pdf](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASBO/9d2d2db1-c943-4f1b-b750-ofca152d64c2/UploadedImages/Budget%20Processes/2015_Budget_Processes_-_S.pdf) Since each state’s process varies, it would be good to check your state legislative website or to ask a trusted state legislative aide to see if there are any differences in your state.

## How a Bill Becomes a Law at the State Level



### BEST PRACTICES

- **Start early.** Advocate early in the legislative process. This impacts decisions when they are just beginning to take shape. The further along a bill or line item in a budget progresses in the legislative process the more difficult it is to influence it.
- **Focus on the governor.** It is much easier to get the legislature to support an increase in funding if at least some of it is included in the governor's budget that is submitted to the legislature. This means that an early part of the campaign must focus on the governor.
- **Have two different leads on your advocacy committee.** Have a lead for state and a lead for the federal level. Having two different point persons may help to minimize confusion among the grassroots over which alerts are for state funding and laws and which are for federal.



Former State Senator Dianne Wilkerson addressing an Adult Literacy Awareness Day rally at the Massachusetts State House

## Targeting the Message

*Do all legislators need to be contacted all of the time? Or is there a more efficient way to do this?*

While all legislators are contacted by advocates during the legislative cycle, not all legislators need to be contacted by the grassroots all of the time. Sometimes, only key committee and subcommittee members need to be contacted when the budget line item or bill is scheduled for consideration in smaller, specialized groups, and not on the full House or Senate floors. These members are priorities because they are the key decision makers.

So, make special efforts to connect with all members of key committees and subcommittees, especially during these important decision points. Also, each state legislative body typically has a Ways and Means committee that is influential on the state budget outcomes. If you are a constituent of a member—especially the chair—of that committee, you may be able to encourage their support for the AEL ask.

### BEST PRACTICE

- **Targeting the message works best when key decision makers are contacted only by advocates from their districts.** Ask constituents (program directors, adult learners, practitioners, business allies, etc.) from their neighborhood, district, or state, to reach out with a coordinated message that includes the same ask. Although this can take time, identify allies in the community who will help carry the message and campaign's request for funding.

## Identifying Allies and Building Alliances

*How can we get buy-in from potential advocates outside of our field?*

Although this can take time, identify allies in the community who will help carry the message and campaign's request for funding. Examples of allies include:

- Businesses that have been involved with adult education over the years, perhaps through their workplace education programs for employees
- Immigrant, poverty, education, and social justice activists and welfare rights and labor activists
- Restorative justice programs and re-entry programs
- Higher education and trade school partners

### BEST PRACTICES

- **Build relationships with everyone.** Join advisory committees with the chamber of commerce, attend meetings with like-minded social justice organizations, and participate in activities. Divide up the work: Ask some board members to attend some functions while others attend different networking events.
- **Show up for legislative hearings concerning your allies' issues.** For example, when there is a legislative hearing on public libraries, testify on behalf of adult learners who benefit from the services that public libraries provide. The same could be done for workforce training programs or affordable housing organizations. As a member of a state AEL advocacy organization, for example, you may agree in advance with a state public library advocacy group that you testify at the other's hearings when the opportunity arises.

## Grassroots Activism

### *What is grassroots activism?*

According to Civil Rights Movement, an independent organization in the U.K., grassroots activism is when “... an independent group of people who feel strongly about a certain issue are willing to put in the effort to affect a change on the issue they are concerned about.”<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, grassroots activism in AEL is about mobilizing people who care about AEL issues to affect positive change for adult learners and the broader societal issues that impact them.

### *Who are the grassroots in adult education and literacy?*

Involve adult learners, program directors, teachers, tutors, volunteers, friends, and allies. Also involve AEL stakeholders such as public libraries; community health centers; business and sector advocacy organizations; individual businesses; organized labor; social justice organizations; and advocate organizations for immigrants and refugees, older adults, digital inclusion, homeless adults, and others whose causes intersect with adult education and literacy.

**The vast majority of grassroots contacts must be comprised of adult learners.** They are the best and most successful advocates for their programs and needs. In the most successful advocacy campaigns, according to Art Ellison, former public policy chair of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education and current New Hampshire state representative, approximately 80 percent of the contacts should come from students and 20 percent from staff and allies of AEL.<sup>25</sup>

**Nonprofits have two primary sources of power:  
valuable information and the voices of people who  
care about your legislative priorities.**

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.civilrightsmovement.co.uk/grass-roots-activism.html>

<sup>25</sup> Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education (2016), p. 57-60:  
<https://coabe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/COABEJournalSpring2016.pdf> Why should you involve so many constituents in grassroots advocacy?

### Ellison explains:

“Over the years many of our advocacy efforts for adult education have focused on what I would call the “truth and justice” approach to the process. We are convinced that if we can just get the right information to the important people then they will reward us with lots of funding. Unfortunately, there are thousands of other groups that use the same approach. While good, reliable information is essential to an advocacy campaign, good information with 500 or more contacts from constituents is better.”<sup>26</sup>

The power in grassroots advocacy, then, is in sheer numbers of communications from constituents at the right time to the right policy makers with the same message and ask. As Ellison argues, make them believe that AEL has a constituency to which they need to pay attention.

### THRESHOLD NUMBERS

#### *Do legislators keep track of the numbers of contacts from constituents?*

Legislators get letters, calls, emails, and still some faxes—for and against a particular issue. They need to know whether there are significant numbers of constituents who hold one view or another on an issue. The threshold, then, is the number of contacts legislative aides must receive **before** the aide alerts the legislator that an issue needs attention.

For example, in New Hampshire, where there are more than 400 members of the House of Representatives, the threshold number for contacts with each member is 10. But even in larger states the threshold number rarely goes above 50, and more often than not it falls within the 20-25 range. Find out your state’s threshold number by asking a state legislator friendly to adult education.

#### *What counts?*

All contacts get counted whether mail, email, telephone or fax, meetings, social media posts, or petitions (there are exceptions). However, some types of contacts are easier to count, and count quickly. Others are better at accomplishing different advocacy goals. **But in terms of your program or state association reaching threshold numbers, it is best to focus on email, mail, and calls.**

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<sup>26</sup> The Politics of Adult Education (2016). Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education. Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 2016 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1789147071?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>

### *Which types of contacts are best for which purposes?*

- Calls are best for raising immediate attention to an issue—such as influencing a vote to be held that day.
- Mail and email are best at providing details of the constituents' views. Email in particular can also be sent and counted very quickly.
- Face-to-face meetings with legislators are important—and they are the best way to gain support, especially if the legislator is undecided on an issue.
- Petitions are useful for raising awareness of an issue and for building a base of advocacy support. Signatures on petitions may also be counted by legislative offices individually, but only if the petition has the names and addresses of constituents in the member's district. An exception might be if the names were all from students in a particular learning center, then all of the representatives from that jurisdiction would likely consider them "constituents" and count them. If the petition clearly has signatures of people from outside of the district, or there are no addresses, then they would count less or maybe not at all.
- Particularly with online petitions, it helps for those signing to provide a comment with their signature to demonstrate the signature's authenticity.
- Social media posts are useful for promoting your AEL advocacy to a large audience. Social media posts directed at legislators may be counted, but that presumes the office has enough staff to monitor the accounts, which is not always possible given staffing constraints. It also presumes that the staff have time to discern whether each social media post is from a constituent or not.

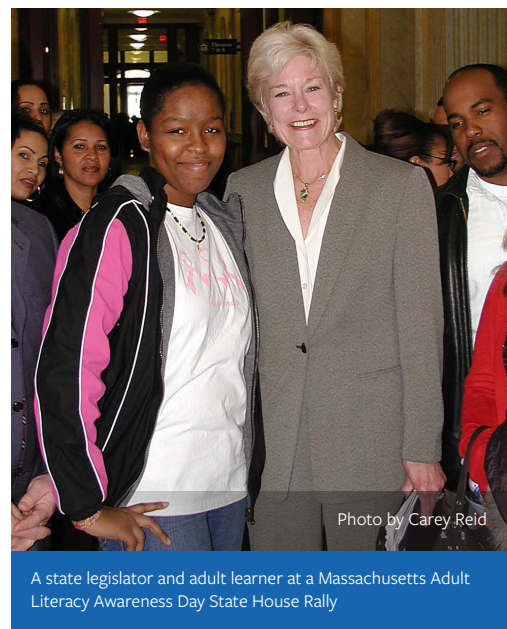


Photo by Carey Reid  
A state legislator and adult learner at a Massachusetts Adult Literacy Awareness Day State House Rally

### *Are there other reasons why numbers of contacts matter?*

An increased or ongoing response from AEL advocates raises the priority of AEL with legislators. An anemic response can hurt the cause because it sends the message that AEL is not all that important among constituents. Also, it is OK to exceed your organization's threshold numbers. The offices will let you know when they have had enough constituent contacts to garner the legislators' support.

## **ORGANIZING LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGNS**

When organizing letter campaigns, use your state's threshold number to determine how many should go to each legislator, at a minimum. For example, each year the New Hampshire Literacy Task Force, comprised of active local program directors, sets a goal of 3,000 letters to the governor before the budget goes to the legislature, and 5,000 letters total to members of the legislature during the session. They usually meet those numbers.



### BEST PRACTICES

#### For practitioners:

- **Speak from your own experiences.** Use key talking points from your association, for consistency, but customize them based on the needs, issues, and solutions you have seen.
- **Include your name and address when you contact legislators.** This is so the legislative aide can record whether you live within the legislator's district and what your stance is on AEL, and then follow up with you, if possible.
- **Involve adult learners in letter-writing.** See [Adult Learner Participation](#) for strategies.
- **Consider faxing a handwritten letter.** The fax machine has been taken over by the availability of the internet, and state legislators receive thousands of emails on legislative issues each year. But your handwritten letter will get there almost as quickly, and stand out more if it is faxed. Or send it via mail, especially if you have collected many letters from adult learners in your class or program.

#### For state associations:

- **Help AEL programs to align with their state legislative districts.** Policy makers will only be interested in communication from their own constituents who live within their districts. Although in some cases a program and its students reside within a single legislative district, often students come from several districts; some program administrators may need your help in learning how to find the alignment between students' home addresses and the district of their legislators.
- **Offer the option of a program-wide membership to your state association.** This way, all staff at a program can become members of the association (at a reduced group rate) and thus become a part of your association's regular email list to receive grassroots advocacy alerts.
- **Include practitioners and stakeholders on your association's advocacy email list, texting list, as members of your Facebook group, or other communication platforms.** Segment the list so that you can be strategic with alerts. Segments might include advocates within each legislative district and advocates within districts of key legislators who serve on committees responsible for AEL laws or funding. See [Appendix E](#) for tools.
- **Seek volunteers to be in charge of local program advocacy networks in cities, towns, counties, or legislative districts.** This local or area contact person should follow up with AEL advocates in their area to ensure a strong, ongoing response.
- **Make it easy to take action.** Provide a form letter with placeholders where they can customize, or form social media posts with specific hashtags. Recognize these local contacts at association events.

- **Get the COABE Educate and Elevate app for your state association.** Join the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) as an association and, for an extra fee, your association can get online access to local and state contacts as a part of their [Educate and Elevate](#) campaign. Then advocates can respond to local alerts you send, with only three clicks.
- **If hand-delivering many letters, consider providing the legislative assistant with a digital spreadsheet of advocates and their contact information.** Make it easy for the LA to update their records and follow up with them.
- **Offer options.** Not everyone is comfortable calling or making an ask. How else can they participate? See [Social Advocacy](#) and [How to Write and Call State and Local Legislators](#).

## ADULT LEARNER PARTICIPATION

*With a goal of 80 percent of contacts coming from adult learners, how do you lay a foundation for an active network of adult learner advocates?*

Helping adult learners advocate for AEL helps to increase funding and shape laws benefitting adults with low basic skills. In fact, according to Ernest Best, executive director of the Massachusetts Alliance of Adult Learners (MassAAL), if a significant number of programs in your state 1) arrange for 1-2 visits with state legislators and involve adult learners in those visits over the course of a program cycle; 2) help adult learners register to vote; and 3) get adult learners to the polls on voting day, it forces policy makers to take adult learners (and AEL) seriously as a “voting block.”

Just as important, if not more so, is helping adult learners advocate for AEL helps them to become better advocates for themselves, their families, and communities. They discover the power they have when they tell their story to a public official and that official listens—especially if leaders have not heard from them before, or if they never considered their experiences to be of value to policy makers. It improves their self-confidence and their ability to speak publicly and influence others, to convey ideas in writing, to collaborate, and to make a positive difference.

Involving adult learners in advocating for adult education is just one way to involve them in decisions that impact their education and learning. Here we will focus specifically on involving adult learners in advocating with policy makers.

**“We know student advocacy works because it has helped bring back funding twice in Arizona.**

**Legislators are laser-focused on student stories; that is who they want to hear from. Student stories are the most powerful tool for advocacy that we have.”**

Regina Suitt – Retired  
Community College Vice President,  
Adult Education advocate

### BEST PRACTICES

- **Teach adult learners how to tell their story in writing.** Invite them to participate in a letter campaign for AEL and show them how to write a letter to a legislator. Provide letter templates for their use. They should share why they sought services from the program, what they plan to do when they graduate, and include the ask. Help students locate accurate contact information for their legislators.
- **If learners are willing, help them to include a photo of themselves in their letters.** This helps make the connection more personal.
- **Teach adult learners how to tell their story verbally.**
  - **Conduct a training where adult learners tell one another their stories** about why they are participating in adult education, what it means to them, and what they plan to do after they graduate. Ask all participants to sit around one table in a comfortable setting and introduce themselves. Learners should hear a couple of examples of how to tell a story effectively, then work with a partner in telling their own story—with a goal of telling it succinctly in five minutes or less. Next, they could practice telling their story to the group and refining it.
  - Later, or possibly at a second training, **conduct role plays where learners practice what it would be like to successfully tell their story to a legislator, and then in front of an audience.**
- **Invite legislators to visit your program to meet the students.** Students will then have an opportunity to share their stories with a legislator in an informal and familiar setting.
- **Meet with legislators, either in-person or virtually.** See [Tips For Meeting Remotely With Legislators](#).
- **Participate in a statehouse rally for adult education and literacy.** If your state association does not already organize one, find out what's involved. See [Organizing Adult Education and Literacy Rallies](#).
- **Help adult learners register to vote,** which also gives them more credibility when going before state legislators. Hold a voter registration drive. Help students learn about the candidates' positions without influencing their vote. Voting day rides could be arranged by programs to visit the polls as a group and encourage voting.
- **Testify in city council hearings.** Learners could testify about adult education, but also about the supports they need to participate, such as access to high-speed internet, public transportation, library resources, etc. See [Tips for Getting on the Record in Town Hall Meetings or Public Hearings](#).

- **Help adult learners create a video testimony.** Send the videos to policy makers and publish them on the web and on social media platforms. See [Social Advocacy](#) for specific examples.
- **Host a student recognition event,** possibly during Adult Education and Family Literacy Week, and invite media and local policymakers to attend. See Activities Designed to Promote Adult Education and Literacy.
- **Make civics or political literacy a part of adult education and literacy classes.** Help learners to understand, critically evaluate, and participate in the political processes of their country, state, county, city, or town. This will prepare them with tools that they can use throughout their lives to advocate for themselves, their families, and communities. Include advocacy in lessons about government and civic participation.
- **Initiate an adult learner leader or student ambassador program at your organization.** These programs involve more in-depth participation by learners about how to meet and develop working relationships with policy makers and community leaders, educate the general public about AEL, and become members of an active adult learner leadership and alumni network. See [COABE](#) for details.



Students from the Lawrence, Massachusetts Adult Learning Center at an Adult Literacy Awareness Day State House Rally

## SOCIAL ADVOCACY

*What are strategies for using social media to advocate for adult education and literacy?*

Social advocacy in the nonprofit world is the concept of empowering a group of individuals to support your cause by sharing content and connecting with a larger audience. Using social media to mobilize supporters and communicate with policy makers helps to achieve that end.

One very successful example of this in AEL is the SaveAdultEd campaign.

# Cut the Excuses Not Education!

## HOW THE SAVEADULTEED CAMPAIGN HELPED SAVE ADULT EDUCATION IN LOS ANGELES

In 2012, The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in California proposed to eliminate funding for Adult and Career Education. This unprecedented proposal—to eliminate funding for one of the largest adult education systems in the nation—prompted an unprecedented response from the Los Angeles community and captured national attention.

As part of a multi-tiered strategy, SaveAdultEd campaign organizer Sean Abajian created a **custom-coded bilingual app that handled 1.5 million seconds of constituent calls**. Advocates called one phone number and were routed to elected officials representing the district in which their community's adult school was located. The app then provided SaveAdultEd talking points to callers.

The teacher's union distributed flyers with the phone number to classrooms across the city. Signs with the phone number were posted all over town—in the windows of homes and small businesses. Radio stations shared the number. One of the adult schools even projected the number onto the side of their building overlooking the busy 10 Freeway.

Elected officials' offices were overwhelmed throughout the day and began reaching out to ask that the calls stop. When that happened, the SaveAdultEd campaign rerouted calls to other elected officials representing the schools, as well as to the Los Angeles delegation of state and national legislators.



Figure 2: SaveAdultEd flyer in a local business. The flyer urged patrons to call a custom-designed app routing callers to policymakers and providing them talking points.

Today, similar click-to-call campaigns are available through paid platforms, such as Salsa Labs. But in 2012 this was an unprecedented, cutting-edge political campaign in LAUSD that played a key role in communicating to Los Angeles delegations of elected officials how important adult education is to Los Angeles.

Not every social advocacy campaign needs to be that elaborate. There are simple—and low cost—efforts you can initiate to use social media to raise widespread awareness of adult education and its importance. It is even becoming more common to communicate with legislators and their staff through social media.

Additionally, in the COVID-19 environment, federal legislators are increasingly on social media, and have even tended to use these platforms to spread information to constituents, explain their rationale for their votes, and urge other elected officials to support their views.<sup>27</sup> The same would be true of state and local legislators.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.congressfoundation.org/news/blog/1737-an-overview-of-the-online-activities-of-members-of-congress-during-covid-19>

**BEST PRACTICES:**

- **Tag others and use hashtags:** Tagging power users and others on social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) allows you to amplify your call-to-action by reaching those who are more engaged on those channels, along with many of their followers—ultimately leading to greater reach and engagement with your advocacy campaign.
- **Tweet policy makers.** Provide sample tweets or other social media posts on your association’s website so that advocates can customize. Make the most of your 240 character limit on Twitter. See the **Social Media Case Study** from The Literacy Cooperative, Cleveland, Ohio for more ways in which to use social media to advocate for adult education.

*Sample Tweet:*

It’s time for action on #AdultEdu. Will you support @ProLiteracy (or insert your association’s Twitter handle) to help raise #adulthood literacy rates? (Insert the ask, and add your legislators’ Twitter handles to tag them in your tweet. Insert a link back to your website or campaign web page.)

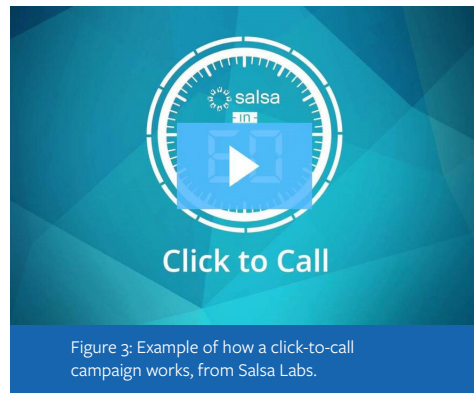
- **Gather and share video testimonies.** Video testimonies are a great way to capture student stories, and the videos provide numerous opportunities for advocacy.

*Example:* During the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, adult learners in NYC had very limited opportunities to participate in a hearing on immigration. NYCCAL decided to capture video testimonies. They published the video testimonies on [Twitter](#), [Google](#), [Instagram](#) and the association’s website ([nyccaliteracy.org](http://nyccaliteracy.org)). Social media posts tagged local policy makers and used campaign hashtags, like #LiteracyLiftsNYC (<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/literacyliftsnyc/>). Instructions for participating in social media testimony campaigns were placed on YouTube to explain how to participate, as in the #literacyliftsnyc example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAFoq56ddPc> in **Appendix F** you can see how practitioners involved adult learners in the campaign.

- **Use a free app to communicate with your public policy advocacy committee or other politically active members.** WhatsApp, for example, is a free messaging app for your phone or desktop that uses the internet to send messages, images, audio or video. For example, when you send an alert, you could follow up with this group after a reasonable period of time to help ensure a strong grassroots response, share photos and videos, and discuss next steps. (<https://www.whatsapp.com/>)



- **Conduct an online petition.** Then ask signers to opt in to your advocacy alert email list. (<https://www.change.org/start-a-petition>, <https://www.ipetitions.com/>)
- **Participate in National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week and International Literacy Day.** Use these September events to educate and engage the community around adult education and literacy. Create sample tweets, and Facebook and Instagram posts that advocates can use or adapt. For example, see the National Coalition for Literacy’s sample social media messaging: <https://nationalcoalitionforliteracy.org/advocacy/aefl-week-resources/adult-education-and-family-literacy-week/>.
- **SMS texting and Click-to-Call:** Create and manage a list of supporters who prefer to be texted with action alerts. Click-to-call campaigns (platforms available for a fee) connect grassroots advocates to their legislators via phone while providing them talking points. The average click-through rate (CTR) for text message campaigns is 45%, while the average CTR for email marketing campaigns is only 6%-7%.<sup>28</sup>
- **Consider purchasing a mobile advocacy app.** In the first quarter of 2020, mobile accounted for more than half of the web traffic worldwide.<sup>29</sup> A mobile app will provide a platform for fundraising, public policy advocacy, and supporter engagement all in one place. It centralizes your association’s digital tools, saving time managing multichannel advocacy strategies and streamlining interactions between the campaign and app users.



Consider: How many of your website visits are from users on their mobile devices? What is the demographic of your advocacy base? Assess your budget, your advocacy needs and existing digital tools, and decide whether an app is worth the investment. Survey your super users. Start small and build if the app becomes popular with your supporters. It’s possible to find a sponsor to cover the cost for a mobile advocacy app. See **Appendix F** for suggested platforms.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.textrequest.com/blog/sms-marketing-myths/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/277125/share-of-website-traffic-coming-from-mobile-devices/>



## CULTIVATING LEGISLATIVE CHAMPIONS

*What are legislative champions in AEL and what are strategies for cultivating them?*

Champions are leaders within the decision-making body who take on AEL as their priority cause and use their influence or power to further AEL. Cultivating champions is a long-term investment that pays off. Champions for AEL in both houses of the legislature (or locally, on city councils or commissions) are the best persuaders to convince their fellow members to support the request for additional funding.

### Examples:

- New York City Council member Mark Treyger, chair of the education committee
- State Assemblyman Ron Kim, New York
- Former State Representative Dan Bosley, Massachusetts
- U.S. Congressman Raul Grijalva, Arizona
- U.S. Senator Patty Murray, Washington State
- U.S. Senator Jack Reed, Rhode Island
- U.S. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, Connecticut
- Former U.S. Senator Paul Simon, Illinois

Champions usually do not start out as champions for a cause. There are efforts advocates can employ to “ratchet up” their legislators’ involvement with and commitment to adult education and literacy. For example:

Consider asking the legislator to:

- Vote in support of AEL funding or laws
- Sponsor a Dear Colleague letter in support of adult education funding or sign one
- Join or form an AEL caucus
- Make AEL one of their top 10 legislative priorities (and then maybe one of the top three).
- Something else?

There may be legislators who reliably support AEL but who are not yet champions. A legislator’s constituents, including adult learners and practitioners from a program in their district, and a representative from your state public policy advocacy organization, could request a meeting with the legislator in which you can ask them to make AEL one of their three top legislative priorities.

### HOW TO CULTIVATE A CHAMPION?

Long-time AEL advocate, Regina Suitt, has worked with many legislators over the years at the local, state, and national levels to cultivate or nurture relationships.

Advice she offers includes:

- **Understand what legislators care about and inform them about AEL in different ways every year, over and over.** They forget what is not in front of them—they are stretched thin.
- **Have authentic relationships with legislators on both sides of the aisle.**
- **Support them personally, if you can.** Examples may include attending debates, volunteering on campaigns, and introducing them to others who can support them.
- **Send invitations to public events such as graduations but also to simple classroom activities.** This gives them the chance to share their views (public events) but also learn directly from students and teachers. Meeting in a policy maker's office is sometimes necessary but the real connections are usually made during visits to the programs.
- **Be known.** Attend their district events, political events, community forums, holiday parties, marches, or their information tables at fairs. Be in the front row and always talk to them so they know you are there and that you are representing adult education. Ask questions that also aim to educate the entire audience.
- **Build relationships with their staff members.** After doing so, staff will call on you for advice on legislation affecting adult education. They should know you and your program well.

### BEST PRACTICES

Some additional best practices include:

- **Articulate a message and a vision that resonates with the potential champion and is compelling to uphold.** For example, Council member Mark Treyger, chair of the New York City Council Education Committee, became a champion for AEL under the flag of liberation, parent empowerment, civic engagement, and empowerment of low-income individuals and immigrants to run for office. He was one of the champions whose advocacy resulted in a nearly fivefold increase in funding, from \$3.5 million to \$15 million.
- **Become a resource for your potential champion on AEL issues.** Share the PIAAC state and county estimates for your county. Meet with them. Bring one or two adult learners to speak about why they sought adult education services and what they plan to do when they meet their education goals.

- **Do you have a famous program graduate?** Involve the alumni by introducing them to the potential champion. Have the alumni hand deliver student letters.
- **Consider giving an award to the potential champion.** Do not underestimate the power of something that can go on a legislator's wall.

Once your legislator becomes a champion of AEL, continue to cultivate that relationship. Be sure to stay on excellent terms with the champion's legislative aides, and always strive to make things easy for them.

### The Power of Legislative Aides

The power of legislative aides and their influence cannot be overstated. Convincing a policy maker's aide of the importance of AEL is a key part in developing an advocate "on the inside."

For example, in 1986, (prior to any state funding for adult education in Pennsylvania and before volunteer tutoring was recognized in legislation) the Executive Director of the Senate Education Committee believed in the importance of what became Act 143, (the PA Adult and Family Literacy Act ). The ED convinced her boss that it should be passed, and it was. The PA Adult and Family Literacy Act of 1986 (and since amended) provides the authorizing language for the state funding for adult and family literacy programs. literacy programs. (JoAnn Weinberger, AAACE-NLA,\* 2/22/20)

\*The AAACE-NLA is a national adult education and literacy advocacy group, founded and currently moderated by David J. Rosen, [djrosen@newsomeassociates.com](mailto:djrosen@newsomeassociates.com)).

### PREPARING FOR THE NEXT BATTLE

#### *Why advocate year-round, every year?*

Advocating for adult education and literacy is a year-in and year-out struggle, not a one-time-only campaign. Adult education advocates should have consistent, ongoing contacts with policy makers year-round. Build relationships with policy makers and keep them well informed so that they can best represent AEL when it comes time to vote—and so that advocates are not contacting them only when they want funding.

In addition to **Best Practices for Cultivating Champions**, programs and the association could:

- Send a congratulations letter when elected/re-elected
- Initiate a **Letter Campaign** asking them to protect or increase funding
- Host a Legislative Day at the capitol
- Share new data and/or an end-of-year report with them
- Thank and recognize them every time they support AEL

They need to know how and why adult education is a good investment so that they continue to advocate for AEL programs with their legislative colleagues.



Adult learners in a crowded hallway at a Massachusetts State House rally for Adult Literacy Awareness Day

## Planning Your Association’s Public Policy Advocacy

Take this opportunity to write down your thoughts on what strategic and tactical changes you will make to strengthen your advocacy or that of your association.

**1**

**Of the 10 Key Elements of Effective Advocacy, which are your priorities—for yourself or your association?**

- A Well-Organized Campaign
- Consistent Messaging and Ask
- Timing
- Targeting the Message
- Grassroots Activism
- Adult Learner Participation
- Social Advocacy
- Identifying Allies and Building Alliances
- Cultivating Champions
- Preparing for the Next Battle

**2**

**Within the priorities you identified, which strategies or tactics are you thinking of pursuing or improving?**

3

**What resources will you use to help you in pursuing this plan?**

4

**What is your timeline to accomplish your plan?**

## How to Write and Call State and Local Legislators

The following are general communication tips for advocates in contacting a legislator:

### Find your elected official.

- Local city/town and county officials: <https://www.usa.gov/local-governments>
- State: <https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites>
- Federal:
  - Representatives: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
  - Senators: [https://www.senate.gov/senators/How\\_to\\_correspond\\_senators.htm](https://www.senate.gov/senators/How_to_correspond_senators.htm)

### Decide whether you will call, write, or meet with your legislator.

Calls are good for simple requests that can be easily delivered by phone. More in-depth communication, like sharing program data and communicating success stories, will be better conveyed in writing (letters, faxes, email) or in person.

### Develop a concise, well-argued, personalized message.

AEL action alerts already contain the message and the ask. Adapt and personalize that message with your local experience.

Communications that include some unique information have significantly more impact on legislators' decision-making than identical form messages. Staff doubt the legitimacy of form communications—letters that all convey the same boilerplate message do not have the same impact. When legislators read individualized messages, they have greater confidence that the constituent sent the letter versus the letter being sent without their knowledge or consent. In addition, the legislator or legislative staff know that the issue motivated the author!

### Report back.

Inform your association's public policy advocacy chair that you made your direct contact. Share what you learned—did you discover that the legislator's office is receiving several calls about AEL? Was this the first the legislator's office has heard about it? Do you know what action the legislator will take?

### Follow up.

Thank the legislative aide for their time. Provide resources (like a program fact sheet) as a supplement to the contact. Ask if the legislator will support your request.



### CALLING LEGISLATORS

Calling is quicker and easier than writing or meeting and can be the only way to get your message and ask across in time to make an impact. Here are some tips for a successful call:

1. Take time to prepare your remarks. You may not speak to the legislator directly, but you will speak with the aide who has their “ear” on the issues.
2. Make sure to identify yourself as a constituent. Legislators count the number of calls from their constituents.
3. Ask to speak with the staff person who handles adult education and literacy issues. Or, leave a message on that person’s voice mail.
4. Express your support or opposition to the bill (include bill #), budget line item, or issue in question, and state your reasons. Use talking points from your local or state advocacy organization. While you want to carefully prepare your remarks, you do not need to be an expert on the issues—you can follow up later with more information if asked.
5. Ask what your legislator’s position is on the issue. Communicate what you learn back to your broader advocacy network.
6. Send a thank you note; restate the purpose of your original communication.
7. Invite and encourage others place calls. A strong and ongoing response from advocates shows your legislators that AEL matters to your community.

**“When I called the Senate president’s office the person who answered said, without even a hello, ‘If this is about adult education, we already know. You have our support.’ The Senate president had been swamped with thousands of calls and it made a huge and positive difference.”**

Long-time adult literacy advocate David Rosen, from Massachusetts remembering one of MCAE’s most successful campaigns

## WRITING LEGISLATORS

Personal and customized letters, whether hand-written or typed, get the attention of legislators. When possible, do not use form or boilerplate letters. Form letters may alienate legislative staff whose aim is to read and respond to each letter received. If individuals are not able to, or don't have time to, adapt a letter to make it personal and unique, then they may choose the option of using an existing letter and adding a unique comment.

### A quality letter is:

- Personalized: it conveys a sense of a constituent's sentiment. The letter should explain why this issue is important to you and your community, include information about your experience, and be clear that your views are your own.
- Concise: this shows respect for staffs' workloads and volume of letters received on various issues.
- Informative: it contains specific information about the legislation in question so that staff are not burdened with having to research it in order to act.
- Targeted: appeal to the legislator's stance on the issue (if you already have a sense from previous communications) and the impact that support would have on the legislator's constituents.

### Letter Formatting Tips

- The inside address should refer to the official as "Honorable Senator Smith" or "Honorable Representative Smith." The salutation should begin "Dear Senator Smith" or "Dear Representative Smith" or "Dear Council Member Smith," depending on the office held.
- State your purpose and your ask in the first paragraph. Include information about the bill, e.g., House bill: H.R. \_\_\_\_; Senate bill: S. \_\_\_\_; or in a state budget, the line item number and the funding amount you are asking the legislator to support.
- Limit your letter to one page and one issue (particular relevant bill or state budget item).
- Use a polite and informative tone. Do not convey righteous indignation. For example, do not write "as a taxpayer and citizen," and do not threaten.
- Sign your letter. If you do not receive public funds, add your organization's affiliation. If you are uncertain of how to sign, sign as a private citizen.
- Use personal stationery if you are a public employee and you are not sure how to sign your letter.

### Letter Format

*To a Senator:*

The Honorable (full name)  
[Room #] [Name of] Office Building  
[State] State Senate  
[City, state, zip]

Dear Senator:

*To a Representative:*

The Honorable (full name)  
[Room #] [Name of] Office Building  
[State] House of Representatives  
[City, state, zip]

Dear Representative:

### Students

Students should write about why they enrolled, what they plan to do when they graduate, and the ask (for example, support adult education programs in the state by adding \$X,XXX to the adult education line item (# listed) in the state budget).

### Practitioners

Practitioners and program volunteers should share where they provide adult education services, and whether online or in person. The letter should include their experiences, how they or their program are adapting to the pandemic crisis, if applicable, and key talking points from their state AEL advocacy association.

## Meeting with Legislators

*How do you plan for and conduct a meeting with legislators or their aides?*

Meeting with legislators or their aides is the most effective way to communicate with a legislator who is undecided on an issue. It takes time to prepare for a meeting with legislators and legislative assistants, but it is well-worth the effort. Consider these steps in planning, scheduling, conducting, and following up on the meeting.

### PLAN THE MEETING

#### 1. **Identify your goals and with whom you need to meet.**

Have a clear purpose and ask for the meeting. Determine with whom you should meet, which could be your legislator or key legislators who lead committees that impact AEL funding or legislation. Meet with legislative assistants, who have the “ear” of the legislator. If advocating locally, present to mayors and city/town councils. Keep in mind that it’s also important to advocate within your organization, and meet with local school boards, superintendents, and other decision makers.

## 2. **Involve Constituents.**

Constituents of the legislator or other policy maker should meet to present the data and share experiences with AEL. This includes AEL practitioners and adult learners; AEL stakeholders such as public libraries, community health centers, business and sector advocacy organizations, individual businesses, organized labor, and advocate organizations for anti-poverty, immigrants and refugees, older adults, digital inclusion, homeless adults, and others. Typically, the following individuals would attend:

- Program director
- Consortium partners or key stakeholders
- Teacher or tutor
- Adult learner leaders or ambassadors

Keep the group small, and be mindful of legislators' limited office spaces. Do not spend a lot of time making introductions rather than making your case—legislators and their staff are very busy and you don't want to leave the office without conveying your key message and ask. Identify your meeting lead, keeping in mind that the legislator or aide may take control of conducting the actual meeting.

## **SCHEDULE AND PREPARE FOR THE MEETING**

### 1. **Be flexible about time and location.**

Contact the legislator's scheduler. Legislators have many competing demands on their time, so allow them to dictate the time for the meeting instead of asking them to meet during the best times for your group.

### 2. **Have a constituent make the meeting request.**

Legislators (and aides) need to meet with their constituents. Oftentimes, it is the highlight of their jobs. If you are not a constituent, do not use a bait-and-switch technique just to get on their calendars. Advocates can ruin relationships with legislative offices by doing so.

### 3. **Do your homework.**

Familiarize yourself with your association's briefing materials. Research which committees/subcommittees the legislator serves on and in what capacity. Review their recent press releases for a quick way to get up to speed on what the legislator has been involved in recently. Use this information when creating your questions and talking points so that you can hook AEL to the legislators' interests when feasible.

### 4. **Gather and prepare your team.**

Create an agenda, and outline who will present what and when. Keep in mind that the legislator or LA may wish to conduct the meeting. Anticipate questions--while you may not have all of the answers, you can follow up promptly afterwards.

### 5. **Train adult learners to effectively tell their stories.**

When was the last time you gave an elevator speech? Did you fumble or later wish you had said something that you left out? Telling our stories succinctly is not always easy, especially for adult learners. Spend time with learners in advance to help them prepare their 2-3 minute stories and key talking points.

## **CONDUCT THE MEETING**

### 1. **Be 15 minutes early.**

Check in with your team; discuss and resolve any last-minute issues. Do not be so early that your team is in the way of the office staff, or that the team's presence in the office interferes with staff's ability to conduct other legislative business.

### 2. **Stay on topic.**

With your goal in mind, use the limited time to make a focused and persuasive case for AEL. Future meetings can be scheduled to discuss other issues.

### 3. **Set aside your political disagreements.**

Always be respectful and acknowledge that you will take their views into consideration. Focus on making engaging dialogue and persuasive arguments and leave on a positive note.

## **FOLLOW UP ON THE MEETING**

### 1. **Leave behind a brief summary document.**

Leave behind the ProLiteracy Impact Report Template that you customized for your program. Or, email it to the staff afterwards. This provides a reminder of what was discussed, and it is something for staff to refer to as budget development or legislation progresses.

### 2. **Use social media to raise awareness of your team's advocacy work.**

Post to social media about your meeting, and like or respond to posts of your team members to increase reach and engagement. Share with your advocacy association.

### 3. **Follow up with the legislator's office**

Check back with the legislative assistant a few days or week later to find out the legislator's position and next steps, if needed. This is also an opportunity to answer any questions that a legislator asked for which you didn't have an answer during the meeting.

## TIPS FOR MEETING REMOTELY WITH LEGISLATORS

COVID-19 has presented unique challenges for legislators and constituents to meet in person about critical issues concerning their communities. Yet even when the situation is not conducive for face-to-face in-person meetings, like during a pandemic, advocates can meet with legislators or their aides (or both!) remotely. Legislators and their aides are eager to help, especially during a crisis, so this is an especially important time to meet.

Additionally, meeting remotely provides a unique opportunity for advocates who cannot travel to still meet with policy makers. And for policy makers—who otherwise would not be able to attend a meeting—remote meetings are a convenient way to meet while on-the-go. While most of the same principles for meeting in-person apply to remote meetings, there are specific tips to follow for planning and conducting virtual meetings. See **Appendix E** for a printable Virtual Meeting Checklist.



Figure 4: Laurie Kierstead, Acting Vice President of Adult Basic Education for College & Career, Pima Community College, conducts a Zoom meeting with adult learners and legislators as a part of COABE's Hill Day.

## Cinching the Commitment

*How do I know if my legislator is actually committed to supporting my ask?*

No matter how you reach out to policymakers or how often you keep in contact, unfortunately none of it matters if you do not cinch the commitment. Can they support increasing funding for AEL programs? If not, then could they support maintaining funding? If not, then what can they do? If they cannot support AEL, find out why—maybe there is something else they can do instead.

But if they consistently cannot support AEL in ways that best meet adult learners' needs, then it is time to vote for someone else running for that seat in the next election cycle.

## Testifying in Hearings

### TIPS FOR GETTING ON THE RECORD IN TOWN HALL MEETINGS OR PUBLIC HEARINGS

Providing testimony, whether in person or submitted in written form to elected officials, allows adult literacy advocates to get key facts and information entered in the official record on a given issue. It is one of the most important ways of interacting with legislators, allowing you to impress upon them the urgency, importance, or dangers of specific legislation. Being on the record allows you to point to a specific time and day when you gave insights and hold legislators accountable for being at least broadly informed.

Sometimes this means you may need to take the time to be present in hearing rooms. In person, we can take what may seem simple and straightforward to us and communicate it with persuasion and passion to policy makers. The best way to clear up any misunderstandings is to be there in person and assist legislators or staff with any questions they may have.

#### Preparing for the Hearing

- Call ahead to verify the location of the hearing, and indicate your intention to participate.
- Ask if there are testimony submission guidelines. Does testimony need to be provided in advance? If so, when and how? How many copies should you expect to provide?
- Are there formatting issues you must be aware of (for example, does the testimony need to be submitted in a folder or in a binder)? What are the time limits for speaking and answering questions?
- Most committees allow you to co-testify with someone who has been or may be affected by the proposal. These “real-life” examples are particularly powerful. Bring an adult learner who can effectively put a face to an issue.
- Practice several times making your points, so that you can make eye contact with members while you speak and do not appear to be just reading from a paper.
- Contact local reporters and news organizations and explain who you are and why you plan to testify. Provide a copy of your testimony after it has been presented or submitted.

#### Providing Your Testimony

- Expect to provide copies of your remarks to legislators and staff. Customarily, your remarks are addressed to the committee chairs and honorable members of the committee.
- Time is generally limited. Make your points concise and memorable. Explain what you are asking for and why it is important.
- Thank the committee before and after you speak, and if you have time, wait until the end of the hearing and thank the committee members in person.

#### Following Up

- Write a follow-up letter to the committee chairs offering to provide more expertise or to set up a meeting to continue the dialogue.



## Organizing Adult Education and Literacy Rallies

A rally is a group of people coming together to peacefully show support for a political or other cause. Rallies that promote funding for adult education and literacy involve adult learners, practitioners, champions, and allies. When held in conjunction with office visits at the statehouse, rallies can help strengthen direct connections between adult learners and members of the legislature, and students experience the power of civic action while learning about how government works.

A successful rally involves hundreds, if not thousands, of adult learners, one or more legislative champions to speak at the event, and media coverage. Rallies have helped restore AEL funding in California, Illinois, and Arizona, and helped increase funding for AEL in Massachusetts and possibly other states. But is holding a rally the best strategy for your association?



Figure 5: Participant at IACEA's Legislative Awareness Day held annually in Springfield, the Illinois state capitol.

### CONSIDERATIONS

When considering whether to organize a rally, ask your organization some important questions, such as:

- What is your association's advocacy goal, and how important is a rally to accomplishing that goal?
- Does your association have the resources needed to organize and lead a rally, or can you secure the resources?
- This sounds like permission is needed; it is not. I suggest instead: "In many states, the adult education director, as a state employee, may not be able to be involved in a rally whose goal is to seek state funding for a line item in the state budget; however, it would be wise to inform the state ABE director about the rally. The state professional development system typically is not involved in advocacy, although you could also inform its members about the rally as some professional developers may wish to attend."
- Can your association involve many adult learners in a rally?
- Do you have funds to cover any expenses, such as the cost to reserve a room within the statehouse, materials, transportation, etc.?

### EXAMPLE: ADULT LITERACY AWARENESS DAY—MCAE AND MASSAAL

When you think of rallies, you might think of a one-time, somewhat spontaneous event that is well attended and runs seamlessly. The actual success of an adult education rally, however, depends on how important it is to your association, and how motivated your members are to get behind it. At first, you might start by having a volunteer be the lead organizer. But ideally you may want to find funding to support someone's time to take the lead in organizing and conducting it, especially if you are coordinating thousands of adult learners to participate each year.

In Massachusetts, for example, the state professional association, MCAE, and the state learner leadership organization, MassAAL, have worked together to organize and lead an annual Adult Literacy Awareness Day at the statehouse. In 2007, the second year they held the event, they brought in more than 2,000 adult learners—the group had to be moved to a larger room within the statehouse to accommodate the large turnout. An adult learner and AEL champion in the legislature spoke to the crowd. Adult Learner and Teacher of the Year awards were presented, and participants met with their legislators afterwards. The Adult Literacy Awareness Day has increased visibility and awareness among state legislators which, in turn, has led to their continued support for adult basic education during the budget process.



Figure 6: MassAAL Executive Director Ernest Best introduces former State Senator Dianne Wilkerson to over 2,000 adult learners and advocates during an Adult Literacy Awareness Day at the Massachusetts State House in Boston. Photo by Carey Reid.

MCAE and MassAAL have had the support of the adult education state director and the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), for organizing Adult Literacy Awareness Day. Both MCAE and MassAAL have an executive director who helps to organize the event. Planning for a rally to be held in March begins in September. MassAAL prepares adult learners to meet with legislators by teaching them how to tell their stories succinctly and in under five minutes. The organizations coordinate with SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support) so the rally doesn't conflict with other adult education professional development events offered. The regional events lead up to the state event in Boston. By then, participants are rehearsed.

Some local programs organize a trip to the statehouse, i.e. the state capitol building, prior to the actual rally. This helps adult learners and practitioners become comfortable with the venue, making it feel less intimidating. Local programs handle the RSVPs and organize transportation for the event, whether they rent buses or arrange caravans of carpools. Both MCAE and MassAAL invite the media. They also invite legislators and their staff since the event is conducted within the statehouse. Adult learners are encouraged to invite family and friends to attend, and adult learners are given classroom participation credit for attending—this is a great opportunity for civic education! Some programs print T-shirts with rally messaging because signs are not allowed inside the statehouse.

## How to Plan and Conduct an Adult Literacy Education Rally

The following are tips for organizing and running a rally at a state capitol building:

### PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR A RALLY

- **Create an organizing group.** Key roles include, but are not limited to:
  - **Lead(s):** In charge of organizing the rally
  - **Emcee:** Hosts/facilitates the rally
  - **Speakers coordinator:** Arranges for guest speakers and coordinates logistics
  - **Visuals and sign coordinator:** Organizes volunteers to create signs and banners
  - **Student organizer(s):** Adult learner(s) who organizes student participation
  - **Cheer or chant leader:** Leads chants to energize the crowd
  - **Media coordinator:** Coordinates with local media to cover the rally, promotes rally on social media, and covers the event live on social media
  - **Photographer/videographer:** While many people will be taking pictures, a designate person is needed to focus solely on documenting the event
  - **Greeter(s):** Greets participants, helps them to sign in and get into position
- **Choose a date, time, and location.** Rallies can last between one to several hours. Choose a date when a rally will make the most impact in the local or state legislative process. Rallies usually occur in the spring as the last influence before the vote, but can happen much sooner, especially if adult education is proposed to be cut in the budget.
- **Coordinate with a legislative champion to sponsor the rally and reserve the space in the state capitol building.** This may save you hundreds of dollars on using the room. The legislative champion will also provide guidance on other details, such as suggesting the best time to hold the event, and inviting other legislators and their staff. The champion's staff do all of this legwork, so be sure to cultivate a very positive working relationship with them.
- **Schedule the rally and obtain a permit several months in advance.** Some public spaces require a permit. Schedule and request a permit for a spring rally early in the fall of the year prior. The earlier you schedule, the better chance of getting permission for the date you choose, especially if you want to reserve a space for the rally inside the capitol.
- **Arrange for speakers.** Many rallies have one to three speakers; but in adult education and literacy usually there are more—legislative champions, adult learner leaders or ambassadors, and representatives from sponsoring organizations may all be involved.
- **Schedule legislative meetings for the day of the event.** Invite legislators and their staff to the rally and schedule a meeting afterwards. See [Meeting with Legislators](#).

- **Prepare adult learners:**

- **Teach civics lessons in class** about how laws are made and the public’s role in civic participation. Integrate basic skills using thematic instruction.
- **Help adult learners register to vote**, giving them more credibility when going before state legislators.
- **Help learners prepare for meetings with legislators.** See [Adult Learner Participation](#) for details.



Figure 7: City council members speak at a Brooklyn rally to save adult education in NYC.

- **Prepare A/V and materials.** If the rally is outside, you will need a sound system or a megaphone. If inside, find out what A/V equipment is available to you and plan accordingly. You will also need materials such as a facilitator agenda and talking points, press release, sign-in sheets, flyers, and copy for social media posts, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. See social media tips from [The Literacy Cooperative, Cleveland, Ohio](#).
- **Recruit advocates to participate.** Use your grassroots network to promote and recruit participants. Encourage adult learners to bring family and friends. Ask local programs to organize adult learners and arrange transport. Create a Facebook event, and/or use platforms like Eventbrite.com to have advocates sign up. See [Grassroots Activism](#) and [Social Advocacy](#).
- **Pay attention to these additional considerations.** Do you want participants to spread out to make the crowd seem larger or for social distancing during a pandemic? Do you want to provide masks during the pandemic? What accessibility issues could there be? Are there other ways advocates can participate, such as driving by and honking in support, or spreading the word over social media?
- **Review for last-minute preparations.** Touch base with the committee and with the grassroots base. Make a final push and tie up any loose ends.

### CONDUCTING THE RALLY

- **Arrive an hour before or earlier.** If at the state capitol, give legislative staff a heads-up that you are there. Arrive extra early to take care of any Murphy’s Law issues that may arise.
- **Welcome reporters and participants as they arrive.** Ask participants to display their signs.
- **Start on time.** Don’t wait more than 10 minutes after your advertised start-time—especially if any reporters attend.



- **A schedule might go as follows:**

- 30 minutes prior: Start signing in participants
- 15 minutes before to 5-10 minutes after start time: Lead crowd in cheers and chants
- Emcee welcomes everyone, states why they are there, introduces first speaker
- One to three speakers total—but it could be more—especially if you are indoors in an auditorium; introduced by emcee, and given 5 minutes each
- Emcee wraps up with key points, takes questions from media
- Continue chanting and cheering; emcee thanks participants and reminds them of next steps

- **Take photos and a video of the event.** Make certain to get photos of adult learner leaders (and others) speaking and participating.



### FOLLOWING UP AFTERWARDS

- Debrief with the planning committee. How well did it go? What would you do differently next time? What are follow-up actions with policymakers?
- Follow up with participants. Thank them for coming, ask for their feedback on the event, and remind them of next steps.
- Share news coverage, photos, and outcomes with participants, the broader state advocacy network, legislators, and champions.
- Make sure adult learners (and others) who were presenting get copies of photos and videos taken so that they can share with family and friends.
- Consider creating a final video wrapping up the event that you can use to document or promote your association's advocacy work. Here is one example from NYCCAL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV7731UBtl>.





## PART 4

# How to Advocate with Donors, Foundations, and Corporations

### Key Takeaways

- ✓ Advocating with policy makers and fundraising in the private sector isn't as different as you might think.
- ✓ If you are not advocating with individual donors, you are missing an opportunity to get a significant portion of private funding for your program or association.
- ✓ Ongoing communication and relationship-building are key to advocating with foundations and corporations, and retaining their support during times of crisis.

### Why Advocate in the Private Sector?

While 80 percent of nonprofit funding in the United States comes from government grants or contracts and fees for services,<sup>30</sup> philanthropic funding is still a major source of funds that AEL programs pursue. Ninety-two percent of nonprofits in the U.S. are small (less than \$500,000 of annual spending) and address local needs,<sup>31</sup> and many—if not most—private funds are given or granted locally.

<sup>30</sup> National Council of Nonprofits, 2019, "Nonprofit Impact Matters: How America's Charitable Nonprofits Strengthen Communities and Improve Lives" <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/>

### ADVOCATING ISN'T AS DIFFERENT FROM FUNDRAISING AS YOU MIGHT THINK

Advocating for funding in the private sector has some notable similarities to advocating in the public realm. Both:

- Involve planning overall strategy and tactics.  
See **Planning Your Advocacy—Key Questions to Ask Yourself**.
- Raise awareness.
- Use practices of effective messaging, connecting AEL to broader societal issues and hooking into funders' and individual donors' interests.  
See **Developing Effective Messaging and the Ask**.
- Make an ask. Effective advocacy in either realm is only as good as the ask.
- Follow up to cinch commitments.

Other parallels likely exist as well. For example, if the public requests to receive your organization's action alerts, they should be asked to donate as well, and vice versa.

And since advocating and fundraising intersect, some of the best practices offered here apply to both. Additional fundraising-specific practices—such as finding and applying for grants—are included in **Appendix G**.

### ADVOCATING WITH PRIVATE DONORS

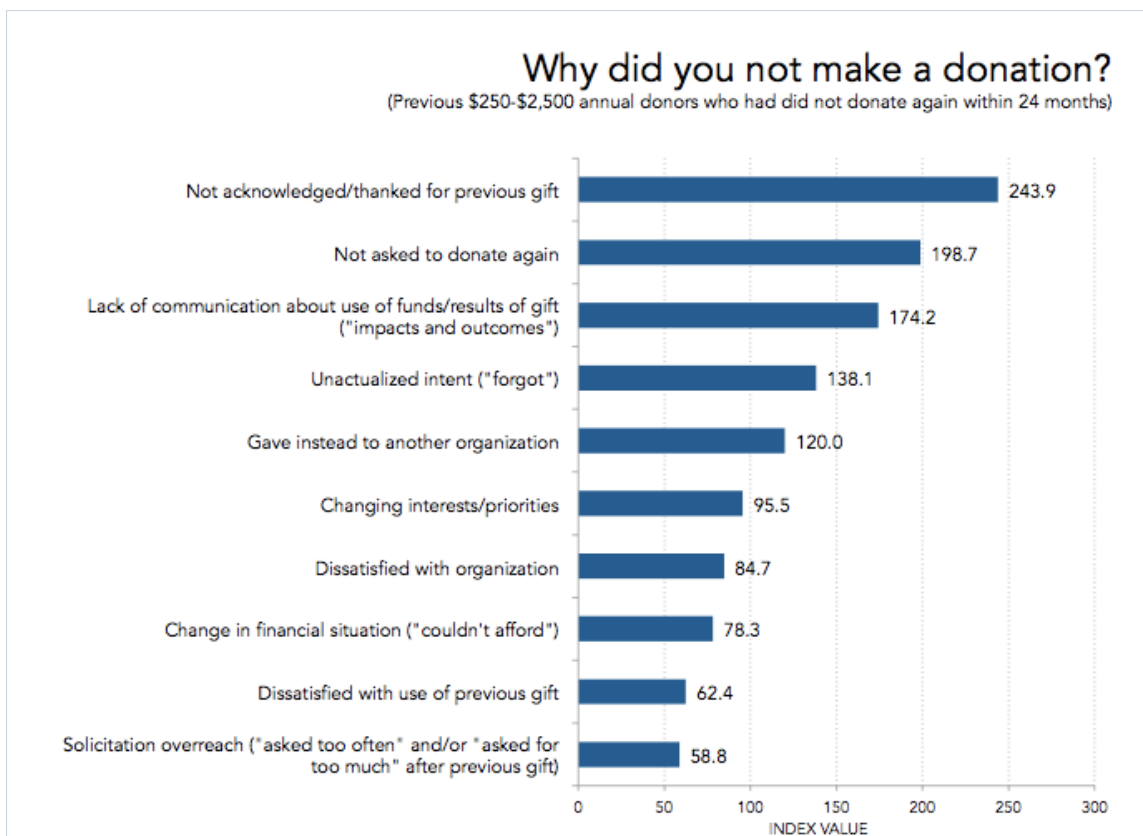
Surprisingly, individuals account for the lion's share of private, philanthropic funds. According to Giving USA 2020, in 2019, the largest source of charitable giving came from individuals at \$309.66 billion, or 69% of total giving (not counting bequests); followed by foundations (\$75.69 billion making up 17%), bequests (\$43.21 billion for 10%), and corporations (\$21.09 billion or 5%).<sup>32</sup> However, even though many individuals donate, nearly 81% of first-time donors do not donate again.<sup>33</sup> According to the National Attitudes, Awareness, and Usage Study, the top three reasons are:

1. They were not acknowledged or thanked for their gift
2. They were not asked to donate again
3. Lack of communication about use of funds (impacts and outcomes)

<sup>32</sup> Giving USA 2020: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2019 <https://store.givingusa.org/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.networkforgood.com/checklist-to-success-build-strong-and-lasting-relationships-with-first-time-donors/>





Further, [research shows](#) that improving donor attrition rates by only 10% can improve the lifetime value of a donor base up to 200%.<sup>34</sup> Thus, not only does focusing advocacy efforts with private donors pay off, but if done right, it could become a long-term source of charitable giving.

### FINDING DONORS—WHY DO PEOPLE DONATE?

What really interests donors? It is not likely that stand-alone facts move people to donate, but rather, it's about becoming part of a larger cause. It's what's also called the "warm glow of giving"—the idea that donors are helping people to change their lives, addressing community needs, helping the economy grow, or creating a more just and equitable world. For some, it's about participating in a fight. If you're not maximizing the potential of individual donors, here are some tips for building a solid donor fundraising base.

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.blackbaud.com/files/resources/recordings/FinishStrong\\_ImprovingDonorLoyalty.pdf](https://www.blackbaud.com/files/resources/recordings/FinishStrong_ImprovingDonorLoyalty.pdf)

## BEST PRACTICES FOR FINDING SMALL DONORS

Not all donors are big donors; in fact, programs can have great success with campaigns that attract many small donors.

- **Organize online and in-person fundraising events.** Host virtual events such as a Day of Giving or Giving Tuesday (held every year the Tuesday after Thanksgiving) where nonprofits work together to raise awareness of their cause, or nonprofit, and often ask for donations, too. **For in-person events, make sure they are financially sustainable without over-taxing resources and volunteers.** In-person events are a great stewardship opportunity for donors, but they are often expensive and work-intensive for (what can amount to) minimal return.
- **Launch a short-term crowdfunding campaign on social media to raise money from small donors.** In a crowdfunding campaign, nonprofits call on many supporters to donate small amounts so they can quickly reach their goal. Examples include individual donor campaigns, peer-to-peer campaigns, product campaigns, pledges, and more. Platforms include GoFundMe.com, Fundly.com, and others. The platforms typically charge a small fee and a credit card processing charge per donation. However, some platforms allow a donor to cover these charges for the organization. See [Donorsearch.net's crowdfunding strategies](#) for a more comprehensive list of tools and strategies.
- **Create a culture of giving.** Letting prospective donors know about one person's charity may help others to be charitable as well. For example, your online end-of-year giving campaign could include an option for donors to have their names listed on the campaign webpage as contributors.
- **Once the small donor has given, also ask them to take action.** Ask to donor to sign a petition, call their state legislator, or share your program newsletter with interested friends and family. Because they are already invested in AEL, they are more likely to be receptive to your program or association's advocacy work.
- **Is the individual a first-time donor?** Follow this [checklist](#) from donorbox to learn about building lasting relationships with them.
- **While developing your own foundation is a longer game, having one would allow you to develop a membership program for small donors.** For example, in the fine arts, supporters pay for a membership every year and they get recognition and satisfaction for supporting the nonprofit's outcomes. You could develop a membership program, even brand program services differently, and ask donors which programs they would like to support. You might host an event that brings donors together to celebrate volunteerism or program successes. You could also hold annual membership drives, send updates to members, and so forth.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR FINDING LARGE DONORS

- **Make it a priority.** Leverage your board members' connections to find the best prospects. Set up a development committee on your board, or a subset of your board to focus on individual donors. This is their sole task. The group should comprise those with the best connections or who can put you in touch with those who have them.
- **Seek information about major donors of nonprofits similar to your organization in mission.** Find their annual reports, which can provide information about other major donors, such as names and their level of giving.
- **Build a target base of people you plan to approach.** The key is to attract donors who will make your program their go-to charity. Focus on prospects who have the most capacity and willingness to give. Learn more about their personal backgrounds, giving histories, wealth, and philanthropic motivations. What are their interests and to whom are they giving? Include individuals who are not donating at this time. They may have money they wish to give to a good cause, but they just haven't been asked.
- **Having trouble thinking of prospects?** Use a relationship grid with your board, a funder, or potential funder as a brainstorming tool. Ask program partners if they have recommendations for prospective donors.
- **Identify the best person to approach a potential large donor.** Who knows this person? Going in cold is difficult and rarely effective. Find someone who already has a relationship with the prospective donor in order to establish a connection. Ask a board member who knows the prospective donor to introduce you.
- **Help the potential donor to establish a personal connection to AEL.** How does AEL tie in with their interests and philanthropic motivations? Do they know someone who has benefitted from AEL? Help them to associate with your cause and feel like they are a part of the solution. Also, consider those who already have a personal connection to AEL as potential donors: volunteer tutors, adult learners who have graduated from your program, your program staff members and former staff members, and AEL public policy advocates in your community.
- **Share two or three compelling adult learner success stories.** Have stories included on your fact sheet or linked to your website. See [Adult Learner Participation](#) for ideas on how to create digital stories.



Cover Photo by Carey Reid

Former State Senator Gloria Fox at a Massachusetts State House rally for Adult Literacy Awareness Day

- **Ask for the donation.** Don't be afraid to ask BIG. Only someone who is comfortable asking for funding, however, should make the ask.
- **Find out how they can help if they say no.** You might ask the prospective donor for names of others who may be interested in donating to your program or association. Or, the donor may be interested in getting involved in your organization in another way.
- **Build authentic relationships with donors.** Learn to ask questions and listen to the responses. Show genuine interest in them if you want them to care at all about what you have to say. Ask questions when you meet with donors face-to-face, and get to know more about them personally.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR ALL DONORS

- **Thank donors!** Be immediate, sincere, and personal. Communicate the impact of giving by sharing program outcomes.
- **Make the donation about more than just listing names on a website or program book.** Share relevant, targeted, and planned communications. Ask for their feedback online and at events. While you may not always agree, take their feedback into consideration and demonstrate that you care about their opinions.
- **Keep donors updated on impacts and outcomes of their support.** Communicate with them in addition to asking for donations. Let them know when and how they are a part of your program's success.
- **Earn their trust.** When you say you are going to do something, be true to your word. Donors believe in your mission, but they stay with you because you have earned their trust and commitment.

## The Role of Advocacy in Fundraising with Charitable Foundations

Foundations account for just 18 percent of private funding for charities. Most charitable and corporate education foundations fund Pre-K-12, or higher education. Often this is because they do not know about—or haven't seriously considered the need for—AEL education. This is why advocacy is needed. For example:

- If the focus of the charitable foundation is K-12, make the case that family literacy has an impact on children's success in school.

- If they have broadened their range of grants to increase digital equity so children will have Internet access at home, make the case that they also need to provide low-income families with help in paying for Internet services, and fund AEL programs to provide parents with digital literacy skills.
- If a foundation is interested in helping low-income families build wealth, then make the case that they also need financial literacy—and good reading skills—to maintain the wealth they have built.

### ADVOCATING WITH POTENTIAL FUNDERS

If you are going in cold on a new grant opportunity without a phone call or face-to-face meeting before applying, expect that it may be denied. It is sometimes easier to maintain funding than to acquire it. However, there are strategies for increasing chances for new grant funding. Here are some best practices to help you get started:

#### BEST PRACTICES

- **Research the funder.** Research foundation websites, social media, blogs, and news coverage. Be aware of projects they have funded. If they have already funded a large-scale initiative, your program proposal may complement it.
- **Find out who you know that works with the funder.** Set up an introductory or discovery meeting (discovery visits allow for determining, in one meeting, whether a person qualifies as a major gift prospect), and offer to give a presentation about your program. See [ProLiteracy's customizable impact report PPT template](#) using PIAAC county and state synthetic data.
- **Speak with a program officer or the founder.** Discuss whether your project is a good fit. Hook AEL to their interests (See [Creating Effective Messages](#)). Let them know how AEL is mission-critical to the success of the funder's larger initiative. Network with foundation staff. Seek them out at conferences. Ask questions. Add them to your email list.
- **Get the right people to the right meetings.** Be strategic—what is your goal for the meeting? Is it an introductory or discovery visit? Is it to pitch a funding proposal? If the latter, it may mean that a president or CEO joins the meeting to add gravity to the situation.
- **Share the cost of low skills to your community, based on the prospective funder's interests.** If your end goal is funding, don't rely solely on PIAAC and program data. It's very important to share how AEL intersects with larger societal issues, especially issues in the funder's community.

- **Create an asset folder of materials.**

Give this to potential funders to illustrate what your program does, what it's accomplished, and the state of literacy and numeracy in your area. Customize [ProLiteracy's impact report fact sheet template](#) to include your local county and state PIAAC and program data and a learner success story.

- **Treat the discovery meeting like a job interview.** What's in it for the grant funder? How does AEL tie into their mission? How can it be part of the solution for issues that the funder cares about?

- **Get feedback.** If you are denied a grant, use this as an opportunity to get feedback on your proposal. Become their go-to person on AEL issues. Get your and your organization's name in front of them regularly (don't spam!), and plan to be in it for the longer game.



Asian American Civic Association adult learners and ESOL program administrator, Richard Goldberg, at an Adult Literacy Awareness Day rally at the Massachusetts State House in Boston

### ADVOCATING WITH PREVIOUS AND ONGOING FUNDERS

One of the biggest mistakes a nonprofit can make is approaching previous or ongoing funders only when asking for funding. Ongoing, strategic communication is one of the best strategies for funder retention. Remember that they are just people, so build that relationship. No one wants to be treated like a pocketbook. But when applying for continued funding, here are some tips:

- Submit a proposal that builds on the funder's past initiatives and the successes of your previous grant(s) from them. Show them that you met your objectives, and that new goals or objectives have emerged from the project. For example, if your first project was effective but small, your grant might scale it up to a different population or to a larger number of people who need the services. How is this proposal going to take the funder's priorities and your cause another step further?
- Build in efficiencies or combine efforts with new partners. Your project doesn't need to cost the same each year, nor do you want it to appear that you might be duplicating efforts.
- Ask for the funder's help even when they cannot provide funding. Who else do they know that can help fill this gap? Could they put in a good word for you, or set up an introductory meeting?



### BEST PRACTICES WITH ALL FUNDERS:

- **Build a relationship with the funder.** While foundations and community organizations are not ongoing streams of funding, you could get funded over longer periods of time by building a relationship with the funder. In many cases this will require asking for funding of a new or follow-on project each time you apply for a grant.
- **If your grant is rejected, find out why. Is there is anything you can do better or different in the future?** Funders appreciate when applicants reach out to find out how they can improve their chances of funding next time. Always ask if there is another funding source that they can recommend.

## Donor and Funder Retention During a Crisis

When disaster strikes, communication with funders and donors is crucial. For example, how is your program directly supporting your community during COVID-19? How has your approved project changed due to in-person learning being on hold?

- Which myriad of sub-crises is your program helping learners to address? For instance:
  - Are teachers showing adult learners how to help their children learn remotely?
  - Is your program adapting in-person curriculum for online delivery?
  - Are teachers building curriculum and instruction around health literacy, building careers and finding jobs, and/or digital literacy?
  - Are you helping adult learners make sense of health, employment, or school information, navigate unemployment insurance, or are you meeting another need that has emerged?
- What supports or support services are you making available to students? For example, getting financial assistance to pay rent or with mortgage payments, family counseling, information about food pantries, information about clothing, etc.
- How will you frame the work that your program may be doing in six months? Are you preparing for an influx of students? Do teachers stand ready to teach in-person, virtually, or use a hybrid or blended learning format? How does your program play a crucial part in economic recovery?



## Advocating with Corporations

While only 5 percent of philanthropic funding comes from corporations, they are still a great resource for programs. One study found that of the corporate giving in AEL, more than two-thirds goes to local literacy programs, typically CBOs, libraries, and local literacy coalitions.<sup>35</sup> The rest is distributed at the national level. The corporate foundation that contributes the most to AEL, the [Dollar General Literacy Foundation](#), provides most of its funding in grants under \$10,000 to local literacy programs that are in proximity to their stores, often in low-income communities.

Corporations give locally in several ways, including community grants, employee volunteer grants, employee matching gifts, corporate sponsorship, and noncash contributions. A lot of corporations have foundations that give grants to charities to spread good will in the community and boost the company's image. Many of the strategies working with private grants also apply to corporate giving. Establishing and nurturing a working relationship with the corporation will go a long way

### BEST PRACTICES:

- **Work with corporate funders who are in sync with your program's mission.** Corporations usually want grant recipients to broadly inform the public of what they are awarded and how funds will be used, and to take advantage of many public relations opportunities during the grant period. Make sure that the partnership itself is a good fit, as you may need to be very public about the corporation's support.
- **Research about grants the foundation has made previously, to whom, in what amounts, and for what purposes.** Corporate foundations are very transparent, and their foundation grants are public information. Check a foundation research database or the foundation's 990 tax returns, which are also public.
- **Learn as much as possible about the corporation's mission and vision and what it has funded previously.** Like private foundations, corporate foundations have distinct interests.
- **Dot the i's and cross the t's.** Make certain your letter of intent to apply and the grant application itself are high quality and provide a logical, complete and compelling argument for funding. Illustrate how AEL will serve to advance the corporate foundation's mission by supporting your program.

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<sup>35</sup> <https://floridaliteracy.org/pdf-docs/corporategiving.pdf>

- **Always ask.** Because you have met with them before and have a positive working relationship, does not mean they will automatically think of your program when it comes time to give money.
- **Ask at the right time.** When asking for sponsorships or matching gifts, the timing of your ask is key—find out when they create their budgets for the upcoming year, and time your ask so that they may add your request to their budgeted giving.

### How Corporate Donors Can Become AEL Advocates

Sometimes corporate donors may not be able to give funding when you ask, but they can help in other ways, such as:

- Donating in-kind (e.g. equipment, services, office/event space, and volunteer time)
- Partnering in AEL initiatives to provide internships
- Serving on an AEL program board of directors
- Writing and submitting an op-ed to the local paper on corporate workforce needs and the need to invest in AEL in the community
- Speaking to adult learners about skills needed for careers in high-demand jobs
- For example
- IBM developed and provided (for free) reading recognition software programs for English-as-a-Second-Language Learners (ELL).<sup>36</sup>
- XPRIZE partnered with the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation and the Dollar General Literacy Foundation to spur innovation in adult literacy by holding a first-of-its-kind global competition that challenged teams to “develop mobile applications for existing smart devices that result in the greatest increase in literacy skills among participating adult learners in just 12 months.” <https://www.xprize.org/articles/winners-in-the-adult-literacy-xprize-communities>

Bring them along the ladder of engagement so that they become a voice for adult education and literacy.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://floridaliteracy.org/pdf-docs/corporategiving.pdf>

## Planning Your Advocacy with Donors, Foundations, and Corporations

Take this opportunity to write down your thoughts on what strategic and tactical changes you would like to make to strengthen your advocacy with private donors.

1

**What are your priorities for improving your advocacy with donors, foundations, or corporations?**

2

**Within the priorities you identified, which practices are you thinking of pursuing or improving? Or, what ideas has this given you in moving forward?**

3

**What resources will you use to help you in pursuing this plan?**

4

**What is your timeline to accomplish your plan?**



## Appendices

## PART 5

### Appendix A: Case Studies—Local and State Advocacy Initiatives and Successes



#### Arizona Association for Lifelong Learning (AALL)

##### Advocacy Successes

The Arizona Association for Lifelong Learning (AALL), in collaboration with program leaders and student ambassadors, has been able to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of Adult Education for decades. This has included a successful advocacy campaign to restore state funding after being zeroed out of the state budget 2009-2013 and successfully avoiding budget cuts in the years since then. This was made possible through the development and strengthening of relationships with local and state leaders. These relationships were leveraged again recently when AALL led an advocacy effort in defense against vendor bills that aimed to discredit and supplant Arizona's highly successful adult education system. Finally, AALL supported the expansion of Pima Community College's Student Ambassador Leadership Training across Arizona, which led to a COABE-supported expansion of the award-winning training nationwide. Now more than 200 adult education students nationally have become trained student ambassadors in more than 20 states.

### Key Factors That Led to Success

**Developing relationships.** AALL was able to restore funding by building and nurturing relationships at all levels: with local policymakers and community members, with students, and with college leadership. With these relationships, AALL was able to mobilize not only adult ed advocates and students but also allies.

**Raising awareness.** AALL has to continually educate policymakers and allies about “what exactly adult education is and does.” We do that through student ambassadors telling their stories; inviting policymakers into classes and to events; press coverage; rallies; community events; and currently through a revamped, stronger social media presence. It’s important that they know who we are and what adult education does BEFORE there is a crisis.

**Cultivating champions.** AALL dedicated funding to pay for student ambassadors to travel to the state Capitol to visit with legislators, as well as participate in COABE’s face-to-face Capitol Hill Days for several years. Policymakers at the local, state, and national level get visits every single year ... in good times or bad. AALL also meets with legislators and keeps college government relations staff up-to-date on any issues so they can also advocate for the field.

**Leveraging Volunteer Boards.** The AALL Awareness Committee leads communication and mobilization efforts for the state. It also works to activate the AALL Board and AALL membership to meet with and secure support from legislators. The AALL Board and Awareness Committee have the freedom to do advocacy work on their own time, separate from their day jobs which may prevent this sort of work. Pima Community College staff have been active leaders on the Awareness Committee for a long time and have led the efforts to implement and expand Ambassador Training. Mobilization requires leadership, preferably one person, to lead the planning and implementation efforts. AALL also dedicates funds to help programs learn from each other and conduct ambassador training in their programs (<https://aafll.wildapricot.org/Awareness-Funding>). The Awareness Committee communicated with policymakers and the field for three and a half years to restore full funding in 2013. Members also testified at several legislative caucus and committee meetings to ensure they knew of Arizona program successes.

**Highlighting Student Ambassadors.** AALL values student voices by dedicating association dollars to fund Ambassador Training. It is critical that student voices are included in advocacy plans. AALL ensures this by taking students on visits, sharing student stories with the press and social media, and developing student digital stories. For example, COABE’s 2018 Adult Learner of the Year, Ana Chavarin, has spoken at many events over the years, advocating directly with legislators on behalf of adult education. She is now a university student and organizer for Pima County Interfaith Council. [https://tucson.com/news/local/netos-tucson-ana-chavarin-is-a-single-mom-an-immigrant-and-a-success/article\\_dfb8ebaa-4411-55ec-9eae-a46437aobo5b.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/netos-tucson-ana-chavarin-is-a-single-mom-an-immigrant-and-a-success/article_dfb8ebaa-4411-55ec-9eae-a46437aobo5b.html)

**Going Forward**

AALL purchased the COABE “Educate and Elevate” state add-on app to allow for customized, state-directed, online email campaigns. This was motivated by this year’s funding cycle and threatening vendor bills. It has also been leveraged to contact the governor and state legislators about the need for additional resources during the pandemic and for maintaining funding. The AALL Awareness Committee is working on advocacy readiness by:

- collecting student stories and sharing them on social media (and holding on to them to share with elected officials at a future date),
- identifying an awareness committee liaison at each adult education program in the state,
- encouraging program liaisons to raise awareness now within their local programs and local communities about what adult education is doing during the pandemic and what our students’ needs are,
- staying on top of potential alternative vendor bills that could siphon adult education funds from state programs, and
- planning more Ambassador Training when it’s safe to do so.



## Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association (IACEA) and the Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (CCLC) Advocacy Initiatives and Successes



IACEA is the adult education state association in Illinois. IACEA provides leadership, representation, and advocacy for adult education and literacy practitioners in order to advance, unify, and professionalize the field. IACEA members represent all facets of the field including public schools, community extensions and evening colleges, corrections, health, community and social welfare agencies, university continuing and extension education, business, arts and religion, media, libraries, and many more.<sup>36</sup> During the Illinois budget impasse spanning from 2015 – 2018, IACEA saved and helped restore full funding for adult education by advocating to end the impasse and include adult education in stopgap funding measures.



The Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (now called [scaleLIT](#)) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that helps Chicago's adult education organizations secure resources and training so that underserved adult learners can become economically successful. CCLC is a nonprofit organization that works with more than 40 member organizations in different capacities annually (such as pass-through grants, research, advocacy, professional development, and in an advisory capacity). Members include Illinois Community College Board grantees, Secretary of State Adult Volunteer Literacy grantees, and workforce development organizations. CCLC led the charge to secure a state budget by facilitating advocacy trainings, leading rallies, and organizing trips to Springfield, the state capitol.

### The Illinois Budget Impasse

During the [Illinois Budget Impasse](#), the state of Illinois faced a 793-day budget crisis. From July 1, 2015, to August 31, 2017, Illinois was without a complete state budget for fiscal years 2016, 2017, and part of 2018. As a result, many state agencies had to cut services or continue borrowing to operate. This meant that adult education programs were [subject to cuts and layoffs](#) as Illinois continued to run without a complete budget. Support services for adult learners were cut, also causing participation to drop by 20 percent in 2016.<sup>37</sup> During the impasse, IACEA and CCLC mobilized ultimately thousands of adult literacy advocates at rallies in Springfield and Chicago, asking legislators to end the impasse and include adult education funding in stopgap measures.

### **Key Factors that Led to Success**

IACEA organized letter writing campaigns to all adult education organizations throughout the state and CCLC conducted more campaigns in Chicago. By advocating the old-fashioned way, advocates looked up legislators' contact information and organizations created their own letter templates for adult learners to use. Advocates statewide then called, emailed, and snail-mailed letters to aldermen, state representatives, state senators, the governor, and more.

### **Additional Advocacy Strategies**

**Annual Legislative Awareness Days:** Each year, IACEA hosts an annual Legislative Awareness Day, which is an opportunity for students from programs statewide to visit the capital and discuss the difference adult education is making in their lives. Prior to Legislative Awareness Day, adult learners study civics and advocacy to prepare them to see government in action. Students and staff learn where their legislators' offices are located and many talk with them in person.

Additionally, the CCLC engages its membership through emails, social media, funding, and other resource allocations and in-person meetings. Members meet in various groups (North Side Literacy Coalition, South and West Side Literacy Coalition, Hispanic Literacy Coalition, CCLC meetings, and IACEA conferences) on a regular basis. CCLC also hosts an annual adult education rally and an annual Night of 1,000 Stars event that showcases learners' stories and successes.

### **Going Forward**

IACEA had to cancel Legislative Day 2020, originally scheduled for March 25. Programs are concentrating on reaching out to adult learners and teaching classes through social media and Zoom meetings.

However, CCLC had been inviting legislators to join their biweekly meetings (conducted via Zoom during the pandemic) through the North Side and South and West Side Literacy Coalition groups. At these meetings, coalition members discuss not only literacy issues but other issues affecting the neighborhoods and their residents.

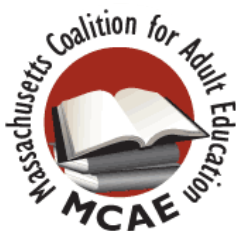
IACEA and CCLC will use the PIAAC state and county estimates to show the local need for adult education and to augment the statistics they currently use. Through trainings, they will help members understand and use the data as well as circulate the findings among CCLC funders.

### Advocating for Improved Broadband and High Speed Internet Access

CCLC has recently expanded its work by advocating to eliminate the digital divide.

Adult learners rely on the internet for distance learning, as well as critical information about employment, healthcare services, government programs, and news about issues affecting their daily lives. The internet is a powerful tool for communicating with friends and loved ones, sharing vital information, and connecting with others to mobilize for justice and rights. Adult learners can engage more with their community through the internet, whether through apps on their phones or through government websites. However, many struggle to access reliable high-speed internet and they lack the skills needed to effectively navigate the web. CCLC believes that this divide is a major hurdle in the fight for adult education and literacy, especially in a COVID-19 world.

As such, CCLC has been intensifying new advocacy initiatives in Chicago by advocating with the mayor's office to improve broadband quality and access. And by seeking allies and organizing community members who want to advance digital inclusion in their hometown, CCLC joins a larger battle to close the digital divide throughout Illinois.



### Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE)

<http://www.mcae.net/>

The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) champions the right of all adults to acquire 21st century literacy, English language, and numeracy skills leading to economic prosperity, strong families, and vibrant communities. MCAE provides leadership, professional development, communication, and advocacy to advance quality adult basic education.

### MCAE's Recent Advocacy Successes

For more than two decades, MCAE has worked to secure additional state funding for ABE programs and promote public policies that will lead to high-quality educational services, improved working conditions for program staff, and enhanced quality of life for adult learners and their families. As a result of our work, the FY2020 state appropriation for the ABE line item was \$41.05 million—a 23% increase over FY2019.

MCAE's success is built on building sustaining long-term relationships with state legislative champions through persistent outreach and networking by MCAE leadership as well as mobilizing our members through action alerts and opportunities for action by phone, email, and in person throughout the state budget season.

### **MCAE’s Advocacy Network**

MCAE’s state advocacy work is led by MCAE’s Director and Public Policy Co-Chairs, one of whom is the Board Chair. The MCAE Public Policy Committee includes ABE program representatives and other ABE experts who collectively recommend the annual policy agenda for endorsement to the Board and support MCAE’s advocacy efforts.

### **How MCAE’s Advocacy “Works”**

The MCAE network is made up primarily of ABE program directors, staff, teachers, and volunteers, as well as experts and other stakeholders. MCAE engages the network during state budget season through email action alerts to provide updates and mobilize call-ins and other forms of contact at key points during the state budget process. MCAE also supports members in hosting legislator visits to programs, and provides an advocacy toolkit for members to conduct visits to legislative offices with their students. MCAE also provides public policy workshops during NETWORK, its annual conference, to help keep advocates engaged.

### **How MCAE Educates Supporters and Grows Its Advocacy Network**

MCAE currently distributes advocacy alerts and news to more than 3,000 members and constituents, and mobilizes our membership to take various actions throughout the legislative process. MCAE also leads professional development for ABE through its annual conference, NETWORK, the largest adult education conference in New England with over 500 attendees each year. During the conference, members have opportunities to learn more about the legislative process and the current legislative agenda for ABE, how to advocate, and what tools and support MCAE can provide. MCAE urges all ABE program directors to share alerts with their staff, volunteers, and students and to mobilize them as directed by the alert.

### **MCAE’s Advocacy Partners**

MCAE partners with several coalitions in Massachusetts that are also focused on supporting on the immigrant, ESOL, and low-income populations served by ABE programs, and on increasing funding for education, job training, and basic services for vulnerable populations. These partners include the MIRA Coalition (immigrant and refugee rights), Raise Up Massachusetts (\$15 minimum wage, Paid Family and Medical Leave, Millionaire’s Tax), and the Massachusetts Community Action Network working with Raise Up.

### **How Advocating During COVID-19 May Change Message and Strategies**

Our advocacy approach is still shifting. We have continued to meet with some lawmakers and their staff via phone, and to share our materials via email. However, the budget timeline for Massachusetts has been held up due to the pandemic, and we are waiting for lawmakers to set a new timeline and milestones for the budget process which typically guide our outreach and process. In the meantime, we are maintaining our ask for this year, knowing that the state budget priorities will be tighter than ever, but also knowing that adult basic education remains a key driver of future economic growth. We believe this investment from the state is more important than ever during these challenging times.

### **Top Priorities for Using the PIAAC Synthetic Data**

Our top priority for using the new PIAAC data will be to map results to legislative districts as best we can, in order to better demonstrate to state lawmakers the need for programming in their communities. We will also compare Massachusetts to other states/national picture in order to demonstrate where the investment made by Massachusetts is paying off, and where we still have work to do.

We have been working to map programs to legislative districts, and to build up stories of program success in specific districts. These data will help us round out those presentations so lawmakers have many ways to connect to the work on the ground and the need/impact in their own community. Additionally, the statewide data picture will help us bolster the argument for the continued overall investment in ABE in the state budget.

### **Cultivating Champions**

MCAE regularly connects with lawmakers from across the Commonwealth, as there are ABE programs in every region of the state. We are continually building up our roster of champions so that at budget time, we can ensure that the ABE line item is presented as a top priority when individual legislators speak to legislative leaders. We continue to reach out to a variety of policy makers and influencers with documentation that ABE has an impact on the policy arenas that concern them: the economy, poverty, health outcomes, incarceration and recidivism, and a child's success in school. We also seek to reach more members of the business community who directly benefit from the pipeline of job seekers coming from ABE programs and skill development programs, in order to secure new support and investments from these stakeholders.

### Gauging Success

Every year our success is measured by continued investment in ABE through the state budget line item. In recent years we have succeeded in growing the amount of funding secured for the ABE line item. This year holds a lot of unknowns in terms of how state lawmakers will prioritize funding programs outside of the pandemic response. If we are able to maintain current funding levels and maintain the commitment to ABE from our top champions, we will feel successful. MCAE will also try new strategies to engage members this year without our annual conference, which was cancelled due to the pandemic, and these new data provide another way for us to talk with our members about their ABE work and help them illustrate the need in their own communities.



New York City Coalition  
for Adult Literacy



Literacy Assistance Center

### New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) and the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC)

#### Advocacy Successes

The New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) is a citywide coalition of adult literacy teachers, managers, students, and allies from community-based organizations, City University of New York colleges, and library programs across NYC. Its broad-based membership includes representatives from advocacy organizations and immigrant rights organizations. NYCCAL advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for the 2.2 million adults in NYC who need them. In 2016, NYCCAL was able to secure a nearly five-fold increase in city funding (from \$3.5M to \$15.5M) and has been able to maintain this funding every year since.

The Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) is a not-for-profit capacity building organization whose mission is to strengthen and expand the adult education system, and to advance adult literacy as a core value in our society and a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. The LAC is a core member of NYCCAL and has taken a lead role in the fight for funding each year.

#### Factors That Led to Success

Key factors that were integral to NYCCAL's success:

**Framing adult literacy advocacy within the larger context of immigrant access, immigrant integration, and immigrant justice agendas.** Framing it in this way allowed NYCCAL to ally with prominent immigrant rights organizations in NYC. They made the case that expansion of ESOL classes is a social justice issue in a “sanctuary city,” a city that claims to be committed to safety and opportunity for all immigrants. Making this case was central to their success because it resonated closely with council members and grassroots community organizations within the city.

**Cultivating champions and grassroots activism.** In 2014, after the election of a new city council, NYCCAL found a champion for whom this message resonated: the council's first Mexican American member, Carlos Menchaca. For Menchaca, the issue was both personal and fundamentally a matter of social justice.

As a result of this framing, having a champion on the council, and significant grassroots activism, NYCCAL has been able to secure and maintain this nearly fivefold increase in city funding for adult literacy services.

### **Investing in Quality**

During NYCCAL's campaign in 2016, two questions that city officials, policy makers, and funders asked were: What are the defining features of a quality adult literacy program and what does it cost to run one?

The LAC serves as the principal technical assistance provider to city-funded community-based adult literacy programs, and from late 2016 through 2017, the LAC engaged in an initiative to answer these two questions. In December 2017, the LAC published [Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders](#). The goal was to create a common framework that could be used to guide adult literacy program design and development and to inform policy decisions and capacity building initiatives. Investing in Quality details 14 “Building Blocks” of a comprehensive, community-based adult literacy program, identifies the resources needed to fully implement the Building Blocks, and includes a first-of-its-kind cost model and sample budget. The report concluded what adult education program directors already know but the rest of the world does not seem to understand: it is expensive!

### **Going Forward**

NYCCAL now considers the \$12M increase as base funding and will continue to fight for it every year; otherwise over 8,000 students will no longer be served. NYCCAL is also using the Investing in Quality report to advocate for a significant increase in per-student funding so that programs can fully implement the Building Blocks outlined in the report.

In addition, the LAC recently launched the Literacy & Justice Initiative to align adult literacy education with wider movements for racial, social, and economic justice; and to assemble a broader coalition to expand educational opportunities for the 2.2M adults in NYC without a high school diploma and/or English language proficiency. For more information, visit [www.literacyjustice.org](http://www.literacyjustice.org).





## The Literacy Cooperative (TLC), Cleveland, Ohio

### Social Media Advocacy Successes

Since 2014, [The Literacy Cooperative](#) has used social media platforms to raise awareness of issues on adult education, low literacy, career pathways, two-generational programming, and policy advocacy and action.

Prior to then, the organization worked primarily behind the scenes and no one beyond their partners knew much about them. In late 2013, the PIAAC report was issued and they really thought that people's opinions about the importance of literacy would become strong. However, there was barely a mention in the media. So, TLC made the decision to be a stronger voice. By 2016, they had 2,300 followers on Twitter (@literacycoop) and 500+ on Facebook (facebook.com/literacycoop). Now they have well over 3,000 total followers on Twitter and over a thousand on Facebook. They also post through LinkedIn, Instagram, and have separate Facebook pages for special initiatives. They utilize these platforms to promote TLC events, spread awareness about literacy initiatives and resources, and educate government officials and local leaders to advocate for change. The Literacy Cooperative partnered with literacy advocates, many with large followings, who became their champions.

### Key Factors that Led to Success

Here is what they believe were keys to their success on social media:

- Social media gets media attention!
- Community partners are key!
- Recruit partners by promoting their work!
- Connect with local, state, and national coalitions to bring power to your advocacy!
- Community champions are a necessity!
- Parents make great partners!

### Tips for Using Social Media

**Social media is the best grassroots campaign.** Posting regularly and tuning in to what your audience wants to see is crucial to amplify your mission and make sure media and individuals know what makes you so important.

Social media, when used correctly, is a great tool to connect with organizations and individuals. It is a way to get yourself on the map and strengthen your reach. Pew Research Center reports that 7 out of 10 American adults are currently active on social media. Almost all adults between the ages of 18-49 use social media. 70% of people ages 50-64 use social media. And 40% of those 65+ use social media to connect and learn as well. The most-used platform of all time is Facebook, which 69% of adults use.<sup>38</sup>

Social media users are often on these platforms every day. Many others are at least weekly users. There is outstanding potential to spread awareness of issues and bring attention to causes, as well as to petition individuals and politicians to take action.

More data from that study can be found here:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>

### **Twitter Specifics: Use to Engage One-on-one With Individual Users**

- Utilize as much as possible of the 240-character limit on Twitter. Make sure to include hashtags and @ people and partners within your network to increase visibility.
  - TAG PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS: Be sure to tag any elected officials you are trying to communicate with.
- On Twitter, there is an option to add a “thread,” which means you can link one tweet to another when you post.
  - Just click the + button when you are creating a tweet. Or, reply to your own tweet with a related comment to ensure the two are seen together. This gets around the character maximum.
  - Note: Use one of these tweets to tag any additional individuals or organizations.

### **Facebook Specifics: Use to Promote Your Brand as an Organization**

- Make sure your page is registered as a business page, not a personal profile.
  - Ensure your “about” section is fully filled out and optimized. This is what people will see first or during previews.
  - Your “about” section should be succinct and interesting.
- Facebook Live videos are a great way to engage viewers. The Literacy Cooperative uses these for Imagination Library families. Viewers can tune in live and ask questions, and the video can remain on your page for everyone else to watch later.

### **General Social Media Tips:**

- With all accounts, **follow your organization with your personal profile.** Share items on your personal account. That is automatic and easy engagement, and it strengthens your reach.

- **Get Noticed:**

- Change your profile picture to reflect the event, cause, or hashtag that you are promoting. For example, if we wanted to run a statewide campaign about adult education, we could create a graphic with the hashtag #AdultEdOhio (or include your state, organization, or community) and include that in every post we make about the subject.
- When hashtags are published at a higher rate, they have the possibility of “trending” on Twitter. This means your hashtag will show up on a lot of users’ home pages.
  - At The Literacy Cooperative’s [2019 Teacher Academy](#), TLC was able to trend as high as #3 in the Cleveland area by encouraging participants to post on social media using their hashtags.
  - **Add images to your post** to make people see it more easily. It can be the simple graphic stated above or something similar, a stock photo, or even a photo from the article/website you are sharing, if applicable and with credit.
- [Canva](#) is a free, online resource that makes it very easy to create graphics. Sign up—it is very user-friendly and easy to learn.

- **Connect:**

- Engage with the people who respond to you—favorite, like, or comment on their posts. Other viewers will be more likely to want to speak with you if they know you will respond.
- Be proactive, too, in seeking out opportunities to engage with other users and organizations online. This can make your organization show up on many more pages, as well as build a rapport with the accounts you engage with.

- **Track Results:**

- Learn the basics of **social media analytics**. Facebook and Twitter both have an insights tab where you can keep track of how individual posts perform, as well as traffic to your page. For more complex tracking, you can also download a report.

- **Manage Platforms:**

- Sign up for a free social media management system, like [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#). Both free versions allow three different profiles on one screen. Schedule posts to go live without having to manually hit publish. We prefer to schedule posts as soon as we see opportunities, either for later the same day or during the next week.
- Note: This is another great way to **promote events**. You can schedule event promotion posts out even months in advance to keep a regular schedule of posting.

To stay up-to-date with The Literacy Cooperative, please follow them on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#). @Literacycoop on all platforms.

## Appendix B: Adapting PIAAC Synthetic Data Locally— The Literacy Cooperative

### Announcing Updated Adult Literacy Data From NCES

#### The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently released the PIAAC Skills Map: State and County Indicators of Adult Literacy and Numeracy. The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) is a cyclical, large-scale study that was developed under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The assessment focuses on workplace skills needed for successful participation in 21st-century society and the global economy.

This survey replaced the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) that was published in 2003. The NAAL's survey measured adults' literacy performance and estimated the percentage of adults lacking basic prose literacy skills. Prose literacy skills are the skills and knowledge necessary to perform tasks like reading the newspaper, general instructions, or directions. The Literacy Cooperative used the NAAL data to publish the number of adults reading below an eighth grade level in our area. Since the two surveys are measuring skills differently, the PIAAC information doesn't equate to a grade level of literacy as did NAAL.

The following infographic gives a brief overview of how PIAAC reports the levels of literacy and numeracy. It compares the levels of literacy by county, state, and the nation. It is important to note that Cuyahoga County is equal to the state and nation at the highest levels of literacy and numeracy. It is also important to note that we have opportunity for improvement to engage more adults in advancing their literacy levels to be at the proficient level. The Literacy Cooperative is working with others including ProLiteracy and the Center for Community Solutions to do a deeper dive into this survey and hope to match the literacy and numeracy levels to occupations along career pathways. Our goal is to have the information ready this fall to present in a virtual session.

We will use this data to continue to promote the use of [contextualized curriculum](#) for literacy advancement and connection to career pathways and in-demand occupations. We will advocate for policy and funding for better connection of adult education and workforce development programming to address the needs of adults below proficiency. We will continue to focus on advancing literacy through our [2Gen Community Call to Action](#).

## Literacy and Numeracy in Cuyahoga County

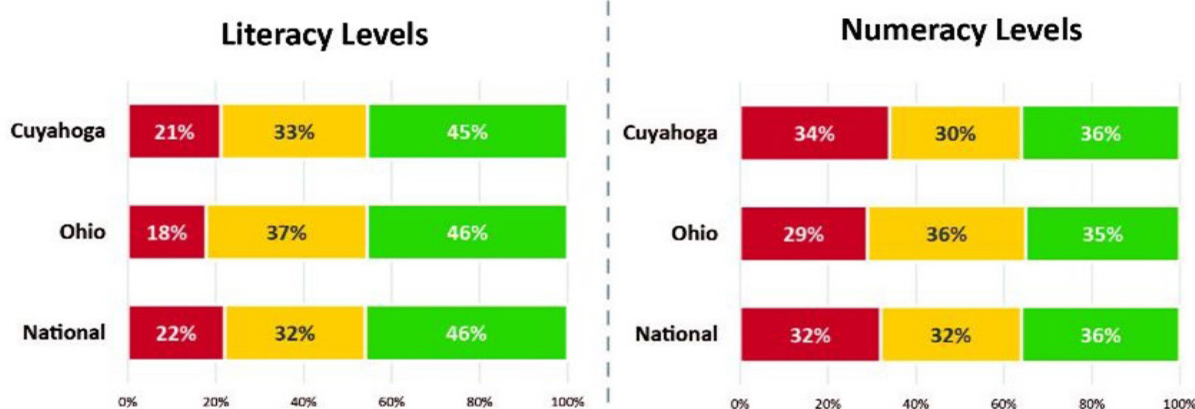
### Data Snapshot



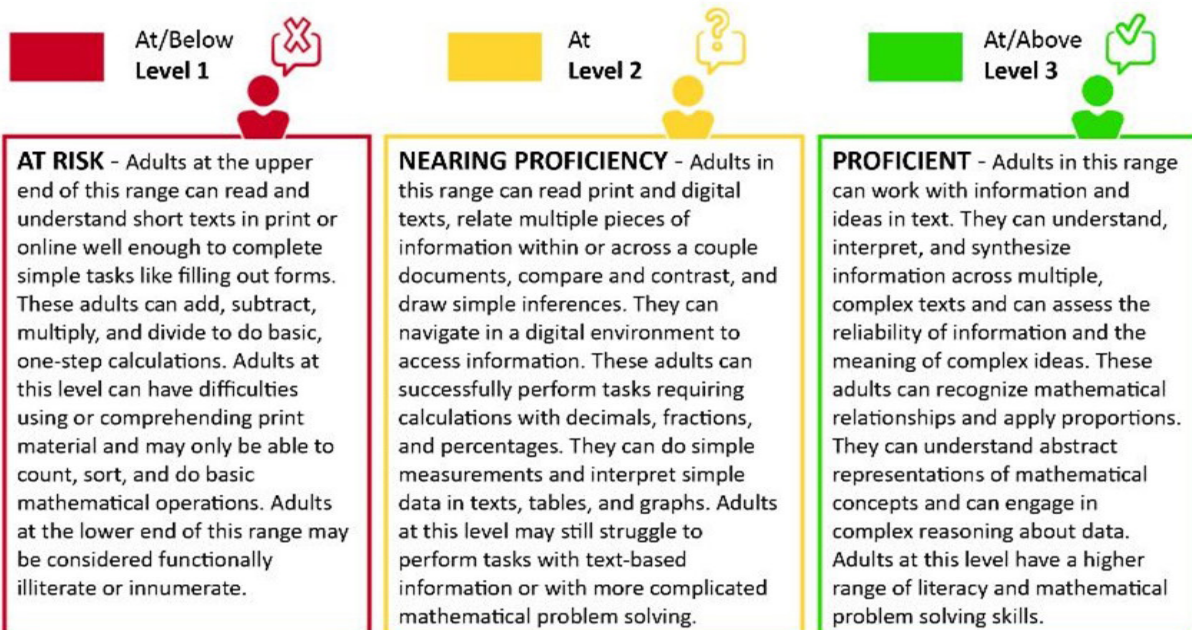
More than half of adults in Cuyahoga County are **less than proficient** in literacy and/or numeracy.



### How does Cuyahoga County Compare?



Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.



The applicability of these levels to any specific occupation is based upon the skill levels required for that occupation and anyone using these scores for occupational coaching should carefully consider the competencies outlined at each level compared to those articulated for the job.

Source: U.S. PIAAC Skills Map, estimates rely on data from 2012, 2014, and 2017 ; data analysis and compilation by The Center for Community Solutions

## Appendix C: Find Your State Association

- **Alabama Association for Public and Continuing Adult Education**  
<https://www.alapcae.com/>
- **Alaska Adult Education Association**  
<https://www.alaskaadulted.org/>
- **Arizona Association for Lifelong Learning**  
<https://aafll.wildapricot.org/>
- **Arkansas Association for Continuing Adult Education**  
<https://www.facebook.com/Arkansas-Association-of-Continuing-and-Adult-Education-136663163052807/>
- **Arkansas Literacy Councils**  
<https://www.arkansasliteracy.org/>
- **California Council for Adult Education**  
<https://www.ccaestate.org/>
- **California Adult Education Administrators Association**  
<http://www.caeaa.org/>
- **Colorado Adult Education Professional Association**  
<https://caepa.net/>
- **Connecticut Association for Adult & Continuing Education**  
<https://caace.org/>
- **Delaware Association for Adult & Community Education**  
<http://www.daace.org/>
- **Adult and Community Educators of Florida**  
<http://aceofflorida.org/>
- **Florida Literacy Coalition**  
<https://floridaliteracy.org/>
- **Georgia Adult Education Association**  
<https://georgiaadultedu.wordpress.com/>
- **Georgia Adult Literacy Advocates**  
<https://www.facebook.com/gaadultlit/>

- **Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association**  
<https://www.iacea.net/>
- **Indiana Association for Adult & Continuing Education**  
<https://iaace.com/>
- **Kansas Adult Education Association**  
<https://www.kansasadulthoodeducation.com/>
- **Louisiana Association for Public, Community, & Adult Education**  
<https://lapcae.coabe.org/>
- **Maine Adult Education Association**  
<https://maineadulted.org/>
- **Maryland Association for Adult Community and Continuing Education**  
<https://www.maaccemd.org/>
- **Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education**  
<http://www.mcae.net/>
- **Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education**  
<https://macae.org/>
- **Minnesota Literacy Action Network**  
<http://literacyactionnetwork.org/>
- **Mississippi Association of Adult and Community Education**  
<https://www.maace.org/>
- **Missouri Association for Adult Continuing and Community Education**  
<https://maacce.org/>
- **Nevada Adult Educators**  
<http://www.nvadulthooded.org/>
- **New Hampshire Adult Education Directors' Alliance**  
<https://sites.google.com/view/nhaeda/home>
- **New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning**  
<https://www.njall.org/>
- **New Mexico Adult Education Association**  
<https://www.nmadulthooded.org/>



- **New York Association for Continuing and Community Education**  
<https://www.nyacce.org/>
- **North Carolina Community College Adult Educators Association**  
<https://www.ncccaea.org/>
- **North Dakota Association for Lifelong Learning**  
<https://www.ndall.info/>
- **Ohio Association for Adult and Continuing Education**  
<http://www.oaace.org/>
- **Pennsylvania Association for Adult and Continuing Education**  
<https://paacesite.org/>
- **South Carolina Association for Adult and Continuing Education**  
<https://www.facebook.com/SCAACE/>
- **South Dakota Association for Lifelong Learning**  
<http://sdall.org/>
- **Texas Association for Literacy and Adult Education**  
<https://www.talae.org/>
- **Literacy Texas**  
<https://literacytexas.org/>
- **Utah Association for Adult, Community, and Continuing Education**  
<https://www.uaacce.org/>
- **Virginia Association for Adult and Continuing Education**  
<https://vaace.org/>
- **West Virginia Adult Education Association**  
<http://www.wvaeainc.org/>
- **Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.**  
<https://wisconsinliteracy.org/>
- **Wyoming Lifelong Learning Association**  
<http://wylla.org>

## Appendix D: What You Can Legally Do

According to the National Council of Nonprofits, less than 3 percent of nonprofits lobby to advance their missions—even though 100 percent have the legal right to do so.<sup>39</sup> Three key principles below will help you understand what you can do as an adult literacy advocate. This does not constitute legal advice. If you are uncertain, always consult your organization’s attorney about lobbying.

### Principle 1: Advocating Vs. Lobbying

#### Advocacy:

Includes identifying, embracing, and promoting a cause; any attempt to shape public opinion, and promote the interests of your community.

—*The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations*

#### Lobbying:

A specific, legally defined activity that involves stating your position on specific legislation to legislators and/or asking them to support your position.

—*Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (CLPI)*

**Lobbying is  
always advocacy.  
Advocacy isn’t  
always lobbying.**

*Gear Up For Capitol Hill, ProLiteracy*

ADVOCATING	LOBBYING	
	Direct	Grassroots
Identifying, embracing, and promoting a cause	Requesting legislators to take action on specific legislation	Urging others to contact their legislator requesting action on specific legislation

Principle 2: Educating Versus Lobbying

If you are communicating the issues by informing legislators of your program successes, along with the need and demand for services, then you are educating your legislators on the issues.

If you are combining that information with a request for action on specific legislation, whether for legislative language or funding, (the issues plus the ask), then you are lobbying.

For example, a legislator asks what you want. Here are two possible responses.

One is educating, one is lobbying:

Educating:

“If we had \$2 million in additional funds, we could serve more adults who will be more productive citizens and contribute more to the economy.”

Lobbying:

“Will you vote for an increase in \$2 million in appropriations for adult education?”

If your role prohibits lobbying, you can educate your legislator. As an adult literacy advocate, become the expert—the resource person—for your legislator on adult literacy in your community.

EDUCATING Communicating the Issues	LOBBYING The Issues + “The Ask”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Success</li><li>• Need for service</li><li>• Demand for service</li><li>• Personal experience</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Success</li><li>• Need for service</li><li>• Demand for service</li><li>• Personal experiences</li><li>• Specific legislative language</li><li>• Request for money</li></ul>

*Gear Up for Capital Hill, ProLiteracy*

## Principle 3: What You Can Legally Do

### Public Employees

As a U.S. citizen, you can voice your concerns. Just do not lobby using program resources:

- no program phones or faxes,
- no program computers to email lobbying requests,
- no federal- or state-funded discussion lists,
- no office paper, printers, or stamps, and
- no lobbying during paid work time.
- Do not lobby from work. You should speak as an individual, from someplace other than work when you are lobbying. It is unlawful to lobby using public funds.

Do speak from your role when you are educating your legislator about your program. Your expertise and experience with adult literacy lends credibility to your report.

### Nonprofits

**Lobbying and nonpartisan voter engagement are not only legal for charitable nonprofits, they are essential if you want to achieve significant change.**

—*Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest*

You CAN lobby! However, 501(c)(3) may not engage in “substantial lobbying.” The IRS has never clearly defined this term. You have two options.

1. File for coverage under the 1976 Lobby Law:
  - File IRS Form 5768 (H Form) to elect coverage under the lobbying law
  - Is your budget is less than \$500,000?
    - 20% can be spent on direct lobbying
    - 5% can be spent on grassroots lobbying
  - Track and report lobbying expenses separately
  - Preparing for lobbying counts towards the total
2. Elect not to be covered by the 1976 Lobby Law:
  - If you do not elect coverage under the 1976 Lobby Law, the IRS will apply the “substantial lobbying test” and will determine on a case-by-case basis how much lobbying is “acceptable” for your organization. This may make you vulnerable in the event of an IRS audit.

## Appendix E: Virtual Meeting Checklist

### Before:

- Identify meeting purpose, with whom you should meet, and within what time frame.
- Identify the lead and who will attend.
- Schedule the meeting 2-4 weeks in advance and confirm. Have a constituent make the meeting request. The meeting request should include:
  - Subject of meeting
  - Requested time frame
  - Participants and their roles or titles
- Choose your technology.
  - Be flexible as to your legislator's meeting preferences (some may want a conference call instead of Google Hangouts or Zoom, for example).
  - Make sure everyone involved has the meeting connectivity information.
  - If using video conferencing, follow up with the link two days prior.
  - Resend the link the morning of the meeting, as a reminder, along with a list of who is attending and their titles
- Do your homework:
  - Familiarize yourself with briefing materials.
  - Learn about the legislator's background and policy priorities.
- Gather and prepare your team.
- Prepare adult learners for the meeting.
- Practice with the audio or video conferencing tool you will be using for the meeting. Review audio or video conferencing etiquette.

### During:

- Be early. Login early to check in with one another. (This replaces the impromptu checking in you do when walking to your meeting and ensures everyone's technology is working correctly.)
- Do NOT set the meeting to record. Most legislators are not comfortable being recorded and you want to set a positive, relaxed tone for your meeting.

- Conduct the Meeting:
  - Keep the meeting brief but impactful—expect 20 minutes total and leave time for Q and A.
  - Make introductions, and thank them for their leadership and continued work during the crisis.
  - Share the hook, messaging, and ask of your advocacy organization or organizations.
- Have learners share their stories for 2-3 minutes (why they're in AE and what it is doing for them).
- Stay on topic. Listen carefully, hear feedback from the decision maker and/or staff.
- If they ask questions to which you do not know the answer, let them know you will follow up with it, then do so.
- Keep politics out of it. Do not argue.
  - Leave behind a 1-2 page summary or fact sheet or share it electronically.  
(See [ProLiteracy's Customizable Impact Report Template](#).)

**After:**

- Follow up with a thank you. Include answers to questions they raised.
- Post to social media and like/respond to posts of your team members to increase reach and engagement. Share with your advocacy association.
- Follow up with the legislator's office a few days or a week later to find out the legislator's position and next steps, if needed.

## Appendix F: Social Media Week NYCCAL

### #SaveAdultLit Advocacy Week of May 18

Instead of our social media Friday this week, we'd love students, teachers, and providers to submit videos to accompany the testimony before our **Thursday, 5/21's NYC Council Hearing on Immigration**, (Remote Hearing scheduled for 9:30-11:00am).

#### Key points to hit in the 1-minute video:

- Why is your adult literacy program (HSE, ABE, or ESOL English classes) important to you?
- We want **\$12 million to be included in the city budget** to restore Adult Literacy funding for FY2021 so that our adult learners do not lose access to these critical programs.
- Upload videos to this [Google Photo Album](https://photos.app.goo.gl/rxxooQzeLXVoU4KM7) (<https://photos.app.goo.gl/rxxooQzeLXVoU4KM7>).

If your students are able to, tweet your videos at City Council (instructions included at the bottom of this email). Otherwise, teachers and providers can tweet on their behalf.

Instructions for students to prepare and record video (thank you to Jeff of CPC for sharing the guide & Chinese translations!). Edit the instructions to you see fit your program and students:

1. Write one paragraph about yourself and your English studies. Try to give specific examples (for example, instead of “better job,” write what kind of job you want in the future)  
. 写一段关于你和你的英文学习。试一下写详细的例子，比如不知写更好的工作，写你将来想要什么养的工作)。  
Escriba un párrafo sobre usted mismo y sus estudios de inglés. Trate de dar ejemplos específicos (por ejemplo, en lugar de “un mejor trabajo,” escriba que tipo de trabajo quiere en el futuro).
2. Send your paragraph to your teacher. Your teacher will help you make your writing clearer.  
把写好的一段发给你的老师，你的老师会帮你修改，想法表达得很清楚。  
Envíe su párrafo a su profesor. Su maestro le ayudará a hacer su escrito más entendible.
3. Make a short video (up to 1 minute). Read your paragraph.  
做一个短的视频（1分钟一下），读你写的一段。  
Haga un video corto (menos de 1 minuto). Lea su párrafo en voz alta.
4. Send the video: 发视频：Envíe el video:  
Send an email to (designated person who will be [submitting video](#) and/or tweeting)  
发一个电子邮件给 (designated person who will be [submitting video](#) and/or tweeting)  
Envíe un correo a (designated person who will be [submitting video](#) and/or tweeting)



**Script/Example paragraph (例段) (ejemplo):**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am an English student at (organization name). I have been studying English for \_\_\_\_\_months/years. I want to learn English because \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ In the future, I want to\_\_\_\_\_. So, I am asking the government to continue funding adult English programs.

**Twitter Mentions and Sample Tweets****(link to Social Media directions and CM Twitter handles):**

Tag the Mayor (@NYCMayor), Speaker Corey Johnson (@NYCSpeakerCoJo), and [your own Council Members](#) to include \$12 million in funding for adult literacy education, include the hashtags #LiteracyLiftsNYC, #SaveAdultLit, #AtHomeTogether, #AdultEdConnected, #AdultEdAtHomeTogether. Note: 280 Character Limit and personalize your message if you can.

**Students:**

During COVID-19, I'm studying (English/ESOL/HSE/ABE) online at home. There are 2.2 million other NYCers also who need adult education. Please restore \$12m for adult literacy education in the NYC Budget @[YourCityCouncilMember], @NYCMayor, #LiteracyLiftsNYC, @NYCCAL.

**Teachers:**

I teach (English/ESOL/HSE/ABE) online at home. My #AdultEdu students need the support of Adult Literacy Programs in this time of COVID-19 to make sure NYC is prepared and ready to reopen 100%! Support \$12m to #SaveAdultLit, @NYCMayor, @[YourCityCouncilMember], @NYCCAL.

**Providers and all:**

Now more than ever, 2.2 million New Yorkers like me cannot afford to lose the critical lifeline that adult education funding provides. We urge @NYCMayor, @NYCSpeakerCoJo, @[YourCityCouncilMember] to restore \$12m to #SaveAdultLiteracy! #LiteracyLiftsNYC, @NYCCAL.

More than half of NYC #COVID19 frontline workers are immigrants. Give them what they need to continue working safely, and access to essential services and info via education! Support \$12m for Adult Education, @NYCCouncil, @[YourCityCouncilMember]! #LiteracyLiftsNYC, @NYCCAL.

City One-Pager attached for your reference. Happy tweeting!

## Appendix G: Where to Find Grants and Grant Partners

### Finding Grants

Start locally or regionally. Starting small also allows you to hone your grant writing skills and time to build needed partnerships that are often required for larger national or international grants.

### Grant Search Engines

- Candid (<https://candid.org>): Foundation Center and Guide Star have teamed up to form Candid, a nonprofit organization that uses databases of foundations, grants, and nonprofits to connect charities with resources and funding. They also have a variety of newsletters, including a weekly roundup of recently announced Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from private, corporate, and government funding sources.
- Foundation Directory Online (<https://fconline.foundationcenter.org>): A database with powerful search tools from Candid that allows users to seek and apply for grants.
- Subscribe to magazines like Inside Philanthropy (<https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/find-a-grant>) and gain access to GrantFinder. Through GrantFinder, access information on nearly every significant institutional grant maker in the U.S., as well as most top individual donors.
- Subscribe to the Chronical of Philanthropy (<https://www.philanthropy.com/>) and gain access to Grant Station. (<https://grantstation.com/>). Grant Station is a robust set of grant databases that include U.S. and Canadian charitable and government grant makers as well as international funding opportunities.
- Fluxx (<https://grantseeker.fluxx.io/>) Fluxx is a free all-in-one grants management system for not-for-profit organizations.

### Finding Grant Partners

Creating new relationships and advocating with partners is a great way to find new grants, including those that require your program to apply with partners as a part of the grant design.

- If you're not already networking locally, connect by attending Chamber of Commerce meetings, charitable club meetings (Lions, Rotary, etc.), leadership organization meetings, and meetings with like-minded social justice organizations. People in these groups are civic-minded professionals from all walks of life. The more connections you can make, the better.
- Get on the speaking circuit. Give presentations to community organizations, chamber and civic groups, etc. Have a booth at college and community events. Give away something to draw a crowd and always have an ask.
- Be a good knowledge broker or ambassador. What do people care about and where are there gaps in knowledge or collaboration? How can AEL programs fill those gaps? Exchange information and identify funding opportunities. Look for a win-win situation.
- Teach staff at partner organizations about AEL so that they know enough to advocate on your behalf. For example, one of your partners may be a guest on a TV or radio segment and have an opportunity to talk about your program.
- Create an asset map of your community. Asset mapping provides information about the strengths and resources of a community and can help uncover solutions or inform program decisions. What are other social justice organizations in your community? Who is funding them? Once these are inventoried and depicted in a map, you can more easily think about how to build upon these assets to improve adult literacy in your community. While it is a difficult time to create an asset map during a crisis, when deficiencies and service gaps may be revealed, try sketching out the new normal in which these are addressed, knowing that it is subject to change in the short term.

## Appendix H: Tools and Resources

### Data and Facts

- **PIAAC State and County Interactive Map:** <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/>
- **PIAAC Gateway:** <http://piaacgateway.com/>
- **PIAAC Infographics:** <http://piaacgateway.com/infographics>
- **National Center for Education Statistics, PIAAC:** <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/>
- **Sample PIAAC Questions and Questionnaire, OECD:** <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/samplequestionsandquestionnaire.htm>
- **Literacy Gap Map:** <http://map.barbarabush.org/map/>
- **U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts:** <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>
- **Unemployment claims since COVID-19:** <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/economy/unemployment-claims-state-see-how-covid-19-has-destroyed-job-n1183686>

### Media Toolkits

- **ProLiteracy Marketing Toolkit:** <https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/marketing-toolkit/>
- **National Coalition for Literacy, Adult Education and Family Literacy Week:** <https://national-coalition-literacy.org/adult-education-and-family-literacy-week/>

### ProLiteracy Templates

- **Customizable Impact Report - Word Template:** [https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:w/g/personal/losowski\\_proliteracy\\_org/IQClqzG8c8HFTYJiQsptXwPGAZJuihzROQS3W6-5zgbLsvU?e=gH8o39](https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:w/g/personal/losowski_proliteracy_org/IQClqzG8c8HFTYJiQsptXwPGAZJuihzROQS3W6-5zgbLsvU?e=gH8o39)
- **Instructions for Customizing Template** [https://proliteracy.org/Portals/o/pdf/Resources/ProLiteracy-2020\\_04-PIAAC-ImpactReport-instructions.pdf?ver=2020-04-24-140320-040](https://proliteracy.org/Portals/o/pdf/Resources/ProLiteracy-2020_04-PIAAC-ImpactReport-instructions.pdf?ver=2020-04-24-140320-040)
- **Customizable Impact Report - PowerPoint Template** [https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:p/g/personal/losowski\\_proliteracy\\_org/IQDrMCOdl1XYTLymqKSBNRo1AcH\\_bp274Dl91xokFpYxl28?e=jCvE4E](https://proliteracyww-my.sharepoint.com/:p/g/personal/losowski_proliteracy_org/IQDrMCOdl1XYTLymqKSBNRo1AcH_bp274Dl91xokFpYxl28?e=jCvE4E)

### Finding Your Legislators

- **Local - city/town and county officials:** <https://www.usa.gov/local-governments>
- **State:** <https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites>
- **U.S. Representatives:** <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- **U.S. Senators:** [https://www.senate.gov/senators/How\\_to\\_correspond\\_senators.htm](https://www.senate.gov/senators/How_to_correspond_senators.htm)

## Meeting and Organizing Remotely

- **Zoom:** <https://zoom.us/>
- **Google Meet:** <https://meet.google.com/>
- **Gotomeeting:** <https://www.gotomeeting.com/>
- **WhatsApp:** <https://web.whatsapp.com/>
- **freeconferencecall.com:** <https://www.freeconferencecall.com/>
- **Google Drive and Docs:** <https://www.google.com/drive/>
- **Eventbrite.com:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/>

## Making Social Media Look Good and Managing It

- **Canva:** <https://www.canva.com/>
- **Pexels (free, professional stock photos):** <https://www.pexels.com/>
- **Buffer:** <https://buffer.com/>
- **Hootsuite:** <https://hootsuite.com/>

## Advocacy Apps:

- <https://coabe.org/educate-and-elevate/>
- <https://www.dnlonnimedia.com/blog/advocacy-apps-for-nonprofits/>
- <https://www.capterra.com/advocacy-software/>

## Online Petitions

- **iPetition:** <https://www.ipetitions.com/>
- **Change.org:** <https://www.change.org/start-a-petition>

## Crowdfunding Platforms and Donor Relations

- **Five Tested Types of Nonprofit Crowdfunding Platforms:**  
<https://www.donorsearch.net/nonprofit-crowdfunding-platforms/>
- **Relationship Grid (used for brainstorming donor prospects):**
- **Build Strong and Lasting Relationships with First Time Donors:**  
<https://donorbox.org/nonprofit-blog/donor-relationships>

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.iacea.net/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/for-adult-literacy-programs-stop-gap-budget-is-not-an-open-book/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/>