

ActionBrief

Building Adult Basic Skills Education: Getting Access to Funds and Partners

New Skills for Changing Jobs

The workplace is changing. At one time, many workers had one job for their entire work life. Today, few workers can expect to stay with the same employer for the duration of their work life. New technology and global markets are changing work. New skills are often required not only to perform new work processes and succeed in new work systems but also to access training itself.

A worker who has been out of school for many years may need a brush up on reading or math to get the most out of training. Some workers may have dropped out of high school before graduation was a requirement for making a good wage in manufacturing, construction, or other industries. Often, the basic skills that have served workers for years are no longer adequate for the new world of work. In addition, many new immigrants need English language skills to earn family-sustaining wages. For all these reasons and more, basic skills education is an important component of workplace education and training.

Basic skills are more than just reading, writing, and mathematics. Many basic skills programs include communication skills, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages – ESOL (sometimes also known as English as a Second Language – ESL). Reasoning and problem solving are also part of the basics. Many programs include technology skills, such as computer and Internet use, as a component of basic skills training.

Unions and joint labor-management programs have invested hundreds of millions of dollars of negotiated funds in workplace basic



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skills. Their programs are among the best and most comprehensive in the country. Some have successfully leveraged their negotiated funds to help win public funding for basic skills training. In this action brief, we will summarize the major public funding sources for basic skills with suggestions for successful partnerships between the public sector and unions and joint labor-management private-sector programs.

Adult and Basic Skills Funding Accessed Through States

In most cases, both federal and state funds for adult education are accessible through the state.

Getting a Program Started

For more information about how to develop a worker-centered basic skills program, please see *Worker-Centered Learning: A Union Guide to Basic Skills*. This publication of the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute can be obtained by e-mailing a request to info@workingforamerica.org or by calling 202-974-8100.

Adult Education and Literacy Programs

Most U.S. Department of Education funds for adult education and literacy are funneled through the states. The Division of Adult Education and Literacy in the Office of Vocation and Adult Education (OVAE) in the U.S. Department of Education administers the funds. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, is the main funding stream and serves adults who are educationally disadvantaged.

These funds are distributed to states by formula allocations. According to the U.S. Department of Education, basic Grants to States are allocated by a formula based upon the number of adults over age 16 who have not completed high school and who are not enrolled in school. "States distribute funds to local providers through a competitive process based upon state-established funding criteria. Eligible providers of basic skills and literacy programs include: local education agencies (LEAs), community based organizations of demonstrated effectiveness, volunteer literacy organizations of demonstrated effectiveness, institutions of higher education, public or private non-profit agencies, libraries, public housing authorities and institutions that have the ability to provide literacy services to adults and families and consortia of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above."

In addition to the money allocated by the federal government, state and local programs must contribute at least 25 percent of total program cost as matching. Some states choose to contribute the minimum while others contribute more than 100 percent of the federal allocation.

Union-based or labor-management partnerships may be able to access funding for adult basic skills education by partnering with local education agencies, which often are local public school systems, community-based organizations, community colleges, or other agencies that have received grants from the state education agency. If a program has a positive track record, it may be eligible to apply directly to the state for funding.

Special Adult Education Programs

As part of its responsibility under Title II to support basic skills education for adults, each state must serve specific populations and provide specific services that are delineated within the overall program. These include the following:

► **Education for Adults With Limited English Proficiency**

English literacy programs, usually known as ESL (English as a Second Language) or ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) are considered part of Adult Education and Family Literacy, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. These programs are accessible in the same manner as Adult Literacy and Basic Skills – through the states and their funded agencies. As a result of the growth in the immigrant population, in the last few years close to 50 percent of Title II money has been spent on English language instruction.

► **Basic Education for Adults With Disabilities**

In order to be eligible for federal adult education funds, each state must implement educational strategies for adult learners with disabilities. For more information about programs in your state, contact your state director of adult education or local adult education programs.

► **Family Literacy Programs**

Family Literacy Programs “integrate 1) interactive literacy activities between parent and child, 2) training in parenting activities, 3) literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency, 4) age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.” Some programs include employment and pre-employment training and education. The programs vary substantially from state to state. For more information, contact local provider agencies or your state director of adult education.

► **Literacy Education for Older Adults**

Some states offer special programs that address the needs of adults over 60. The states that served significant numbers of older adults in 1997 were: California, Florida, Texas, New York, Hawaii, and South Carolina.

► **Adult Secondary Education Programs**

The following programs provide ways for workers and learners, over 16 and not currently in school, to achieve high school credentials:

General Educational Development (GED) Credential—This credential is the most well-known method for adults to obtain a high school diploma. To earn it, a learner must pass a series of five tests in mathematics, interpreting literature, science, social studies, and writing skills. Each state has a GED administrator who appoints examiners at the local level to administer these tests to learners. GED Hotline: 1 800-62-My GED. Website: www.gedtest.org

Look for Opportunities

Programs should keep a close watch on availability of funds. New systems for applications are developing under the Workforce Investment Act system.

A California example: California has a new application process. The California Department of Education (CDE) and the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN) have teamed up to launch a virtual application process for federal adult education funds. The OTAN Website is: <http://www.otan.dni.us>

National External Diploma Program (NEDP)—The External Diploma requires candidates to demonstrate mastery of at least 65 competencies. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “Adult abilities (in the NEDP) are evaluated against established national performance criteria instead of by comparison with others. The competencies they must demonstrate (to achieve the diploma) parallel those expected of a skilled employee as determined by the Workforce 2000 research, including oral and written communication, computation, and ability to manipulate and analyze data in context.” The NEDP is not available in every state. However, the national program provides technical assistance to those attempting to start new programs. For more information, contact:

NEDP
211 North Carroll St.
Madison, WI 53703
Phone (608) 259-2977
Toll Free (888) 298-6337
Fax (608) 259-2909
Admin@NEDP.org

Carnegie Unit Programs—These programs are designed and organized by local school systems. They require an accumulation of units of credit, which vary from state to state. For more information, contact your state director of adult education.

English Language Instruction and Civics Education

EL/Civics

This program helps immigrant workers learn English and prepare for citizenship. The funds are separate from Title II funds. These grants, totaling \$70 million for FY 2001, are set aside to go directly to the states. The funding formula is as follows: 65 percent to states with the largest numbers of immigrants; 35 percent to states with the largest recent increases in immigrant population. Every state will receive a minimum of \$60,000 for EL/Civics. New census data will determine future state allocations. Contact your state director of adult education for more information about funding in your state.

For updated information, call U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Phone: (202) 205-5451 or go to the Website: www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/ELCIVICS/

Programs from the U.S. Department of Education and Other Agencies

The programs mentioned below have adult education as a permissible use. Each was funded through 2001. Given possible new mandates in the federal budget, the status of funding for these programs should be checked.

To find contact information for your state's director of adult education, see: www.ed.gov/Programs/ERODmap.html

National Institute for Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) is an independent government agency whose major objective is to increase adult literacy. It conducts research, promotes literacy education, and creates networks for adult basic skills and literacy practitioners and researchers. While NIFL does not provide funding for programs, it is a resource for information about programs and best practices. Through list serves on a variety of topics about adult literacy and through its National LINCS Website, it develops networks for communication among people in the field of adult basic skills education. Check its Website for updates on funding opportunities (both public and private), for information on the latest research, publications and instructional materials, and to post job openings for instructors and administrators in your programs.

The National Institute for Literacy
1775 I St., NW, Suite 730
Washington, DC 20006
Phone 202 233-2025
Website: www.nifl.gov

Community Technology Centers

Many Community Technology Centers already are funded around the country. In many cases, these centers can help establish local training programs. If you are interested in finding out if there are centers in your area, you can contact the Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet). If you want assistance starting a center, you can contact U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet)

This network has sites and partners in most states. Some of the centers are looking for partners who can help them bridge the digital divide. By visiting their Website, you can find out about local agencies that may want to work with you to build your capacity to provide technology access and education to workers and their families.

CTCNet states that it "brings together agencies and programs that provide opportunities whereby people of all ages who typically lack access to computers and related technologies can learn to use these technologies in an environment that encourages exploration and discovery and, through this experience, develops personal skills and self-confidence." For more information:

CTCNet
372 Broadway St.
Cambridge, MA 02139
Phone: 617 354-0825
Fax: 617 354-8437
Website: www.ctcnet.org
Contact person: Stephen Ronan at sronan@ctcnet.org

A Community Technology Center Example

In Washington, DC, SEIU Local 82's joint labor-management training and education fund was able to set up a state-of-the-art computer lab to train workers in basic computer skills and provided staff to do the training.

U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education awards grants to develop Community Technology Centers. You may apply directly to OVAE to start a center. For more information, contact:

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
4090 MES
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202
Phone: (202) 205-5451
Fax: (202) 205-8748
Email: ovae@inet.ed.gov
Website: www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/

Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR)

Several government departments have this category of grant available. The Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement offers a variety of small grants that lead to the development of products (such as software) that use computers and other high-tech equipment for teaching and learning basic skills, science and foreign languages. It also addresses the use of this technology to assist the success of the physically disabled to function more easily in society. For information on these grants, see their Website: www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/SBIR/

21st Century Community Learning Centers

This U.S. Department of Education initiative funds programs in rural and inner-city public elementary schools to implement projects that benefit education, health, social services, cultural and recreational needs of the community. It can be used for basic skills, family literacy, and computer literacy programs. All programs must be in partnership with local schools. For more information see the Website: www.ed.gov/21stcccl/

Technology Opportunities Program

This Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration program provides grants to state and local governments and not-for-profit organizations to extend the benefits of advanced telecommunications technologies to all Americans, especially those in inaccessible rural and underserved urban communities. For more information, see their Website: www.ntia.doc.gov/otia/Otia/

The Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning Grant Program

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program is designed specifically to meet the educational and health care requirements of rural America. The purpose of the DLT program is to provide financial assistance to enhance learning and health care opportunities for rural residents. The program asks applicants to define the educational or health care problems that face their communities and determine how federal distance learning or telemedicine assistance can help. For more information, see: www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/dlt/dlt-publications.htm

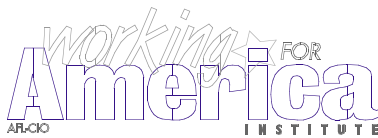
Federal Government Websites

U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration

Basic skills are one of the possible uses for Department of Labor funds. Many of these programs are directed through local One-Stop Centers. Periodically, there are federal funds available. For more information, visit the DOL's Employment and Training Administration Website: www.doleta.gov.

The U.S. Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education provides a number of useful resources on adult and vocational training at this Website: www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/adusite.html



The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute works with unions and their allies to create and retain good jobs and build strong communities through promoting high road economic strategies for individuals, employers and industrial sectors, and public economic and workforce development systems.