

Adult Education and Literacy Network



Together, we provide literacy services to adults across the state of Vermont, so that they can achieve their goals and fully participate in their lives and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of literacy and education to our most vulnerable Vermonters: people of color and people living in poverty and people with disabilities, who together make up the vast majority of our students. The need for literacy and adult education programs leading to career and college readiness is higher than ever. When people have the literacy skills they need, they can pursue further education or careers. They will have a better chance of navigating both the primary and secondary effects of the pandemic. They will also have better health outcomes and more stable employment and housing.

The four Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) service providers are proposing a statewide, coordinated outreach program to ensure that the entire community knows of our available services, to recruit participants who lack a high school diploma or have inadequate basic skills and to continue to provide AEL services at no cost to participants. Our request from the state is to support this effort with an appropriation of \$2.8million for fiscal year 2022.

The first part of the funding (\$1.2million) would support an intensive statewide, targeted outreach campaign to identify and recruit two groups of people:

- Young adults (16-19 years old) who have not succeeded in High School, especially during the COVID pandemic, and who would benefit from our High School Completion Program to get their diploma.
- Adults (age 20 and older) who may or may not have completed high school and have low literacy and may need to build college or career readiness skills in order to achieve their goals during the economic recovery.
- Specifically, this outreach campaign will require hiring outreach workers within each AEL provider service area, as well as a statewide advertising campaign, targeted to the populations we serve.

We estimate that, through our targeted outreach, we will increase our student population by 25-30% throughout the year, creating the requisite funding needs:

- TV, radio, print media (and other) advertising
- Outreach and recruitment salaries and professional development
- Direct student supports and transportation
- Telecommunications equipment and connectivity, computer software and hardware
- Materials for student learning and testing

The second part of the funding (\$1.6million) will support the delivery of AEL services to the influx of students coming into our programs, on the funding formula grant reimbursement basis that we currently work under. This amount is based on a 25% increase in student population in FY22, over FY20 (pre-COVID year).

We believe this student recruitment campaign and the services we will be able to provide to students are a critical component to Vermont's economic recovery from the COVID pandemic. The people we serve are hard to reach and they have high needs. People living in poverty and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) have been more likely to feel the negative effects of "stay home, stay safe" orders. For instance, many working in "essential" positions in grocery and convenience stores earn minimum wage. A fair number of our students fall into these categories. With the closure of schools and no affordable childcare, many have had to quit their sustenance jobs to provide childcare. In doing so, they became ineligible for many Federal CARES Bill benefits. **The Adult Education and Literacy system is poised to be on the frontlines of helping vulnerable Vermonters to better their lives.**

With the high unemployment rates, and rapidly shifting job and career landscape in Vermont, we are already seeing an uptick of new students seeking career and college readiness skill building, and we expect this trend to intensify in upcoming months. **We also believe focusing on the people we serve will be a good complement to the Workforce Development programs being offered through VSC and UVM.**