Investing in Quality: A Blueprint for Adult Literacy Programs and Funders

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills give individuals the power to communicate, make informed choices, access resources and opportunities and, ultimately, transform their lives and the world around them. Literacy is the bedrock of engaged, productive, confident, and connected communities. In New York City – where one out of three adults lack sufficient literacy skills – investment in high-quality adult literacy education is essential to advancing both individual and collective well-being.

In the spring of 2016, as advocates in New York City called for a significant increase in funding for community-based adult literacy services, city officials, policy makers, and funders asked: What are the defining features of a quality adult literacy program and what does it cost to run one? To respond to these questions, the Literacy Assistance Center – with support from the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the primary city funder of community-based adult literacy programs – engaged program leaders and other stakeholders in a process to articulate a shared understanding of what a comprehensive, quality community-based adult literacy program looks like and what it costs to implement. This report – which includes a first-of-its-kind cost model – is the result of that process.

The Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system, and to advancing adult literacy as a core value in our society and a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. Since 1983, the LAC has been working to build the capacity and improve the quality of the basic education, high school equivalency, and English language programs that serve New York’s most educationally disadvantaged and economically marginalized adults and out-of-school youth. This report was funded by DYCD as part of the citywide technical assistance services that the LAC is contracted to provide to community-based adult literacy programs. The conclusions and recommendations of this report reflect the views of the LAC and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of DYCD.

Background

In the context of this report, adult literacy services refer to the range of educational services and supports that enable adults to improve their ability to read, write, compute, understand and solve problems, and communicate in English. These are foundational skills that every adult in the U.S. needs to achieve economic security and develop their knowledge and potential. Yet while the relationship between literacy levels and positive social and economic indicators is well established, today in New York City, 2.2 million adults lack English language proficiency, a high

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1 For research on the relationship between adult literacy and social and economic indicators, see:
school diploma, or both. This reality represents a crisis, as well as an opportunity to build an education system that will enable all adults to achieve their aspirations and contribute to the vitality of our city.

New York City is home to a broad field of adult literacy providers that are dedicated to giving their students the tools to navigate the world with skill and confidence. They do this primarily through offering classes and connected support in three instructional areas: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation. The city’s main providers include the NYC Department of Education, the City University of New York (CUNY), the three public library systems, and multiple community-based organizations (CBOs). This report focuses on community-based programs, which are typically located in multi-service organizations which have strong roots in local neighborhoods and established trust with community members who look to them for many types of supports under one roof. The primary sources of city funding for these programs are DYCD and the New York City Council.

New Yorkers seeking adult literacy education are diverse in their backgrounds, experiences, literacy levels, strengths, interests, and goals. According to a FY 2017 demographic snapshot of adult literacy students in DYCD-funded programs, the majority are immigrants who hail from over 115 countries and speak more than 70 different primary languages. Two-thirds of all students are women. Students range in age from 17 to 70+, with the majority (73 percent) between the ages 18 and 44. Most students are low-income and people of color: more than 90 percent have family incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, and over 80 percent are Black, Latino, Asian, or multi-racial.

A significant portion of adult literacy students in New York City are parents, many of whom come to classes because they want to be able to better support their children in school. Some students are young adults who left high school without a diploma and are now pursuing new educational and personal goals. Others are older adults who are returning to the classroom to gain skills they missed out on earlier in their lives. Many adult students want to make gains in the job market and need to earn a high school equivalency diploma and pursue further education. Some students are men and women returning home from prison who are seeking to open new doors. Many immigrants study English because they want to pass the test to become naturalized U.S. citizens; others simply want to be able to negotiate the city they now call home. The majority of adult literacy students enter programs at very low literacy levels, from which it takes substantial time and persistence to make enough progress to reach fluency or earn a diploma. While students have varied experiences and goals, they all share the desire to gain crucial skills and to harness their power – as learners, immigrants, family members, workers, and community leaders.


2 New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, 2016.
New York City’s adult literacy system has been profoundly limited by a history of insufficient and inconsistent investment. While New York City and State have historically been national leaders in providing dedicated city and state funds for adult literacy education, as the need has grown and federal investment has stagnated, local funding has been unreliable and is nowhere near what is necessary to address the crisis. This has resulted in an enormous unmet need for adult education that dwarfs the available services. Each year, less than four percent of New Yorkers who need adult literacy services have the opportunity to continue their education through publicly-funded programs.\(^3\) Moreover, public funding for the community-based adult literacy programs that do receive it is so inadequate that they are typically unable to provide the full array of services that students need without securing additional resources. Consequently, critical program areas such as counseling and workforce transitions are often underdeveloped. The unpredictable, short-term nature of funding has undermined program stability, staff continuity, and the ability to fully achieve program and policy goals. While adult literacy programs continue to be in high demand and can be life-changing for students who are lucky enough to get a seat, the city’s adult literacy system lacks the resources to move beyond the margins of the challenge.

As a result of advocacy from the field and the responsiveness of the City Council and Mayor, in FY 2017 and FY 2018, New York City made new, targeted investments in adult literacy, which have been important for preserving and expanding opportunities. In light of the city’s increased commitment, it is an important moment for the field to review effective program practices and articulate real costs, especially in relation to programs operated by community-based organizations, where much of the new investment has been focused.

**Purpose and Process**

In the fall of 2016, the LAC launched the “Investing in Quality” project to help develop a common vision for building the capacity and investing in the future of the city’s adult education system. The goal was to develop a “blueprint” for high-quality, community-based adult literacy programs that could be used to guide program design, inform policy decisions, and identify true costs.

This project expands on earlier work that defined “indicators of program quality” for adult literacy programs, including those that the LAC originally developed for the New York State Education Department in 2008 as part of the *Adult Literacy Education Core Curriculum* (ALECC), as well as those articulated in the mid-1990s through the city’s *Looking at Literacy* project.\(^4\) These resources were reviewed and key aspects were incorporated to serve as a foundation for this project. The project also incorporated insights from discussions about indicators of program quality that were held by the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development’s Adult Education Advisory Board in the spring of 2016.

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\(^3\) New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, 2016.


\(^4\) NYS Education Department and the Literacy Assistance Center, “ALECC Module #7 Indicators of Program Quality,” 2008.

After reviewing the literature noted above, the LAC initiated a process to gather input from key stakeholders in the adult literacy field, primarily program leaders and students. Between January and June of 2017, the LAC:

- Engaged an expert advisory committee to guide the project.
- Conducted interactive feedback sessions with more than 90 program managers and staff of adult literacy service providers affiliated with DYCD, the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development’s (WKDEV) Adult Education Advisory Board, and the NYC Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL).
- Collected input from 102 students from four adult literacy programs in four boroughs.
- Developed multiple iterations of the evolving content for feedback and refinement, and consulted with senior literacy staff at DYCD and WKDEV throughout the process.
- Developed a program cost model and sample budget.

This report provides a “blueprint” for program quality and contributes a new framework for understanding program costs and the resources needed to support comprehensive, high-quality adult literacy programs.

Active engagement from the field made for rich conversations about what strong programs look like and what is needed to support them. Project leaders took to heart the challenge of getting as concrete as possible while honoring the diversity of the field and its constituents. Through multiple in-person meetings, providers and students discussed what makes a successful program, what they have had to sacrifice in the face of scarce resources, and what they would prioritize for investment.

This process led to the development of 14 Building Blocks for a Quality Adult Literacy Program which, when taken together, describe the components of a comprehensive and effective program. It is notable that many of the “Building Blocks” of quality programs generated through this process are similar to the “indicators” identified by the field over the last 40 years. That is, many of the key program features described in this report have been recognized as essential components of an effective program by a broad range of stakeholders dating back to the first major federal, state, and local investments in community-based adult literacy programs.5 With its examination of program costs, this report carries the discussion further to address the question of resources.

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5See for example:
Association for Community Based Education, “Adult Literacy: A Study of Community Based Literacy Programs,” September, 1986.
Once the Building Blocks were established, the next steps were to identify the resources required to implement a comprehensive program, and to design a sample operating budget that could be used as a point of reference for the field. The LAC drew on feedback from providers and other stakeholders, both to identify the “Key Elements for Investment” as well as to generate the parameters for a hypothetical program that was then used to craft the budget and define the costs.

**Report Structure and Summary Cost Finding**

This report is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes the 14 Building Blocks for a Quality Adult Literacy Program for easy reference. The second section describes each Building Block in detail. The third section, Key Elements for Investment, outlines the critical areas that programs need to invest in to create high-quality, sustainable adult literacy services. Finally, the Defining Costs section presents an operating budget for a hypothetical adult literacy program that incorporates all of the Building Blocks and Key Elements for Investment.

The sample budget presented here is not intended to be used as a formula for all quality programs, but rather as a guide to inform program design and funding levels. In our model, the annual cost for a program seat, or “slot,” is $7,400 for 400 hours of instruction and connected support.

The “cost per slot” for a defined number of instructional hours is a distinct metric that cannot be compared directly with current “per student” or “price per participant” funding rates. We use the cost per slot because it is a more reliable and stable unit of measure than the cost per student due to the variability of program models and periods of student engagement. We discuss and explain this decision more fully on pages 35 and 36.

This report does not discuss the many different existing and possible program models, approaches, and sub-populations of students. Instead, it identifies and describes the key program components that are common across instructional areas, program models, student populations, and neighborhoods. While each Building Block is articulated as a discrete component, it is important to recognize the interconnected nature of the Building Blocks that make up a holistic program.

**Uses of this Report**

This report is intended as a tool for programs and funders to use in a variety of ways: to inform new program design or development; to spur program reflection and continuous improvement; to understand and articulate quality program practices; to identify key areas for professional development; to delineate and benchmark program costs; and to pave the way for funding levels that fully support sustainable, comprehensive, quality adult literacy programs and a citywide adult literacy infrastructure.

The sections of this report are designed to build on each other, and no individual section should be considered separate from the whole. For example, the Building Blocks cannot be implemented without sufficient resources, and the sample budget is based on a well-developed, comprehensive program that incorporates all of the Building Blocks. However, depending on the
reader’s priorities and prior knowledge, the later sections on investment may be of primary interest. For readers with less first-hand knowledge of adult literacy services, the Building Blocks provide a crucial foundation for understanding effective program practice.

Next Steps
Making a case for increased investment in adult literacy raises important questions about outcomes and the return on any additional investment. While this document builds on the earlier literature on indicators of program quality, it does not attempt to project specific outcomes or gains that would result from the enhanced funding outlined in this report. Research has shown the compelling links between increased adult literacy and individual and collective indicators of economic and social well-being. However, there is limited existing research that examines specific adult literacy program elements or practices and their quantifiable impact on program results. The substance of this report is based primarily on the collective knowledge and experience of the professionals who work in the adult literacy field. The LAC’s underlying hypothesis is that sufficient resources will lead to improved outcomes; that if the program elements described in this report are fully funded, more students will persist in their studies, make educational gains, overcome challenges, achieve greater economic stability, be better able to support their children and families, pursue higher education and training, and participate more fully in the civic life of their communities. Moreover, if adult literacy educators are supported with full-time positions, competitive salaries, professional development and planning time, and a career track with a future, programs will be better able to recruit and retain excellent staff – the main ingredient for strong student outcomes.

One potential next step is to analyze the programmatic and resource gaps of currently funded programs relative to the Building Blocks and Key Elements described in this report. Such an analysis would further establish the need to increase funding rates for adult literacy programs and overall funding for adult literacy education. More importantly, a critical next step is for funders to invest in pilot implementation projects, combined with research and evaluation studies, which will enable the field of adult literacy to assess and document the outcomes associated with the 14 Building Blocks and increased resources; and, ultimately, to demonstrate that by investing in comprehensive, fully-funded adult literacy programs, both individual students – and our city as a whole – can be transformed.

Acknowledgements
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SUMMARY LIST: 14 BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A QUALITY ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM

Adult literacy programs are diverse, varied in their approaches, and tailored to their particular students and communities. At the same time, there are core components of programs that cut across all instructional types (English for Speakers of Other Languages, Adult Basic Education, and High School Equivalency preparation), locations, and student populations. These “Building Blocks” have been identified by adult literacy program leaders and students as the key ingredients for a comprehensive, effective, sustainable adult education program operated by a community-based organization. Below is a summary list of the 14 Building Blocks for a Quality Adult Literacy Program. (The next section of the report describes each Building Block in detail.)

1. A well-defined program philosophy and goals that guide all program activities and respond to community needs.
2. A clear process for outreach, intake, enrollment, and orientation that attracts students, communicates goals and expectations, places students appropriately, and begins the educational re-engagement process.
3. A program structure that maximizes student success with convenient class schedules, appropriate class size, student groupings by level, and optimal intensity and duration of engagement.
4. Organized curriculum and instruction, contextualized to students’ goals and interests, that apply principles of adult learning and engage students to become more skillful readers, writers, speakers, problem solvers, and leaders.
5. Student support services, including counseling and case management, that respond to the complexity of adult students’ lives and support their persistence and success.
6. Pathways and supported transitions to help students make informed choices about further education, training, and employment, and move forward to achieve long-term goals.
7. Integrated technology and learning tools designed for adult students that strengthen their capacity to navigate an information-based society.
8. Qualified, committed staff with skills and experiences to fulfill their responsibilities and who understand the diverse experiences, language, culture, and needs of students.
9. Adequate full-time staff with paid time for instruction, planning and preparation, outreach and intake, student assessment, counseling and support, program management, and professional development.
10. Professional working conditions and compensation to attract and retain excellent staff and support high performance.
11. Ongoing professional development that supports knowledge and skill development, collaboration, and program success.
12. Integrated planning, assessment, and evaluation that guide instruction, inform ongoing program development, and enable staff to monitor progress.
13. Program facilities and resources that are accessible to students and support all program activities, provide up-to-date technology and learning tools, and promote safety, dignity and respect for students, staff, and the local community.
14. Organizational mission, management systems, and partnerships that support program goals and effectiveness, human resources, operations, finances, community networks, and sustainability.
The **14 Building Blocks for a Quality Adult Literacy Program** are the key components of a comprehensive, effective, sustainable educational program for adults. As described in the Introduction, these Building Blocks expand on earlier literature defining “indicators of program quality” and reflect a series of new discussions with New York City adult literacy program managers, staff, and students. This section describes each Building Block in detail to paint a fuller picture of a high-quality adult literacy program operated by a nonprofit community-based organization.

1. **A well-defined program philosophy and goals** that guide all program activities and respond to community needs.

   1.1. The program has a clear statement of mission, philosophy, and goals that drive program activities and unify staff and students with a shared purpose, vision, and identity.
   1.2. All program components are designed to respond to the particular needs and priorities of the community served and to expand adult students’ capacity to improve their lives and communities.
   1.3. The program embodies its philosophy in all aspects of its operations, including governance structures, program policies and materials, instruction, staff training, student orientation, and design and use of program space.
   1.4. The program applies its philosophy and goals to allocate resources and staff in a consistent and logical way. For example, if a primary program goal is to engage beginning ESOL students who are also parents, then the program will devote significant staff time and resources to reaching out to immigrant parents, teaching theme-based beginner-level ESOL classes, and offering family supports.
   1.5. The program goals are reviewed, evaluated, and updated on a regular basis, with input from staff, students, and organizational leadership. This may include additional input from other stakeholders such as community members, program partners, and funders.
2. **A clear process for outreach, intake, enrollment, and orientation** that attracts students, communicates goals and expectations, places students appropriately, and begins the educational re-engagement process.

2.1. The program recruits students through targeted community outreach, publicizing the program through local institutions, informal networks, community events, websites, and other media, as needed.\(^7\)

2.2. Intake protocols and orientation materials are tailored to the specific program and student population, and take into account student availability, languages, literacy levels, age range, demographics, program goals, and funder guidelines.

2.3. Through the outreach, intake, and orientation process, program staff welcome students, share clear information about program expectations and commitments, and answer students’ questions. This happens through one-on-one interactions and through group activities that familiarize students with program services and foster connections with staff and peers. The process acknowledges students’ anxieties and intentionally builds their confidence in their ability to learn.

2.4. Individual assessment begins at intake to determine students’ skills and needs, to place them in the appropriate class, and to support goal setting and learning plans. It is important for students to develop a vision for themselves and a realistic understanding of what it will take to achieve their goals. Assessment includes testing for class level, combined with other types of initial assessments. (See Building Block #12 for more on assessment.)

2.5. As part of a student’s early engagement with the program, s/he meets with a counselor or case manager to start building a relationship, share information about life challenges, and set in motion any needed support services. This is especially important for particularly vulnerable populations, such as people returning home from prison, homeless adults, and undocumented immigrants.

2.6. The program manages enrollment by opening class registration at certain times during the year and having cohorts of students start a class at the same time. If the program engages in a rolling enrollment process, it is structured to maximize student engagement and learning. Students also have the opportunity to continue their studies in consecutive class cycles. (A class “cycle” is defined as the number of weeks that a class is scheduled to meet. It is like a semester, but it can vary in length and intensity.)

2.7. The intake process includes collecting student data, such as demographic information, source of referral to the program, initial assessment results, personal goals, support services needed, and other information necessary for the program to effectively serve the students and to review and report on program data and outcomes.

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\(^7\) Student input reinforced that a high percentage of adult students chose their education program because they learned about it through family or friends, because it was near where they lived, and/or because they already were connected to the community organization that offered the program.
2.8. There are dedicated, trained staff to perform outreach, intake, enrollment, orientation, data management, and reporting, with substantial time and resources allocated for these activities. These processes take time and skills to manage, and require attention and support from program leaders and frontline staff.

2.9. The program has a logical system for handling the overflow of students beyond the enrollment capacity and for those who do not meet program eligibility. This may include an organized wait list for classes and/or referrals to other adult literacy programs or services.
3. A **program structure** that maximizes student success with convenient class schedules, appropriate class size, student groupings by level, and optimal intensity and duration of engagement.

3.1. The program offers a class schedule that responds to the needs of adult students, (e.g. daytime classes for parents of school-aged children, night classes for students who work during the day).

3.2. Classes are small enough to maximize teaching and learning, with an average range of 12 to 20 students per class, depending on the type of class, level, and student population.

3.3. Classes are organized by level to group students based on their skills and needs. This allows for more effective instruction. At the same time, the program has flexibility to organize classes around student goals or other experiences students have in common, such as being expectant mothers or immigrant workers in a particular industry.

3.4. The program offers classes of an intensity and duration that are accessible to adult students and accelerate their learning. A general guideline is that a class should offer a minimum of 100 hours of instruction for students to have enough time to benefit.\(^8\)

While there is research that shows that students make greater educational gains through greater intensity of instruction (i.e. more hours per week),\(^9\) the intensity and duration of classes will vary depending on program goals and the student population. For example, an intensive HSE program for young adults may require more of a time commitment each week for a shorter period of time, while a weekend ESOL class for immigrant laborers who cannot attend during the work week may run fewer hours per week over a longer period of time. Regardless of the intensity and duration of each individual class, the program provides students with the opportunity to continue to study and advance through class levels for as long as is needed to achieve their goals.

3.5. The staffing structure gives teachers enough paid time to carry out all key aspects of their work, including curriculum planning, class preparation, instruction, communication with students, collaboration with other staff, assessment and evaluation, professional development, and other programmatic and administrative duties. The program recognizes the central importance of student-teacher interaction and builds in time to foster communication and supportive relationships.

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\(^8\) This guideline came from discussions with experienced program leaders and studies of the relationship between instructional hours and level gains, including:


Sarah Young, Center for Applied Linguistics, “Effects of Instructional Hours and Intensity of Instruction on NRS Level Gain in Listening and Speaking,” CAL Digest, December 2007.

\(^9\) Sarah Young, Center for Applied Linguistics. 2007.
3.6. The program incorporates student participation and leadership in program operations and decision-making. Structured vehicles for student engagement may include: a student advisory group or elected student government that meets with program managers to make decisions about program activities and policies; focus groups and surveys through which students provide feedback at regular intervals; and staff hiring processes that include student input.
4. Organized curriculum and instruction, contextualized to students’ goals and interests, that apply principles of adult learning and engage students to become more skillful readers, writers, speakers, problem solvers, and leaders.

4.1. The program fosters a welcoming, safe classroom culture that values the diversity of student backgrounds and experiences and creates the conditions for adult learning and leadership development.

4.2. The program has an organized, planned approach to curriculum and instruction that addresses the needs and goals of adult students, reflects program philosophy and adult learning principles, employs evidence-based instructional practices, and is delivered in a purposeful and flexible way.

4.3. The program has clearly articulated instructional expectations and best practices, which are introduced to all instructional staff as part of their orientation and reinforced through ongoing professional development.

4.4. Curriculum is contextualized to reflect the experiences and concerns of adult students, and is responsive to the specific student population and their academic, employment, personal, family, and community-related goals. For example, an ESOL class of immigrant parents might learn about the local school system and practice questions for their children’s teachers as part of their English studies. In addition to academic content, an HSE program for young adults may emphasize work readiness skills like communication, team work, resume writing, networking, and interviewing skills, as well as researching information on colleges and the application process to prepare them for next steps.

4.4.1. Examples of common curricular themes include: students’ experiences and cultures; U.S. culture and systems; accessing community resources; contemporary social, political, economic, and environmental issues; civic engagement and advocacy; health literacy; financial literacy; parent engagement; employment skills; workers’ rights; and immigrant rights.

4.5. Classroom instruction is relevant, meaningful, and motivating for students, drawing on their strengths, interests, and preferred learning styles. Students practice real-world tasks and learn new skills and knowledge that are immediately useful in their lives.

4.6. Teachers employ a range of instructional strategies that are appropriate for students’ skills, and promote language, literacy, and numeracy development through active, participatory learning. Instruction provides opportunities for students to be “producers” as well as critical “consumers” of knowledge and may include project-based and problem-based learning, as well as activities such as group discussions and presentations, simulations and role plays, case studies, debates, student writing projects, digital media projects, student research, and other “hands-on” activities.

4.7. Classes use relevant, up-to-date educational materials designed for adult learners, as well as authentic materials drawn from the real world.

4.8. Classroom activities and learning materials are sensitive to students’ cultural norms, practices, and beliefs.
4.9. Technology-based tools and activities are integrated into the curriculum, and students learn to navigate the internet, assess the validity of online sources, and engage with social media, mobile learning apps, and other online learning platforms.

4.10. Educational field trips are an important part of the learning experience, giving students the opportunity to learn and apply their learning in real-life situations and to engage with the world outside the classroom.

4.11. Teachers embrace their roles as facilitators with resources to share, not just as experts with knowledge to impart. They engage all of their students to be active participants and partners in shaping the educational process.

4.12. Opportunities for student leadership development are integral to the instructional approach. Students are encouraged to take initiative in their own learning, and play a meaningful role in choosing topics and activities, motivating and supporting peers, and providing feedback to the program in ongoing, structured ways.

4.13. The program offers additional learning supports connected to instruction, such as writing labs, technology labs, conversation groups, tutoring, and other structured peer support. The program may also engage volunteers or interns to support in-class work or provide additional learning supports.

4.14. Curriculum and instruction position students to successfully transition to their next steps. Assessment tools are aligned with curriculum and instruction and enable students to actively gauge their progress.

4.15. Program curricula and instructional strategies are reviewed and updated periodically, in conjunction with program evaluation and improvement efforts.
5. **Student support services**, including counseling and case management, that respond to the complexity of adult students’ lives and support their persistence and success.

5.1. Educational and personal counseling are provided to help students persist in their learning, overcome obstacles, and attain their educational goals. Adult students, who are often facing personal and systemic challenges, experience the program as a caring environment where they can access a range of support services and move forward in their lives.

5.2. There is a clear and purposeful system for identifying students’ needs for support services and either providing the necessary services in-house or referring students to outside agencies that can provide those services.

5.3. The program takes an organized approach to helping students define their goals and mark progress. Structured one-on-one and group counseling helps students set goals, make gains, and determine their own path forward. The program respects and supports the broad range of student goals, both personal and professional, and learning plans proactively address needs and foster persistence.

5.4. Counselors support student participation, persistence, retention, and graduation. They follow up with students after program completion, and offer continued support and options for re-engagement for those who leave or “stop out” of the program before completion. Support is designed to respond to the reality that adult students often need to pause their studies because of changes in their life circumstances, such as employment issues, housing issues, family responsibilities, health challenges, legal issues, or immigration issues.

5.5. The program incorporates planning for next steps in education, employment, college preparation, workforce training, and career development. (See Building Block #6 for more on pathways and supported transitions.)

5.6. Assessment and follow-up support services or referrals are available for students with documented or probable learning disabilities.

5.7. Social services, provided in-house or through referral, are tailored to the student population and may include support related to: physical and mental health, crisis intervention, immigration, domestic violence, housing, employment, food assistance, legal services, learning disabilities, child care, public benefits, or other concerns.

5.8. There is a clear system for referrals to services not available in-house. Program staff develop and maintain partnerships and collaborative relationships with other local and citywide service providers and organizations that strengthen the network of support for students. The program keeps up-to-date information on referral resources for additional social services in the areas listed above.

5.9. Trained, full-time support services staff provide individualized and group assistance for students to maximize their success and address obstacles. Part-time staff positions may supplement full-time staff, if needed, to cover the program schedule. The staff configuration is designed to meet the needs of the program and its particular student population. Staff roles/titles may include counselors, social workers, case managers, academic advisors, navigators, coaches, and/or specialists for program-specific support, such as employment counseling, re-entry, or immigration support.
5.10. The program recognizes that relationships between staff and students are a key ingredient for program quality and success and, therefore, factors in time for supportive interaction. A ratio of one full-time support services staff member for every 75 students is recommended, depending on the needs of the particular student population.10

5.11. Counselors coordinate with teachers and visit classes to build relationships with students and teachers, offer relevant workshops and resources for students, and encourage use of support services.

5.12. Language access is important for immigrant students to feel at ease and be able to communicate their goals and needs. This means the program employs staff who can communicate with students in their native language(s) and that program materials and communications are translated, as appropriate.

5.13. In addition to the academic and social service supports described above, the program may offer a broader range of additional support services including tutoring and learning labs, peer support, transportation, child care, and/or other incentives. These types of supports are consistently identified by students and staff as important for student retention and success. The program will rarely offer all of these services, but rather create a unique “menu” based on the particular students’ needs and the availability of other in-house services and community resources.

5.13.1. Tutoring, writing labs, conversation groups, and/or technology labs may be offered for all students or specifically for those who need additional academic support.

5.13.2. Peer support – such as peer counseling, peer tutoring, and/or peer mentoring with student leaders or graduates – may be integrated to engage students as resources for each other and build solidarity, self-efficacy, and a sense of shared responsibility.

5.13.3. Transportation assistance may be provided for students who need it to participate, on either an ongoing or emergency basis.

5.13.4. Child care may be offered in education programs serving high numbers of parents, either on-site or through a partnership agreement with a local child care provider.

5.13.5. Incentives may be used to motivate students. Examples include recognition awards, student celebrations, movie tickets, technology devices, and gift cards.

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10 This ratio is based on established best practices of the successful CUNY Start program, as shared in discussions with CUNY staff members and described in this MDRC research brief:

6. **Pathways and supported transitions** to help students make informed choices about further education, training, and employment, and move forward to achieve long-term goals.

6.1. The program actively supports and facilitates student transitions from one level to the next, along the broad continuum that includes ESOL, ABE, HSE, contextualized bridge classes that integrate education and training, postsecondary education, career training, and employment.

6.2. Individual counseling supports students to establish goals, understand the time commitment necessary to reach them, learn about future options, make informed choices, and take the next steps at each transition point. Students develop graduation plans and timelines to pursue next steps.

6.3. Post-program options and pathways are part of the conversation with students starting at intake and throughout their course of study. This includes establishing realistic timelines for making level gains and advancing on an educational and/or career path.

6.4. Staff have knowledge and networks to guide students through the transition steps to further education, job training, credentialing programs, and employment.

6.5. The program builds referral relationships and partnerships with a range of organizations, employers, and educational institutions that offer potential next steps for students. The program facilitates connections for students and communicates and coordinates with partners to support student transitions.

6.6. The program creates opportunities for students and graduates to become mentors for new students.

6.7. The program tracks and documents student transitions to further education, training, employment, and other next steps.

6.8. The program offers follow-up support and engagement through a range of activities that keep students and graduates connected with each other, as well as with ongoing program support and resources and opportunities for their next steps. This may include follow-up phone calls from staff, networking events, support groups, volunteer and civic engagement opportunities, trainings on topics of interest, job fairs, community resource fairs, and other community building activities.
7. **Integrated technology** and learning tools designed for adult students that strengthen their capacity to navigate an information-based society.

7.1. The program is equipped with up-to-date technology tools that are integrated into every day instruction and program management. These include computers, software, wireless internet connection, and other tools such as smart boards, smart TVs, projectors, flash drives, digital cameras, mobile devices, etc.

7.2. The host organization maintains staff capacity to support the use of technology and the need for ongoing upgrades. Instructional staff are trained on the application of technology tools for adult learners, and they integrate the tools in meaningful ways in curriculum and instructional plans. Staff also use digital tools to support program functions like outreach, intake, student assessment, data management, evaluation, and communications.

7.3. Classes integrate digital literacy activities and incorporate the use of social media, mobile apps, and other digital learning and communication tools to foster students to become both critical “consumers” of knowledge who can judge the validity of sources, as well as active “producers” of knowledge and information. Students may also be introduced to technology-based distance learning options that supplement classroom instruction and accelerate students’ independent learning.

7.4. Adequate hardware loaded with relevant software is maintained in an appropriate physical environment with a clear system for technology support and security. For example, English language learning applications are installed onto laptops or tablets that are stored in a locked mobile lab/charging station that can be used in ESOL classrooms, and that are regularly checked, cleaned, and updated by knowledgeable staff.

7.5. Students have access to computers and/or tablets in and outside of class and are trained on how to use these tools and given ample opportunity to practice new skills. The program also maintains a list of other locations where students can access computers/tablets outside of the classroom since students may not have private access at home or elsewhere.
8. **Qualified, committed staff** with skills and experiences to fulfill their responsibilities and who understand the diverse experiences, language, culture, and needs of students.

8.1. Program staff are well-trained, dedicated individuals who are prepared with the educational backgrounds, experience, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to effectively serve their students. They are well-versed in the program’s philosophy and goals and are committed to supporting students and ensuring their success.11

8.1.1. Program managers/directors have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and several years of relevant educational experience and demonstrated success.

8.1.2. Teachers have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and relevant educational experience.

8.1.3. Counselors have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree plus relevant credentials and/or experience providing counseling and support services.

8.1.4. Other support services staff have a minimum of an associate’s degree and relevant experience providing or coordinating social services and/or academic support.

8.1.5. Administrative support staff have clerical and communication skills necessary to conduct student outreach, intake, orientation, and testing; data entry and management; support for teachers; coordination with support services staff; phone calls and follow-up with students; and other program and administrative tasks.

8.2. The staff team has a strong presence of individuals who share the cultural, linguistic, immigration, and class backgrounds of the students.

8.3. The program has clear criteria for the qualifications of each staff position and a clear, effective process for attracting, hiring, and retaining talented staff.

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11 Students who participated in the project consistently pointed out the importance of having smart, compassionate, patient staff who communicate well, build positive relationships with students, and make learning possible in the face of internal and external obstacles.
9. Adequate *full-time staff* with paid time for instruction, planning and preparation, outreach and intake, student assessment, counseling and support, program management, and professional development.

9.1. The program employs full-time managerial, instructional, counseling, and administrative staff, with some part-time positions, as needed, to supplement the full-time team.

9.2. There are dedicated staff positions for program management and coordination; administrative and data/reporting functions; recruitment, intake, orientation, and retention; and counseling and student support services. Shared organizational staff cover shared functions like reception, maintenance, human resources, and development.

9.3. Teachers’ paid time includes curriculum development, planning and preparation, classroom instruction, student assessment and orientation, professional development, staff meetings, communication with students, administrative tasks, other program and organizational activities, and special events.

9.4. To bolster capacity, the program leverages other human resources where possible, including interns and volunteers who have received pre-service training and are provided with in-service support. The program also keeps a list of available substitute teachers. Interns, volunteers, and substitute teachers become part of the program’s pipeline of prospective future staff.
10. Professional *working conditions and compensation* to attract and retain excellent staff and support high performance.

10.1. The program maintains professional working conditions that support staff in their growth and facilitate their success with students. This includes adequate work space; technology tools; clear organizational policies and communication; a culture of collaboration, learning, and support; and other staff-identified priorities.

10.2. The program offers competitive salary and benefits packages to attract and retain talented staff and to recognize their work, on par with other educational professionals. There is a consistent application of salary steps and cost of living increases for all staff.

10.3. All staff have written job descriptions with clearly-defined roles and responsibilities, enabling the staff team to organize their work and coordinate effectively to meet students’ needs.

10.4. The program creates pathways for promotion and professional advancement within the broader organization.
11. Ongoing *professional development* that supports knowledge and skill development, collaboration, and program success.

11.1. There is a clear professional development plan that takes into account the evolving needs of the program and its staff and provides opportunities for staff to receive training, learn and practice new skills, and receive constructive feedback.

11.2. The menu of professional development activities includes onsite staff development and coaching, collaboration with other staff within and across program areas, and external trainings. Participating in adult literacy conferences and networks encourages sharing of best practices, cross-pollination of ideas, and coordination among adult literacy programs.

11.3. Some core training topics include: understanding the program goals and structure, delivering culturally sensitive and effective instruction and support services, working with students to set and achieve educational goals, assessment tools and testing, learning differences, lesson planning and curriculum development, content-based instruction, teaching strategies for low-literacy students, technology integration, case management, student retention strategies, intake protocols, administrative best practices, database management, and data entry.

11.4. The program creates and provides opportunities for instructors to collaborate with each other through many formats, such as peer learning and feedback, co-teaching, and co-creating curricula.

11.5. The program establishes a minimum annual number of paid professional development hours for all staff members, which can be allocated to the core training topics outlined in 11.3 above, as well as additional areas based on individual professional development goals.

11.6. Supervision is part of the system of staff support that encourages professional growth, learning, and high performance. This includes regular meetings with a supervisor that provide opportunities to review and develop workplans, discuss priorities, address challenges, and receive and offer feedback and support. All staff participate in an annual evaluation process and receive a written evaluation. For instructors, the evaluation process includes classroom observations and debriefing with the supervisor or instructional leader.

11.7. The program creates pathways for students, volunteers, and staff to advance their skills and take on larger roles. These opportunities – both within and outside the program – could include internships, apprenticeships, shadowing, peer volunteer training, leadership training, coaching, assistant teaching, co-teaching, and lead teaching with wider curriculum development and/or program coordination responsibilities.
12. **Integrated planning, assessment, and evaluation** that guide instruction, inform ongoing program development, and enable staff to monitor progress.

12.1. Planning, assessment, and evaluation are integrated into all aspects of program development and improvement and involve multiple stakeholders including staff and students.

12.2. The program sets ambitious yet realistic outcome targets based on assessment of student and community needs, organizational priorities and program goals, analysis of past performance data, comparative data with similar programs, and funder expectations.

12.3. The program uses multiple assessments to place students into instructional levels, monitor and demonstrate student progress, guide instruction, and deliver support services. Assessments may include standardized tests; program-designed assessments to determine each student’s goals, skill levels, and support needs; curriculum-based formative and summative assessments; student projects; and portfolios.

12.4. Intake is a critical part of the assessment process, where staff devote time to determine if there is a good match between the individual student and the program, and offer referrals to applicants who would be better served by other programs.

12.5. There is appropriate screening and/or assessment for students with learning differences and special needs.

12.6. Each student has a learning plan developed with the teacher and used to guide and gauge progress.

12.7. Each student meets one-on-one with a teacher and/or counselor at least twice during a class cycle to assess and review the student’s progress and challenges. Case management is incorporated at all points in the process. (See Building Block #5.)

12.8. Student progress measures include attendance, educational gain and/or HSE diploma attainment, class completion, persistence, personal goal attainment, challenges addressed through support services, and transitions to further education, training, or employment.

12.9. Staff job descriptions and a clear staffing pattern allocate sufficient time to cover all activities associated with student assessment and evaluation. This includes intake, informal and formal assessments, scoring and interpreting tests, collecting and tracking data, developing learning and support plans, and making referrals.

12.10. Teacher effectiveness is assessed through class observations, student learning outcomes, student attendance and retention, student feedback (formal and informal), and meeting professional development goals. Teacher evaluation includes post-observation conferences where the teacher and supervisor discuss strengths and areas for improvement, and discuss ways to better address student needs and interests.

12.11. The program evaluates its overall success by systematically looking at aggregated data on student attendance and retention, learning outcomes, student feedback, and staff retention, and by conducting a holistic internal review of quantitative and qualitative program data.
12.12. There is an integrated system for data collection and analysis to track student demographics, needs and goals, participation, services provided, progress, outcomes, and next steps. This system also gives staff the ability to organize key information and analyze program operations, services, and trends.
13. **Program facilities and resources** that are accessible to students and support all program activities, provide up-to-date technology and learning tools, and promote safety, dignity and respect for students, staff, and the local community.

13.1. The program operates in a safe, welcoming physical space that helps create a student-centered environment and is appropriate for instruction, counseling and student support, outreach, intake, testing, orientation, and all other program activities.

13.2. The program environment fosters a sense of dignity, community, and “home.” For example, there is community space where students are welcome to spend time together outside of structured activities, and the décor shows images and messages that honor the students’ cultures and inspire learning.

13.3. The space is clean, comfortable, well-lit, and designed for teaching and learning. Classrooms are equipped with moveable furniture that is easy to configure in multiple ways, storage space, technology tools, heating and air conditioning, white boards, and projectors. A water dispenser is available to staff and students.

13.4. Program facilities are near public transportation and accessible to people with disabilities.

13.5. Program staff have adequate office space, dedicated cabinets and storage to keep their supplies and belongings, and access to common areas such as a lounge and kitchen.

13.6. If the program space is shared with other programs or services, all program schedules and transitions are well-coordinated for a smooth flow.

13.7. Learning tools and materials are designed for use by adults, and there are enough books and materials for each student.

13.8. The program supports language access by translating program information and materials and using visual aids, where possible.
14. **Organizational mission, management systems, and partnerships** that support program goals and effectiveness, human resources, operations, finances, community networks, and sustainability.

14.1. Mission: The host organization that houses the program has a clear mission, philosophy, and goals that guide all aspects of the adult literacy program.

14.2. Leadership and commitment: The host organization’s board and leadership have deep ties to the community they serve and are committed to the adult literacy program as an integral part of the organizational mission and operations.

14.3. Human resources: The organization employs trained and competent human resources staff and maintains consistent policies and practices to support staff hiring, training, supervision, and retention. The organization ensures that adequate staffing structures are in place to manage pressing workloads. Interns and volunteers are leveraged, where possible, as a supplement to paid staff, with an understanding of the benefits and the challenges they bring.

14.4. Planning and evaluation: The adult literacy program’s system for assessment and evaluation (see Building Block #12) fits into an organization-wide practice of ongoing planning and evaluation to continually improve services and effectiveness.

14.5. Communication: There is a well-established system of communication among the organization’s leadership, managers, teachers, and administrative and support staff.

14.6. Facilities: The organization provides the program with an adequate allocation of space for offices and classrooms, equipped with up-to-date technology, materials, and other resources (see Building Blocks #7 and #13).

14.7. Fiscal management: The host organization supports the program with skilled and coordinated financial management, maintaining financial records, establishing and monitoring a budget, and ensuring compliance with funders.

14.8. Sustainability and funding support: The organization’s leadership integrates adult literacy into its overall fundraising plans and works to secure funding to sustain the program for the long term.

14.9. Data management: The organization maintains an adequate electronic data system that supports efficient reporting, accountability, transparency, program analysis, and continuous improvement efforts.

14.10. Community connections: The host organization actively supports the adult literacy program to foster connections and collaboration across program areas in the host organization, as well as in the community and the adult literacy field. This includes maintaining a visible and valued presence in the local community through outreach and partnerships, leveraging community resources and relationships with other organizations and businesses that help to enhance program activities and student outcomes, and participating in activities to improve and sustain the field of adult literacy education. Fostering and sustaining community connections requires time, as well as clarity about which staff members are responsible for establishing linkages, engaging in networks and advocacy, updating partner lists, and maintaining communication and relationships.
KEY ELEMENTS FOR INVESTMENT IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

The 14 Building Blocks detailed in the previous section describe the components of a comprehensive adult literacy program that supports adult students to gain skills, make connections, and advance toward their personal and professional goals. However, in order for programs to be able to fully implement these Building Blocks, they must have the financial resources to invest in a number of critical areas. The following section outlines the Key Elements for Investment needed to create stable, sustainable, high-quality adult literacy programs. The final section presents a sample budget for a hypothetical program that reflects these investments.

Staff and Personnel Costs
The staff – the people who devote their time and energy to carry out all program activities – are the heart of the program and largely determine the quality of students’ experiences and outcomes. Recruiting, retaining, and supporting excellent staff are essential to the success of any program. Below are the Key Elements for Investment that are necessary to establish and support a strong staff team.

- **Full-Time Staff Positions**: It is important for the program to have an adequate number of full-time staff, including a program leader, who can be fully dedicated to the program’s operation and success. Each staff position should be well-structured with sufficient time to meet key responsibilities and implement core program functions. Sometimes, it is necessary to supplement full-time staff with part-time positions, especially if a program is small or runs a wide range of classes that require staffing at different times of day. However, a core full-time staff team is crucial for effective program implementation and daily operations. Full-time program positions should include:
  - A **program manager** who leads and directs all aspects of the program, including program development and planning, staff hiring and supervision, professional development, grant management and contract reporting, budget management, fundraising, communications, community partnerships, and special events.
  - An **assistant program manager** who coordinates and supervises key program areas, such as curriculum and teaching; evening program and staff; volunteer management; outreach, intake, enrollment, and orientation; student assessment; technology integration; and communication among teachers and support services staff. (In a smaller program that does not have two administrator positions, these responsibilities could fall under the program manager with help from other staff.)
  - **Teachers** with paid time for curriculum development, lesson planning and preparation, classroom instruction, student assessment and orientation, professional development, staff meetings, communication with students, administrative work required for grants and contracts, and other program and organizational activities and special events. In order to meet all of these
demands, instructional hours should constitute no more than 55 to 65 percent of a teacher’s total hours per week.\textsuperscript{12}

- **Support services staff** who directly support program goals and student outcomes. Many adult students face challenges that require extensive counseling, coaching, referrals, and follow-up. It takes time and persistence to build trust and maintain communication with students with complex lives and needs. A strong program values the power of student support by devoting an adequate number of dedicated staff at a ratio of roughly one counselor/case manager for every 75 students at any given time.\textsuperscript{13} This enables staff to fulfill the vital work of meeting with students on a regular basis starting at intake; assisting students to set and achieve goals; assessing students’ strengths and needs; creating support service and learning plans; providing ongoing personal and academic support; planning and leading workshops on relevant themes; collaborating and coordinating with other staff; developing and managing connections and referral systems with external service providers; establishing opportunities and systems that aid students in making educational, economic, and social gains; following-up with students after they exit the program; tracking related data; documenting progress; and supporting other program activities like student orientation. Programs use a variety of roles and titles for support services staff including counselors, social workers, case managers, advisors, navigators, and coaches. The staff team should be designed to best fit the particular program, the student population, and the community’s needs and resources.

- **Administrative support staff** who directly support outreach, student intake, orientation, testing, data entry and management, support for teachers, coordination with support services staff, communication with students, and other administrative tasks that keep the program running smoothly. In addition to permanent staff roles, the program should also have the resources to hire additional temporary staff to add capacity during periods of high demand.

- **Competitive Salaries and Benefits** are crucial to recruiting and keeping skilled staff. Community-based organizations must be able to offer compensation that keeps pace with other education employers, including the NYC Department of Education and the City University of New York.
  - Benefits should include paid time off, health insurance, opportunity to participate in a retirement savings plan, transportation support for staff in multi-site programs, and paid time for professional development.
  - Part-time staff should also be eligible for benefits on a prorated basis.

\textsuperscript{12} This recommendation is derived from the experience of program managers and the calculation of time needed to complete each area of work. The proportion of instructional hours is comparable to the expectations for NYC Department of Education high school teachers, who are assigned to classroom teaching for approximately 19 to 21 hours a week, with the balance of their work hours devoted to other assigned duties, professional development, planning, grading, collaborating, etc. (This information is based on the DOE teacher contract and discussions with a DOE principal.)

\textsuperscript{13} See Footnote #10, page 17.
• **Professional Development** is critical to retain excellent staff and further support their development in conjunction with program goals. Activities may include onsite training and coaching, peer learning and supported collaboration with other staff, as well as outside workshops, classes, and conferences that bring new knowledge and capacity. Core training topics include program goals and structure, teaching strategies, lesson planning and curriculum development, student assessment and goal setting, data collection and analysis, technology integration, student support strategies, intake protocols, and administrative best practices. The costs for professional development activities – trainings, conferences, outside trainers and coaches, materials, supplies, and staff time – are critical investments in the quality of staff and the program’s ability to achieve student outcomes.

• **Shared Organizational Staff** who perform important centralized functions require committed resources. Support for these functions – including reception, maintenance, security, fiscal management, technology support, and communications – are crucial to running a successful program.

**Student Supports**
Structured support for students beyond classroom instruction is a core component of a successful adult literacy program. This is especially true when working with low-income and immigrant students striving to meet their own basic needs and overcome systemic barriers. In addition to investing in staff positions to carry out this area of program support, there are a number of direct student supports and incentives that have been consistently identified by programs and students as important aids for student retention and success.

• **Direct Student Supports** such as child care, transportation assistance, tutoring, emergency assistance, financial aid for application fees, document translation, and other fees related to continued education and training. The costs of these services vary widely and can be substantial. While there is no single formula, it is important for a program to have flexible resources to be able to design a specific menu of services based on the particular student population, immediate needs, ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of the supports, other services offered by the host organization, and other support services already available or acutely needed in the local community.

• **Incentives** are additional tools to motivate students to persist in the program and that require modest financial resources. Incentives may include educational field trips, special events and activities, and awards to recognize and celebrate individual and group achievement or improvement, such as perfect attendance awards, graduation ceremonies, technology devices, gift cards, and movie tickets. Some programs also provide stipends for alumni leaders. This is an area where programs should have discretion based on knowledge of their students and program priorities.
Materials and Tools
A high-quality program needs to invest in relevant materials and tools for communication, instruction, testing, and data management, as outlined below.

- **Communication Materials**: Successful outreach, intake, enrollment, and orientation require investments in materials and communication tools. These include brochures, flyers, applications, and welcome packets for students, as well as electronic and online communication tools, including websites, e-mail lists, and social media. Advertising through a variety of media outlets is sometimes used to recruit students, and videos and text messaging can also be valuable tools for communicating with students and prospective students. Translation and/or interpretation of materials and orientation sessions may be important, especially for ESOL programs that engage students who speak a range of languages. It is essential to factor these communication tools into the costs of a program.

- **Instructional Materials and Tools**: To operate an effective education program, staff and students need access to a variety of instructional tools and materials that should be factored into program costs. These include text books, work books, reference books, primary source materials, newspapers, magazines, online subscriptions, calculators, software, videos, and other educational resources and supplies. Equipment and supplies are also needed in the form of projectors, white boards, copy machines, cameras, posters for classroom display, office supplies, as well as the tools described under “Technology” below.

- **Testing Materials**: The standardized tests used to measure students’ educational gain must be purchased from test publishers in a quantity sufficient to test all students at least twice a year, but often more frequently, to measure progress.

- **Data Collection and Analysis Tools**: A quality program has an integrated system for data collection and analysis to track student demographics, needs and goals, participation, services provided, progress, outcomes, and next steps. Programs must have the resources to cover the cost of an advanced database that gives staff the ability to organize information and analyze program operations, services, outcomes, and trends.

Program Space and Technology
Another significant area for investment is the physical space and technology tools needed to run a successful educational program.

- **Facilities**: A quality program has adequate physical space for all staff and program functions including intake, testing, orientation, instruction, meetings, student support (i.e. space that is respectful of students’ privacy), volunteer activities, tutoring and learning labs, events, administrative support, and storage (data, files, etc.). The facilities should be accessible by public transportation and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Primary space costs include rent or mortgage, taxes, furniture, maintenance, and utilities. A program may be able to access in-kind space in public
institutions, but nonprofit organizations are usually subject to the ever-increasing costs of real estate in New York City. It is important to recognize the significance and impact of a physical environment that is conducive to learning and community building.

- **Technology**: In today’s world, technology tools are vital to teaching and learning and represent an important area for investment. Costs include the initial capital costs of purchasing hardware and equipping the program with up-to-date tools, installing hardware and software, providing for storage and security, ongoing maintenance and upgrades, and repairs and replacement over time. The program must also pay for wireless internet access and connectivity, data management capacity and security, and communication tools such as an interactive website, group texting apps, etc. Robust technical support (in-house or from an outside provider) is necessary to manage and maintain these tools. All of this also requires staff time and outside support/consultants to carry out the research, training, and planning needed to fully integrate technology tools into instruction and program operations. In other words, the costs of a well-developed program with integrated technology reach well beyond the simple cost of outfitting a computer lab. Ongoing investment in technology will enable the program to continuously develop in ways that prepare students to navigate an increasingly high-tech world.

**Organizational Management Systems and Support**

Organizational management support provides the necessary infrastructure that sustains the program. To function well, the program needs the host organization to understand the program and integrate it into its overall operations, management systems, communications, and community partnerships. This also means providing resources in the form of centralized staff and management functions. The program budget should reflect a fair share of the costs of this management support, through direct budget lines and “indirect costs” pegged at a percentage of the overall budget. Some important areas of organizational support and associated investment are listed below.

- **Organizational Leadership and Supervisory Staff**: Program success relies on senior management support and supervision for program staff and all operations. Organizational leaders integrate the adult literacy program into their plans, communications, management priorities, and community engagement. This requires dedicated time to communicate, coordinate, and strategize for program success within the larger host organization and the surrounding community.

- **Shared Management Functions**: When based in a larger multi-service organization, the program relies on shared staff and management functions including front desk/reception, physical plant maintenance, security, IT support, organizational data management, human resources, fiscal management, and fundraising. These costs should be reflected in the program budget.
• **Community Connections**: The adult literacy program relies on and benefits from the host organization’s reputation and connections to the surrounding community, residents, and institutions. The associated costs are mainly paid staff time to develop and maintain partnerships and participate in community activities, as well as membership and registration fees for community networks, coalitions, and special events.

• **Other Expenses** that a program should account for include costs such as insurance, postage, printing, copying, and contracted services.
DEFINING COSTS: A SAMPLE PROGRAM BUDGET

The previous sections of this report describe the 14 Building Blocks for a Quality Adult Literacy Program and the Key Elements for Investment. This section presents a sample budget for a hypothetical program that incorporates all of the Building Blocks and Key Elements, and identifies benchmark program costs. The goal is to illustrate, through one realistic example, the resources needed for a comprehensive, high-quality, and sustainable adult literacy program in New York City.

Context and Method
Given the diversity of adult literacy providers and students, there are many ways a quality adult literacy program could be designed, even when incorporating the same core program components or “Building Blocks.” Many factors directly affect costs, including the size of the program, student population, instructional types and levels, staffing structure, support services, space, location, and the overall size and services of the host organization. It is important to recognize the diversity of program models while still striving to define the prevailing costs of running a quality program.

The sample program budget presented in the following pages captures the cost of the Key Elements for Investment and the 14 Building Blocks described in the previous sections of this report. It is based on a set of specific program assumptions outlined below. The sample program and budget are not intended as a prescriptive model or a one-size-fits-all formula for all programs. Rather, they are meant to serve as one concrete example to demonstrate what it takes and what it costs to implement a comprehensive program.

The budget structure and line item amounts were developed through several rounds of input with programs leaders and project advisors to determine benchmarks for reasonable costs. Many areas of the budget are also informed by comparable educational programs and institutions, including the NYC Department of Education. Median salary data for relevant job titles in New York were also consulted for comparative reference.

Program Design and Budget Assumptions
In order to craft the budget, we needed to define specific parameters for the sample program. The program we designed represents a hypothetical yet realistic, medium-sized, high-quality adult literacy program in New York City. The basic assumptions we used for the sample budget are below.

- The budget reflects the costs for a comprehensive adult literacy program operated within a multi-service community-based organization located in New York City in 2017.
- The program runs 12 yearlong classes: six English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), four Adult Basic Education (ABE), and two High School Equivalency (HSE) classes.
- Each class runs 8-12 hours of instruction a week for 40 weeks a year, for an average of 400 instructional hours per class.
- Each class has an average of 18 slots, for a total of 216 annual program slots for students.
• The program serves a minimum of 216 students for a full program year or more students for shorter periods of engagement, such as 12-week class cycles.

The total number of program slots is based on an average of 18 slots per class. This establishes an average class size that is educationally sound while also leaving flexibility to maintain some smaller or larger classes depending on the type and level of instruction and the variability of classroom space. For example, the program may create smaller beginning level ABE classes for new students who need more individualized attention, and larger advanced ESOL classes for experienced students who are making rapid progress. The number of slots represents the number of active students participating in a class at any given point in the program year. This is different than the average daily attendance across the classes, which will likely be a bit lower, taking into account anticipated student absences.

Understanding the Cost Per Program Slot
The sample budget demonstrates the level of investment needed to operate a comprehensive, quality program of the size and design specified. The budget generates a cost for a program slot for one full program year, regardless of how many students are served through each slot over the course of the year. We use the “cost per slot” as the unit of measure because it is a more reliable and stable unit than the “cost per student,” which varies greatly depending on many factors including program model, student population, student retention, and turnover.

In the sample budget, the program has 216 program slots in 12 yearlong classes. This means that the minimum number of students served in a year would be 216. This would assume that all students continue their studies for a full program year and would likely result in greater gains for a smaller number of students. It is more likely that the program would serve multiple students in at least a portion of the program slots, increasing the overall number of students engaged in a year.

Program models are responsive to student populations with challenging life situations that often do not allow for continuous, extended enrollment. Many programs structure their classes as a series of consecutive shorter class cycles, where at least some new students enroll each quarter or semester to replace others who have advanced and/or left the program for a range of reasons. Some classes may focus on shorter term outcomes, such as an advanced business English class for immigrants with professional degrees who need to quickly brush up their language skills to access the job market in the U.S.

The conclusion is that there is no reliable way to project the “right” number of students served through a certain number of slots without taking an individualized lens to each program and its specific population, design, and goals. There could be two programs of the same size, both of high quality, with one serving twice or three times as many students as the other over the course of a program year. In this scenario, the cost per student would be much lower for the program serving more students for shorter amounts of time. (For example, if two students on average were served in each program slot per year, the cost per student would be half of the cost per slot.)
The goal is not to serve the largest number of students, but rather to engage students for the length of time it takes to reach their educational goals, which varies greatly. Per student funding rates create backwards incentives for programs to have higher student turnover, when most programs are pushing in the other direction to retain and support students to stay engaged long enough to meet their goals. Although this may require a shift in the field’s and funders’ collective frame of reference, we believe that the cost per slot is a better measure of costs for adult literacy programs, and that it should be adopted over cost per student as the standard unit of measure for adult literacy funding.

The actual cost per slot of any program will be affected by its size, students, design, and location. For example, a very large program may have economies of scale and lower unit costs, while a small, specialized, or standalone program (without operational and management support from a host organization) may require greater investment per program slot. Depending on the needs of the students served, a program may run smaller or larger classes, resulting in a higher or lower cost per slot. Furthermore, a program with a greater number of instructional hours per class will likely have a higher cost per slot, while a program with fewer instructional hours per class will likely have a lower cost per slot.

The sample budget presented here is designed to reflect realistic parameters for a program of mid-range size and costs. The resulting cost per slot of $7,400 for 400 hours of instruction and connected support is a new point of reference that can inform discussions and decisions about funding levels and how to support the sustainability of the adult literacy field.
**Defining Costs: A Sample Program Budget for a Community-Based Adult Literacy Program**

The following is an annual operating budget for a hypothetical, comprehensive adult literacy program operated within a multi-service community-based organization located in New York City in 2017.

**Program Parameters and Budget Assumptions:**
* The program runs 12 yearlong classes: six English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), four Adult Basic Education (ABE), two High School Equivalency (HSE) classes.
* Each class runs 8-12 hours of instruction a week for 40 weeks a year, for an average of 400 instructional hours per class.
* Each class has an average of 18 slots, for a total of 216 annual program slots for students.
* The program serves a minimum of 216 students for a full program year or more students for shorter periods of engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Services:</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Calculation</th>
<th>Annual Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program staff:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Manager (1 FT)</td>
<td>Directs all aspects of the program: program development and planning, staff hiring and supervision, professional development, grant management and contract reporting, budget, fundraising, communications, community partnerships.</td>
<td>1 FT @ $80,000</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Program Manager/ Education Coordinator (1 FT)</td>
<td>Coordinates/supervises key program areas, e.g. curriculum and teaching, evening program and staff, volunteer management, intake and enrollment, student assessment, technology integration, communication among teachers and support services staff.</td>
<td>1 FT @ $68,000</td>
<td>68,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (5 FT)</td>
<td>FT teachers have 20 hours per week of direct classroom instruction with 15 hours per week for curriculum development, lesson planning and preparation, meetings, assessment, professional development, and other program and administrative activities.</td>
<td>5 FT @ $65,000 average</td>
<td>325,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (2 PT)</td>
<td>PT teachers have 10-12 hours per week of direct classroom instruction with balance for lesson planning and preparation, meetings, assessment, professional development, and other program and administrative activities.</td>
<td>2 PT @ $35 per hour average x 18 hours per week x 44 weeks (40 weeks instruction + 4 weeks planning and/or intake)</td>
<td>55,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student support services staff (counselors, case managers, advisors, etc.) (3 FTE)</strong></td>
<td>Provide counseling, case management, academic advisement, and/or program-specific supports like employment counseling, re-entry or immigration support. Includes meeting with students; assessing needs and creating service plans; providing personal and academic support; leading workshops; coordinating with other staff; managing referral systems with external service providers; following-up with students; tracking related data; and documenting progress.</td>
<td>3 FTE @ $55,000 average</td>
<td>165,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative support staff (2 FTE)</strong></td>
<td>Provide support for outreach, intake, orientation, testing, data entry and management, support for PT teachers, coordination with support services staff, phone calls to students, follow-up.</td>
<td>2 FTE @ $43,000 average</td>
<td>86,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temp administrative assistance and substitute teachers</strong></td>
<td>Provide extra support during high intensity periods and cover absences, as needed.</td>
<td>$20 per hour average x 400 hours staff time</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management staff:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Prorated portion of executive director salary.</td>
<td>$120,000 @ 5%</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Prorated portion of finance staff to manage program grants and contracts.</td>
<td>$90,000 @ 10%</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared support staff:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Prorated portion of shared receptionist and point of contact for students.</td>
<td>$45,000 @ 20%</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Prorated portion of shared maintenance staff for upkeep of program space.</td>
<td>$18 per hour x 1,820 hours @ 20%</td>
<td>6,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fringe &amp; Benefits</strong></td>
<td>Average cost of fringe and benefits package (FICA, health insurance, retirement, paid time off, etc.)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>204,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal PS:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,022,490</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTPS:</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Cost per slot</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational materials and tools</td>
<td>Books, instructional materials, testing materials, educational software, subscriptions, videos, other educational resources.</td>
<td>$200 average per slot</td>
<td>43,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>Office and classroom supplies for all students and staff.</td>
<td>Estimated cost of annual supplies</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment and maintenance</td>
<td>Computer/technology maintenance, repair, replacement; furniture repair/replacement; copiers, smart boards, projectors, DVD players, cameras, etc.</td>
<td>Includes annual costs @ $80 per slot</td>
<td>17,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy costs</td>
<td>Four classrooms to accommodate 12 class schedules @ 500 square feet each + 1000 square feet of office/program space.</td>
<td>3,000 sq. ft. @ $46 per sq. ft.</td>
<td>138,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities, telephone &amp; internet</td>
<td>Standard utilities costs, plus communication tools (e.g. group text apps).</td>
<td>$1500 per month</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td>Trainers for professional development, IT support, translation, etc. 30 hours per month (20 hours for IT + 10 hours for other consultants).</td>
<td>30 hours per month x $100 per hour consultant rate</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences and training</td>
<td>Registration fees for professional development conferences and trainings for staff.</td>
<td>$800 x 13 FTEs</td>
<td>10,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Staff travel for professional development, training, conferences; and student educational field trips.</td>
<td>$400 x 13 FTEs + $50 per student slot for 3-4 field trips</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
<td>Flexible funds for priority support services, emergency assistance, and/or incentives (e.g. childcare support, emergency Metrocards, stipends for alumni leaders, application fees, gift cards, etc.).</td>
<td>Mid-range amount for program to allocate for priority services/incentives</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other costs</td>
<td>Printing, copying, postage, insurance, special events, membership fees, etc.</td>
<td>$100 per slot</td>
<td>21,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect / organizational management</td>
<td>Accounting, human resources, fundraising, communications, data management, security, etc.</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>208,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal OTPS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>575,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,598,466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cost per annual program slot **$7,400**
Budget Notes:

2. Based on provider input and salary research: $63,510 Median Yearly Wages for "Instructional Coordinators" in NY, www.onetonline.org, 6/26/2017. See also Note 1 above.
3. Based on provider input and salary research: Comparable to NYC Department of Education (DOE) pay scale where teachers start at an annual salary of $54,000 with no Masters or teaching experience and the maximum salary is $119,000. The number of hours allocated for direct instruction is also comparable to NYC DOE high school teachers. An important difference is that DOE teachers have the summer months off, while full-time teachers in this program model continue working (on non-teaching duties) during weeks when classes are not in session. $67,460 Median Yearly Wages for "Adult Basic and Secondary Education and Literacy Teachers" in NY, www.onetonline.org, 6/13/17.
7. Based on provider input.
8. Based on provider estimates of ongoing technology maintenance and replacement costs. Initial capital investment of an estimated $30,000 for 60 laptops is NOT included in this operating budget.
9. Based on program space needs, real estate research, and provider input. In this budget, occupancy represents approximately 10% of direct program costs. A program may have in-kind space, but it is important to account for the real costs of space in New York City.
10. Based on estimated costs of common adult literacy conferences, e.g. TESOL, COABE, NYACCE, which are in the range of $400 for registration plus hotel costs.
11. Costs vary widely depending on program design and specific support services. This estimate is based on provider input on the amount necessary to offer some important support services, but not enough to provide more expensive supports like childcare or transportation for all students.
12. Based on NYC human services sector standard for organizational sustainability (Human Services Council).