



Why We Need a National Digital Library for U.S. Adult Foundational Education

A Proposal from the Adult Foundational Education Digital Library Group

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Adult Foundational Education (AFE) is a vital national resource

AFE (sometimes referred to by such inter-related terms as “adult basic education,” “adult literacy,” “high school equivalency preparation,” and “English for speakers of other languages programs”) provides instructional and other services to help U.S. adults strengthen the oral and written language, numeracy, digital literacy, problem-solving, collaboration, and other essential skills and credentials they need for work, family, civic, and lifelong learning roles. These services are based in multiple institutions and communities, serve diverse populations of adults and out-of-school youth, and often involve other stakeholder partners.

AFE services are hampered by a lack of “historical memory”

This work needs to be carried out by a well-equipped, professional AFE workforce and supported by well-informed policy makers, funders, and other potential partners (e.g., employers, labor unions, public health agencies, correctional programs, and others) who can benefit from and work with AFE. But there is a tendency in the field to reinvent the wheel or use less-than-effective practices because relevant materials that could meaningfully inform practice have not been collected in a coordinated and easily accessible online location. To build on decades of accrued knowledge, AFE practitioners need to be able to draw on previously developed program models, effective curricula and assessment tools, research reports and program evaluations, policy papers, and other relevant documents. A lack of access to and use of valuable resources limits the quality, reach, and sustainability of AFE efforts.

What an Adult Foundational Education Digital Library would do

With the help of COABE, we have in the past year been creating a pilot version of an on-line library containing selected resources related to policy, business partnerships, workplace learning, and community-oriented AFE. But we want to continue this initial promising work to create an expanded library that will ...

- Provide needed, reliable information to AFE providers and supporters (policy makers, funders . . .).
- Provide important primary source information for researchers.
- Build on existing AFE resource collections and on emerging models of digital libraries.
- Be organized as a digital system with a central hub and satellite collections.
- Be staffed and advised by professionals in AFE and digital archiving/libraries.
- Be developed and rolled out in several phases.
- Be supported by a mix of public and private-sector sources.

What is needed now to further build an AFE Digital

- Technical partners who have the skills and capacity to help build a digital library.
- Seed funding and professional staff to support the further development of a digital library of diverse resources.

The AFE Digital Library Group is an ad hoc team of experienced AFE researchers and practitioners formed in April 2022. Please contact Group Coordinator, Paul Jurmo, Ed.D. (pauljurmo@gmail.com), 410-598-3374) for more information. See the full AFE Digital Library Concept Paper at <https://bit.ly/4oamVah> .