First *Literacy Lab* Initiative
Fiscal Year 2021
Request for Proposals

First Literacy Mission and Goals

Established in 1988, the mission of First Literacy is to ensure that adults with low-literacy or limited English proficiency have high-quality educational opportunities that enable them to thrive as individuals and as family members, in their workplaces, and in their communities. We support innovative, effective adult education instruction and adult learners who persevere and strive for higher education.

Description of First *Literacy Lab* Initiative

The goal of the First *Literacy Lab* initiative is to provide grants to stimulate and support the development, trial, and implementation of innovative Adult Basic Education (ABE) educational resources and practices that have an impact on teaching and learning. Grants focus on fresh approaches to instruction, curriculum development, and related areas. They are not intended to fund regular ABE or ESOL classes. We encourage you to think in terms of specific projects that enrich your regular curriculum.

Eligibility

Grants are open to all not-for-profit* ABE programs in Massachusetts. Up to $5,000 may be provided for the development and trial of innovative resources and practices potentially promising to ABE teaching and learning.

Project Guidelines

Because adult education programs in Massachusetts have unique needs, there are many acceptable uses for grant funds. We encourage programs to be creative, think about the unmet needs of their students, and gaps in current programming. Here are some examples of allowable uses for grant funds:

- Developing and piloting curriculum not available from other sources;
- Providing experiential learning opportunities (must include a curricular component), such as partnerships with community organizations or project-based learning.
- Offering an innovative, short-term class that fills an unmet student need (for example, family literacy, a post-HSE math or writing class, digital literacy);

- Implementing a program-wide special project or initiative. Past examples include a civics and leadership initiative, a program-wide poetry project, and a "one-book" project that fostered reading and journaling across all classes.

We encourage projects that develop resources or materials that can be used by your program in future years and/or shared for use with other programs.

Note that *Literacy Lab* funding cannot be used to offset costs for core classes.

If you have an idea you would like to discuss before applying, you are welcome to contact Bryan McCormick at 617-482-3336 ext. 113 or bmccormick@firstliteracy.org.

*Not-for-profit includes community-based programs, public school adult programs, prison programs, and unions. Please contact us if you are unsure of your status.

Additional Information

- All grant awards are from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021.
- An adult education program may apply for more than one grant, but only one grant will be funded in a fiscal year.
- Teachers are encouraged to serve as project leaders.
- Proposals for lesser amounts are welcome.
- In FY21, proposals for projects that significantly build upon an FY20 First *Literacy Lab* grant will also be considered, as long as the project has its own goals, activities, and evaluation protocols.
- Assessments and evaluations of First *Literacy Lab* project goals need to be project-specific and clearly described in the proposal narrative.

Requirements of Applicants and Grantees

1. The proposal review process includes a 30-minute interview for finalists between the applicant, First Literacy staff, and representatives from the First Literacy Community Advisory Council and Board of Directors. We will consider a virtual meeting for applicants who would need to travel long distances.

2. Project leaders will submit a short interim report in January 2021.

3. Final reports describing project activities, final products, and project evaluation will be due no later than June 16, 2021. Reports will include electronic copies of all resources developed as part of the grant. First Literacy will upload products from the project onto its website.

4. Grantees will agree to make a brief presentation on their projects at a First Literacy event in October 2021.

5. Project leaders are encouraged to discuss the project with the Program Director at First Literacy as it evolves. We are happy to offer support along the way.

6. We understand that original ideas might change. Any amendment to project activities, evaluation, or budget must be approved by First Literacy.

7. The Program Director will conduct site visits to assess project progress.

8. Articles or presentations by grantees on First *Literacy Lab* projects are encouraged and should include reference to First Literacy's support of the project.

Grant Application Checklist

The application guidelines are available on our website, https://firstliteracy.org.

For a Microsoft Word version of the application that can be used as a template, please contact Bryan McCormick at bmccormick@firstliteracy.org.

Your application must include the following items:

1. Cover sheet
2. Proposal narrative, including the Activities / Outcomes Chart
3. Budget

Dates/Timeline

- **Release of Request for Proposals**

  February 19th, 2020

- **Information Session**

  Friday, March 13, 2020, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

- **Proposals Due:**

  April 29, 2020, 5:00 p.m.

  Send to Bryan McCormick at bmccormick@firstliteracy.org. **Late or incomplete proposals will not be accepted**. Please submit documents as a combined Word or PDF file.

- **Finalist Interviews** (Individually scheduled and required of all finalists)

  May 5 – 21, 2020

- **Announcement of grant awards**

  June 15, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Q: Who do I contact if I have questions?**

   A: Bryan McCormick, Program Director, may be reached at bmccormick@firstliteracy.org or 617-482-3336 ext. 113.

2. **Q: How many proposals may I submit?**

   *A: Each program may submit any number of proposals. First Literacy will only fund **one** proposal per program.*

3. **Q: How should I submit my proposal?**

   *A: Proposals will only be accepted via email. Send the grant proposal as a **single PDF** file to* Bryan McCormick at bmccormick@firstliteracy.org. *We will be printing out and circulating the proposals to readers in hard copies.*

4. **Why do I need to come in for an interview, and who will interview me?**
   A: Interviews give you a chance to tell us a little more about your ideas and how you plan to carry them out. It also gives you a chance to ask us questions. We envision the interview as a conversation. You will meet with First Literacy staff, a member of the First Literacy Community Advisory Council, and a member of our Board of Directors.

5. **Q: I live in western Massachusetts. Will I have to drive to Boston for a 30-minute interview?**

   A: For applicants who live well beyond the Greater Boston area, we can arrange for a virtual meeting. We prefer face-to-face, but we understand the challenge of long-distance travel.

6. **Q: If we are awarded a grant, how are we paid?**

   A: First Literacy pays the program half of the award by September 30, 2020. Your final report and final submission of grant materials are due June 15, 2021. We will pay your second installment by June 30, 2021 if we have received the final report and materials. We reserve the right to withhold final payment if the project gets abandoned before any significant work has been completed.

7. **Q: What am I expected to do as part of the *Literacy Lab* sharing presentation?**

   A: The lead teacher (and any collaborators) will present their project to ABE colleagues for 30-45 minutes at an event in October 2021. We will support you in designing your presentation.

8. **Q: What kind of support may I expect from First Literacy?**

   A: Our intention is to help you implement a strong project. We are available to support you with any reasonable requests, such as finding resources, solving problems, adjusting to unexpected changes, etc.

9. **Q: What kind of monitoring can I expect from First Literacy?**

    A: Bryan McCormick, Program Director, will schedule a site visit with you to look at the project in action, to check in about how things are progressing, and to see what support you might need.

10. **Q: What kind of reporting will I be required to complete?**

    A: You will need to fill out a short interim report and a final report that includes student demographic data, outcomes, and any final products. ***Please note: We send all correspondence about the grant to each person who is part of the project.***

11. **Q: Why do you need the demographics of our students?**

    A: When we apply for grants, we are often asked about the demographics of students who benefit from our services. In your program application, you will be asked about the demographics of your program. If you receive a grant, you will share the demographics of students served by the project in your final report.

12. **Q: I plan to submit a proposal to a conference based on my First *Literacy Lab* grant project, but I won't know if I am accepted at the time of my grant submission. How should I handle this in the budget?**

    A: Use a provisional amount depending on whether your conference is in New England or out of state. Contact First Literacy when you are accepted. If you are not accepted, we can make a budget modification and you can use those funds in another way.

13. **Q: What happens if things don't work out the way we projected in our original proposal?**

    A: If you need to make a change, and your original goals are still on track, it's probably fine. But you do need to contact First Literacy with your request, so we know about the changes and can approve them. This is particularly important if you are making budget change requests.

14. **Q: Can you tell me more about the activities/outcomes chart?**

    A: The purpose of this chart is to think ahead about how you plan to implement your project. For example, in the first few weeks, you might want to do a pre-survey or assessment of some kind. In the weeks that follow, you will need to plan for certain tasks that will bring you closer to reaching your overall goal. We view this chart as a planning tool for you to think through the project step by step and to show us how you plan to proceed.

15. **Q: Why do you give us a limited number of pages to write about our idea?**

    A: The Literacy Lab grants are small. We are looking for focused projects with clear goals and processes. The more focused you are, the clearer you will be about what you want to achieve.