

COLLABORATIONS WITH LIBRARIES OFFER NEW LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMMIGRANTS

Examples from THE NETWORKS FOR INTEGRATING NEW AMERICANS INITIATIVE

How can public libraries and adult education programs work together to strengthen each other's services to immigrant language learners? This fact sheet describes how community networks in three different parts of the country answered this question. Each one received support to build its collaborative work through the Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative.

THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION

The federally-funded adult education system serves the language, academic, and work readiness needs of the country's adult residents. Among these are immigrants and refugees who vary by level of formal education, age, learning goals, and length of time in the United States. Adult English as a Second Language programs are among the first entities that welcome and orient immigrants to their new home community and that provide a pathway to further education and training. Yet, the adult education system is only able to reach roughly 7% ([OCTAE, 2010](#)) of adults in need of language instruction. Collaboration with local libraries extends that reach by providing English language learners with an array of learning opportunities for individuals and families. These activities and resources supplement the language, citizenship, and employment preparation available in adult education programs, and accelerates the pace at which adults can progress toward their goals.

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

The mission of the public library system is to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. Libraries play an important role connecting newcomers to community resources, and offering services that build English language, literacy, and employability skills. Free access to computers and online resources, along with the individualized assistance offered by librarians, creates a welcoming environment for immigrants and their families. The role of libraries continues to grow as new immigrants settle outside of traditional gateway cities where there are fewer resources to facilitate their economic and social integration. Collaboration with adult education programs is valuable to libraries because joint programming introduces a broad range of immigrant and refugee language learners to the library and its many events, resources, and activities.

NETWORKS FOR INTEGRATING NEW AMERICANS

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) funded the Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative to advance the capacity of local networks to support the civic, linguistic, and economic integration of immigrants and refugees. The networks in this initiative tapped into further support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (Uvin and Hildreth, 2014), the National Endowment for the Arts, and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to help libraries and federally-funded adult education programs enhance the basic skills, employability, citizenship, and quality of life for newcomers. With adult education programs playing a central role, the networks coordinated their resources, strategies, and services to more effectively address the needs of both immigrant and receiving communities.



Adult learners benefit from additional practice and study at the library.

THE NETWORKS

The We Rhode Island Network (WeRIN) is a network of three adult education providers that has focused its efforts on addressing the economic integration needs of immigrant adults by using the public library system as a hub for services that build job readiness, digital literacy, and English language skills. The library and adult education programs collaborate on the Adult Lifelong Learning (ALL) Access Project, where adults can visit drop-in "Learning Lounges" for support with real-life tasks that require a range of language and computer skills. These might include online job or college applications, resume preparation, citizenship or other test practice, and writing for college.

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Fresno County, California, is home to almost a quarter of a million immigrant residents, many of whom work in agriculture. The rates of naturalization among those who are eligible remain low. **The Central Valley Immigrant Integration Network** was established to build a strong system of services to support these immigrants on a pathway to citizenship. As part of this effort, the Fresno County Public Library created dedicated space in several branches for "Citizenship Corners" where patrons can find accurate information about the naturalization process and citizenship test preparation.

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In King County, Washington, **the White Center Promise Network** brings residents together to share their experiences and to foster civic engagement. To that end, the network participated in a community-wide Big Read Campaign that provided creative ways for residents of all ages to read, discuss, and learn about immigrant experiences. The campaign featured the novel, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, about an Ethiopian immigrant shopkeeper and his friends as they make a new life in a quickly gentrifying neighborhood. The King County Library collaborated with the adult education program at Highline College to involve adult learners in Big Read activities throughout the community.

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“The best events were those done in schools and neighborhoods where people lived. You need to take programming to people.” (Jo Anderson Cavinta, King County Library)

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The networks found that their cross-agency collaboration improved the system of services available to adult students and also benefited their respective organizations. Adult education providers and libraries found that:

1. Cross-agency collaborations help build a system of supports that connect immigrants to community resources and activities.

When networks of organizations collaborate, they provide opportunities for adults to apply what they've learned in the English language classroom to real life activities, and to navigating their communities more fully. They also contribute to the creation of more welcoming communities by bringing together immigrants and long-term residents for activities that encourage learning with and about one another.

In **Central Valley**, Citizenship Corners at the Fresno County Public Library connect immigrant patrons to a wide range of civic resources that supplement the citizenship classes offered by the Fresno Adult School (FAS). The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) supports the Citizenship Corners by providing learning materials and by visiting the branches to explain the naturalization process. Their presentation includes mock citizenship exam interviews to demonstrate exactly what will occur, and guidance to dispel myths and fears about the process. While at the library, adult learners can access information about additional services through a customized web page that includes information about immigration, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), legal support, voter information, and classes for English and citizenship. The library also hosts naturalization oath ceremonies which allow the local community to witness the civic commitment of their immigrant neighbors and celebrate their accomplishment.

In **White Center**, immigrants and refugees joined with long-term residents to enjoy a range of Big Read activities organized by the network. The adult education program at Highline College contributed by preparing language learners for their participation in a variety of community events:

- Book discussions facilitated by local immigrants at partner agencies, such as the King County Housing Authority.
- A library-hosted naturalization ceremony, coordinated with the local office of USCIS.
- An exhibit of African masks at the Seattle Art Museum that explored the theme of disguise in the lives of those who come from other cultures.
- Visual storytelling workshops to engage the Somali, Vietnamese, Latino, and other immigrant and refugee groups in using art to tell their stories. Many of the resulting works of art were displayed in a local exhibit.
- A theatrical reading and writing workshops for youth led by the book's author.

At the **Providence** Public Library, Learning Lounges provide a comfortable environment where adults are able to network, get referrals to education and employment services, and develop language and computer skills. Learning Lounges are open for 6-9 hours a week at four sites and staffed by adult education instructors, college work-study students, and librarians. This dedicated learning time adds to the language practice that immigrant adults receive through their regular English classes, and allows adults on program waiting lists to begin developing their skills.

2. Collaboration between libraries and adult education programs creates flexible, varied, and student-directed learning opportunities

Collaborations enrich learning by providing language learners with opportunities to authentically interact with English speakers outside the classroom. Because many of these opportunities are structured as drop-in services, adults are able to choose the activities that best suit their needs at a level of intensity they can manage. They might come to the library for one-to-one tutoring, self-guided study, topical workshops, or conversation practice. The varied programming expands access for students with diverse learning preferences, skill levels, schedules, and transportation options.

The Fresno Adult School diversifies its programming by bringing students to the **Fresno County Public Library** for independent study in the Citizenship Corner, educational games, celebrations of citizenship, and other activities that enable immigrant and receiving community students to enjoy time together and develop comradery and connection. FAS continues to foster and build on this sense of community through activities at the adult education program.

“It is imperative that staff working in branches with Citizenship Corners receive training so that they can answer questions about library resources without ever crossing the line into advice, particularly when it pertains to the legal issues of citizenship.” (Michelle Gordon, Fresno County Public Library)

The **Providence Public Library**’s Learning Lounges offer adult language learners and other library patrons a relaxed atmosphere for learning. Visitors determine the tasks they want to work on and the kind of support they need in order to build their language and digital literacy skills. Although patrons can come to the library anytime to use its computers, they come to the Learning Lounge for personalized support as well as the social support of learning from and with peers.

The **King County Library** in White Center wanted to make its Big Read activities accessible to English language learners and collaborated with Highline College’s adult education program to prepare immigrants and refugees to participate in community-wide activities. Their strategies included translating excerpts of the text into several languages, providing bilingual facilitators for book discussions, incorporating visual storytelling activities, and bringing their events out into the neighborhoods where immigrants live. The ESL teachers at Highline College contributed to this inclusive effort by developing language lessons based on the book’s themes and exploring how the classroom can help create a sense of community for adult learners who might feel isolated.

3. Collaboration extends the reach of both partners into new communities. When adult education programs offer activities at the library, it builds their visibility to potential adult learners. Library patrons are reminded of educational services available to them and to others they may want to refer. As these services get expanded out to the branches, adult education providers can reach adults in more remote locations. Conversely, library-hosted education activities introduce adult ESL students to the varied and innovative services of the library, from family literacy activities to the lending of a substantial and growing array of resources.

In **Rhode Island**, the expansion of adult education services into new community settings enabled the library’s adult education program to reach adults who are not likely to attend regular classes. The program’s strategy was to locate two of its Learning Lounges in One Stop Career Centers, where counselors could refer job-seekers who needed remedial help in order to qualify for training programs. The program now seeks



English language learners get personalized support at the Learning Lounge.

While many libraries offer workshops for job-seekers (on resume-writing, for example) or provide the opportunity to “book a librarian” for 1-1 help with technology, they should consider the needs learners have for follow-up support. Ongoing access is important. (Karisa Tashjian, Providence Public Library)

funding to expand the number of Learning Lounges (and hours of operation) to six new, highly-accessible locations, including the parents’ lounge at a high school and a public housing development.

In **Central Valley**, the popularity of the Fresno County Public Library’s Citizenship Corners resulted in plans to add such spaces to two new libraries per month until there are Citizenship Corners in all branches. This expansion will bring information about available adult education and citizenship classes to all the new Citizenship Corner visitors.

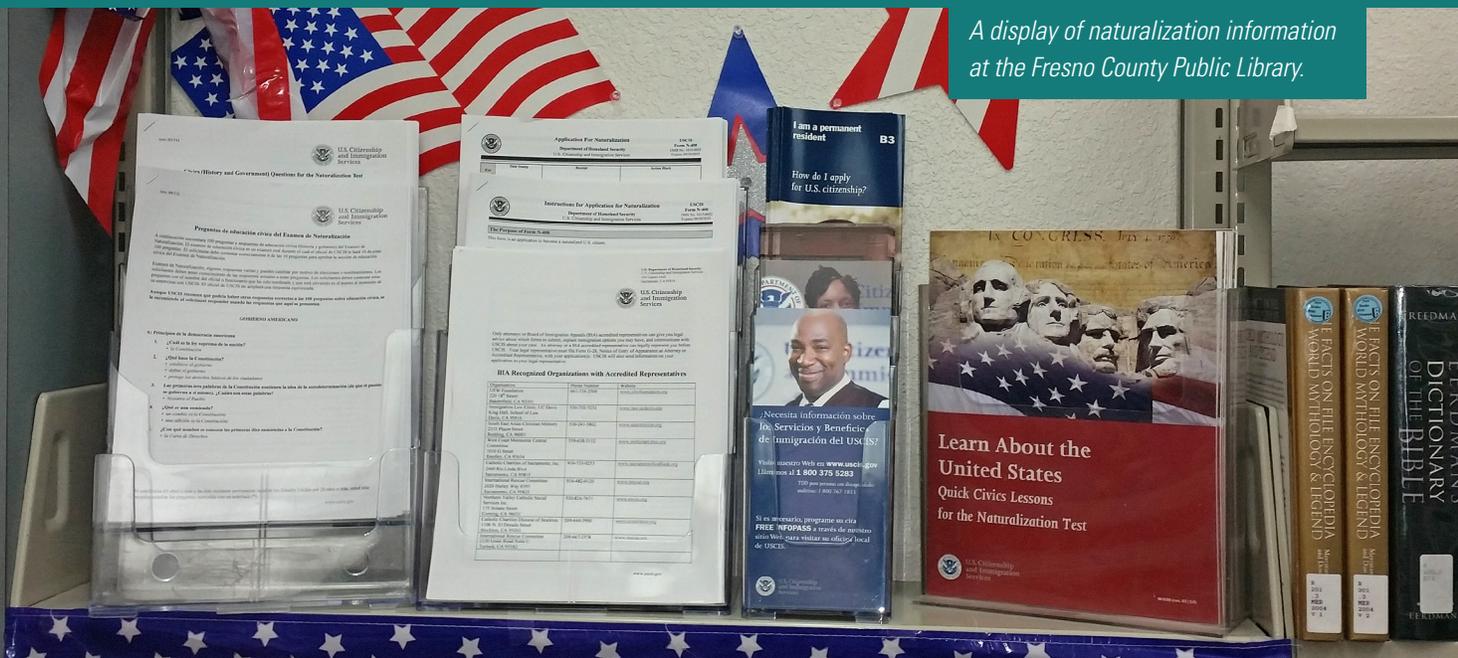
4. Collaboration builds awareness of the role adult education plays in immigrant integration and increases access to funding.

Public and private funders are increasingly aware of the benefits of coordinated networks, such as their capacity to offer innovative programs that have a strong collective impact. This gives effective networks a competitive edge over single organizations. A successful collaboration demonstrates to funders the value of expanding their support or of contributing to a jointly-funded project. The three networks featured here were able to leverage their network strength to secure additional funding and support for their varied efforts.

In **Central Valley**, collaboration with the Fresno County Public Library and other partners helped the Fresno Adult School (FAS) exceed the performance targets for its USCIS citizenship services grant, thereby positioning FAS for increased funding. This strong collaborative effort helped to attract USCIS funding for the library’s Citizenship Corners, as well as in-kind support from the library in the form of space for citizenship classes and funding for 150 new citizenship resources.

The Big Read campaign in **White Center** was primarily funded by a grant to the King County Library from the National Endowment for the Arts. This national grant was then supplemented by smaller local grants for particular aspects of the work. The local arts foundation, for example, provided funding to add visual storytelling workshops that enabled English language learners to contribute to the community conversation through their artistic representations.

Finally, nurturing strong and intentional connections between the **Providence** Public Library and several adult education programs enabled those partners to leverage access to each other’s services. The education programs used the library’s IMLS-funded Learning Lounges to supplement their ESL services with individualized tutoring and support. At the same time, the library hosted an adult education-funded Jobs Club for low-income English learners that enabled the library to attract and better serve its patrons. This reciprocal collaboration enhanced the services that each organization could proudly claim a role in offering.



A display of naturalization information at the Fresno County Public Library.

The Networks for Integrating New Americas initiative was led by World Education and its partners: Community Science, IMPRINT, National Partnership for New Americans, Network Impact, Inc., and Welcoming America. See the report on lessons learned from the initiative (Kallenbach and Nash, 2016) and related project resources, such as webinars and additional fact sheets, at www.worlded.org/us.

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