

The Literacy Alliance

Strategic Framework:
March 2022

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I. The Strategic Context

Mission and Vision

The Literacy Alliance (TLA) was founded in 1972 to help adults learn to read and improve reading through one-on-one tutoring. Services expanded in 1988 with the opening of adult learning centers to help adults prepare for the high school equivalency exam. By teaching through learning centers, literacy programs, and tutoring services, TLA was able to meet the needs of a growing number of adults in need of basic education, HSE preparation, and English language instruction.

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The work of TLA is guided by the vision of a community in which everyone is empowered to reach their personal, employment, and community engagement goals. TLA's contribution to this broad vision is to **foster life-changing learning through functional literacy**. To this end, TLA serves adult learners who need to improve their academic skills, prepare for the high school equivalency test, strengthen their English fluency, or gain employability skills.

The Organizational Core

The organizational core is the foundation of nonprofit strategy and is made up of the following four essential elements of the organization:

Target Population (“Who needs us most?”): We serve adults in need of stronger academic skills, with an emphasis on adults functioning at the lower end of the literacy scale.

Priority Need (“What do they need most from us?”): We provide personalized instruction designed to put adults back on track to meet personal goals.

Defining Qualities (“What are the key characteristics of our organization?”): TLA is the only community-based agency dedicated primarily to adult literacy and is the only option for the lowest-functioning adults.

Impact (“How do we define success?”): Externally, success is defined as academic gains as measured by formal assessments. Internally, TLA defines success as the ability of adults to attain their personal goals.

Program Model

In 2021, TLA was presented with an opportunity to address early literacy in elementary schools through the acquisition of Project READS (PR). The purpose of PR is to help struggling early readers through supplemental instruction, with the goal of having all students read at the appropriate level by the end of grade three. Research has demonstrated that students reading at grade level by this time are more likely to persist to high school graduation resulting in fewer adult learners to be served in later years.

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TLA will honor its commitment to nurture the PR program on behalf of the community. However, TLA's primary commitment is the enhancement and expansion of services aimed at the functional literacy needs of adults in Fort Wayne, as described below.

Adult Basic Education (Pre-HSE): Adults seeking to complete the HSE or achieve personal goals but who read below the sixth-grade level are assigned to basic level instruction. While eventual completion of the HSE is attainable, success for most students in ABE is measured in skill gains and the attainment of personal goals.

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High School Equivalency (HSE): Adults who test at the sixth-grade level or higher are eligible to enroll in classes designed for individuals seeking to attain the HSE. Currently, TLA has the capacity to serve more adults in the program. Further, TLA believes that demand for HSE preparation will increase over time.

English Language Learners (ELL): Although the need is great, there is uncertainty around current and future demand for ELL instruction. TLA will continue to identify meaningful goals and metrics for outputs and outcomes that meet the expectations of potential funders and provide empowerment to students.

Employability: A defining characteristic of functional literacy is that it moves beyond instruction and into the application of skills. For TLA, this presents an opportunity to bridge functional literacy instruction and employment by providing instruction and training to employees of social enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and small business.

Funding Mix

The strength of the funding mix for a nonprofit is a function of three key factors. The first is the reliability of the funding from each source. The second factor is the percentage from each source relative to the overall mix. And third, the nonprofit must have the infrastructure needed to raise money from each source. For example, event planning, grant writing, and the cultivation of major gifts each require a specific set of skills and types of external relationships. Below is a snapshot of the financial mix for TLA for the 2020-21 fiscal year:

Total Revenue: \$1,255,741

- Foundation Grants: \$776,259 (62%)**
- Individual and Corporate Support: \$94,168 (8%)**
 - *Charitable Contributions: \$57,646 (5%)*
 - *Fundraising Events: \$36,522 (3%)*
- Government Contracts: \$326,401 (26%)**
- Investments: \$4,555 (<1%)**
- Other: \$54,358 (4%)**
- Fee-for-Service: 0**

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The defining feature of the TLA funding mix is its reliance on external sources (foundation grants, individual and corporate support, and government contracts) for 95% of annual revenue. Because of the challenges inherent in creating an internal revenue stream from fee-for-service programs, the strategic challenge for TLA is to strengthen its resource development efforts to lessen the vulnerability associated with foundation and government funding.

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II. Strategic Priorities

Currently, the TLA program mix includes programs and services in the following three categories:

Tier I: Adult Literacy – Programs in Tier I directly address all aspects of the organizational core as presented in this document.

Tier II: Early Literacy – Project Reads is the only program in this category, which includes literacy needs of children and youth in grades one through twelve.

Tier III: Community Resource – Upon request, TLA will provide on-site training for businesses, agencies, and other organizations.

TLA has identified two broad strategic priorities to guide its work over the next three to five years. Each is presented below, along with a rationale and focus areas within each priority.

Strategic Priority 1: Increase participation in Tier I programs (Pre-HSE, HSE, and ELL).

Rationale: Demographic data show that large numbers of adults in the community lack a high school diploma and/or do not speak English. TLA believes that it can attract a higher percentage of students from these populations by raising awareness of the availability and benefits of its Tier I programs. TLA will accomplish this through a comprehensive marketing and outreach program aimed at three objectives:

- Clarifying the role of TLA as a provider of adult basic education.
- Advocating for the public benefits of adult literacy.
- Encouraging adults to fill learning gaps.

TLA will continue to consider Tier II opportunities based on the following criteria:

- The need is related to a substantiated benchmark in the area of literacy.
- The outcomes of the initiative will help break the cycle of illiteracy.
- The partner agency is willing to invest its own resources in the initiative.

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Tier III program opportunities will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with emphasis on the following criteria:

- The program will generate excess revenue that can support Tier I programs.
- TLA has excess staff capacity that can be dedicated to the program.
- The program does not detract from higher-priority programs.

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Strategic Priority 2: Increase individual and corporate support.

Rationale: TLA has been intentional in diversifying its revenue and funding streams. Currently, over 70% of its total annual revenue is from individual giving, events, foundation grants, and corporate sponsorships. While TLA will continue to explore grant and contract opportunities, its primary focus will be on individual and corporate support, including major donors and event sponsorships. TLA will strive to raise \$150,000 from these sources by 2025. While TLA has not set percentage goals for each of its funding sources, it will conduct regular reviews to identify areas of vulnerability and will reallocate time and effort accordingly.