

First Literacy Grants Program Request for Proposals

Application Deadline: March 25, 2011

Your proposal may be submitted electronically to Michael Feher at mfeher@firstliteracy.org. You may also submit an original, unstapled proposal in person or by mail to First Literacy, 160 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116.

First Literacy

First Literacy was established in 1988 to mobilize private-sector support and public awareness to strengthen Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Boston. We believe that literacy and basic education are inherent rights of every individual. Our goal is to support community-based adult literacy/ABE programs in the Greater Boston area that are committed to participatory, learner-centered education that provide adult learners with the opportunity to improve the quality of *their* lives, to become better parents, and to reach their educational and professional goals.

Eligibility

First Literacy will accept proposals from community-based, nonprofit organizations that operate an adult literacy/ABE program in Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, or Watertown. All applicants must have 501c3 status or a fiscal agent with that status.

Funding Opportunities

The following is a listing of the kinds of ABE classes and services First Literacy will support with its grants. The list is not necessarily all-inclusive. (Note the need to state a strong case for the support of program operation costs.)

1. New and existing ABE classes, including ESOL; Basic Literacy; Adult Secondary Education (ASE)/GED; Pre- ASE/GED; Basic ABE Instruction in Reading, Writing, and Math; Computer and Digital Literacy; and Bridge-to-College/Training Classes. (Existing classes must have a clear history of learner gains.) Tutoring services that support such instruction may also be funded.
2. Special projects and elective classes that are offered in addition to learners' core ABE instruction, in areas such as Health Education, Parenting, Family Literacy, Financial Literacy, Civic Participation, and Student Leadership and Empowerment.
3. Support services such as Counseling and Childcare.
4. Program operation costs (such as administrative costs) that are crucial to the operation of proven community-based ABE programs. (The operation costs for which a program is requesting support must be clearly specified. A strong case must also be made explaining why such costs are crucial to the program's operation *and* why First Literacy's support is needed to cover such costs.)

Collaborative classes and projects are encouraged.

General Guidelines

New literacy programs must have substantial and firm funding commitments from other sources in order to be considered. First Literacy gives preference to adult literacy/ABE programs that have at least one year of experience providing ABE classes and services.

Programs without clearly-established student-centered, participatory practices and instruction need to describe their plans to become more student-centered and participatory in fiscal years 2012 and 2013.

Instructional intensity correlates strongly with student progress. First Literacy prefers that funded programs provide learners with a minimum of five hours of instruction a week. (If a program offers fewer than five hours of instruction a week, it must explain why it does so.)

Adult learners should have the opportunity to move toward their educational and professional goals within an adult literacy/ABE program. Programs should provide a continuum of services with at least three levels of instruction. (If a program does not offer a continuum of at least three levels of instruction, it must provide First Literacy with a clear plan to move students on to other area literacy programs.)

Programs must have instituted ways of assessing and tracking learner progress. Whatever tools or processes programs choose to use for student evaluation, their assessment protocol must be capable of measuring student progress before and after a period of instruction.

Programs should also be working with learners to help them identify and reach their educational and professional goals. This includes referring them to their “next steps,” whether to a program with higher-level ABE classes, a Bridge-to-College or Training program, job training, college, or new employment.

Continuous program improvement and the professional development of all staff should be priorities.

Available Funding

While the maximum grant request that will be considered is \$25,000, in the last funding cycle, the largest grant awarded was \$21,500, the smallest \$8,000, with an average of approximately \$14,500. The requested grant amount may not exceed 25 percent of the program's annual budget for adult education. (The 25 percent figure is based only on expenditures for adult literacy.)

The grant allocations are for two years, with the second year of funding subject to the availability of funds and satisfactory program performance.

If there is a significant turnover in program staff, a loss of funding which would put First Literacy's grant at a percentage higher than 25 percent of the program's annual budget for adult literacy, or a situation that appears to involve a philosophical change, First Literacy may withhold funding until it is able to determine the impact of these changes.

Writing the Proposal

- Proposals must be fully completed and must contain all required attachments.
- The maximum proposal length is ten typed, easily readable pages, i.e., font size 11 pt or larger with at least 1.5 lines spacing. The Request Summary, the Program Information Form, First Literacy's Budget Forms, Budget Narrative, and the Program Diversity Form are not part of the ten page limit. First Literacy will not consider proposals over ten pages.
- Unsolicited attachments are welcome but will not be made available to all readers.
- First Literacy may request additional information from programs. This may be done in the form of an interview with the program administrator.

- Multiple requests from one program will not be considered. Please select the one most appropriate for funding from First Literacy.

Deadlines and Notification

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| • Friday, February 18, 2011 | RFP available by email |
| • Tuesday, March 1, 2011, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m. | Grant Seekers' Forum at Boston Public Library |
| • Friday, March 25, 2011, 5:00 p.m. | Proposals due at First Literacy office |
| • April, May 2011 | Pre-grant interviews, if requested |
| • June 30, 2011 | Grant decisions announced |
| • July 1, 2011 | Earliest possible start-up date |

Review Process

Successful proposals clearly define and document the compelling need they address. They present a well-constructed program design, with clearly-set goals, and plans for action and evaluation that are consistent with First Literacy's guidelines.

Proposals submitted are reviewed and scored by First Literacy's staff and Community Advisory Council members, all of whom have signed an Ethical Procurement Practices statement in accordance with MGL c. 268 A & B. Any advisory council members affiliated with organizations which have submitted a funding request abstain from reviewing or commenting on that request, are absent during its discussion, and do not participate in votes regarding the request. The First Literacy staff and advisory council make its grant recommendations to the Education Committee of First Literacy's Board of Directors, which in turn makes its recommendations to the full Board of Directors. It is the Board of Directors which approves and awards all grants.

In order to allocate its limited resources as judiciously as possible, the Community Advisory Council and the Board of Directors consider several factors, internal and external to a program and its proposal, in making their grant determinations.

Internal factors considered include:

1. Commitment to a participatory, learner-centered approach to programming and instruction
2. The urgency and the weight of the literacy need
2. A class or project design that directly responds to that need
3. The anticipated impact and benefit of the grant
4. A match between First Literacy's priorities and the project
5. The feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the proposed project
6. The program's history and accomplishments (if applicable)
7. The financial condition and quality of fiscal management of the program
8. A program's success in implementing a previous First Literacy grant (if applicable)

External factors may include:

1. The program's need in comparison to that raised by other programs
2. An equitable distribution of resources among ESOL and other ABE programming
3. An equitable distribution of resources among educational levels
4. Evidence of collaborations or partnerships with other programs
5. First Literacy's goal of providing support to all Greater Boston neighborhoods and populations

Site Visits and Reporting Requirements for Funded Programs

If funded, programs must comply with site visit and reporting requirements, as described below.

Site visits are conducted annually by First Literacy's Director of Programs and a member of the First Literacy Community Advisory Council or other member of the First Literacy staff. Members of First Literacy's Board of Directors may also participate in program site visits. (More than one site visit per year may be requested by either the funded program or First Literacy.)

During site visits, classes funded by First Literacy are observed. (In the case of programs receiving a grant supporting another facet of its operation, an ABE class selected by First Literacy and the program will be observed.) Interviews with an administrator, instructor, and learners are conducted. Discussions include ways that programs are student-centered and participatory, learners' progress and goal attainment, referrals to learners' next steps, and professional development and other technical assistance that First Literacy may provide. The discussion and evaluation of programs include not only the component supported by First Literacy, but the entire program. Reports of First Literacy site visits will be sent to programs. Recommendations made by First Literacy to programs will require a written response. (This may be done in the program's report due to First Literacy at the end of each fiscal year.)

Funded programs submit a Progress Report at the end of the first year of the funding cycle and a Final Report at the end of the second year. These reports include discussions of the program's key accomplishments during the past year and learners' achievements and demographic information, as well as brief descriptions of program and staff development activities.

Funded programs may also be required to submit program and staff development priorities in September of each year of funding and to participate in annual meetings to share their projects, accomplishments and challenges with staff of other programs funded by First Literacy.