

ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION

In Immigrant Communities

*Identifying
Policy
and
Program
Priorities
for Helping
Newcomers
Learn
English*



Adult Literacy Education In Immigrant Communities:

Identifying Policy and Program Priorities
for Helping Newcomers Learn English



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About Us



The **Asian American Justice Center** (AAJC) works to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans. AAJC is a leading national voice to advance equality for all Americans. AAJC provides balanced, non-partisan analysis, technical assistance, public education, public policy, and litigation. Our goals are to:

Promote Civic Engagement: AAJC ensures that Asian Americans have the tools and institutional support they need to participate more fully in shaping the policies and programs that affect their communities on a local, regional, and national level.

Forge Strong and Safe Communities: AAJC helps build Asian American community leadership, combats hate crimes, and promotes productive race relations.

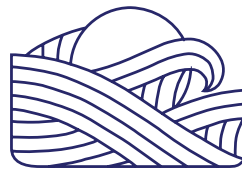
Create an Inclusive Society: AAJC assists Asian Americans to successfully challenge unnecessary barriers and unfair restrictions to equal and fair access to justice and public programs.

AAJC is a leading national expert on issues affecting the Asian American community and one that offers a pan-Asian perspective on issues such as hate

crimes and race relations, affirmative action, immigration and immigrant rights, language access, census and voting rights.

AAJC also works with a strong and growing network of nearly 100 community-based organizations. They keep AAJC informed of what is happening in the growing Asian American communities in 49 cities and 23 states and the District of Columbia, as well as partner with AAJC to build strong communities.

AAJC is affiliated with three regional organizations. Together, as partners, they work to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders:



**ASIAN PACIFIC
AMERICAN
LEGAL CENTER
OF
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

The **Asian Pacific American Legal Center** (APALC) was established in 1983 as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) and has become the largest organization in southern California that provides Asian and Pacific Islander and other communities with multi-lingual, culturally sensitive services and legal education.

APALC's in-house attorneys and paralegals have developed expertise in a

variety of areas, such as immigration and naturalization, workers' rights, family law and domestic violence, immigrant welfare, voting rights and anti-discrimination, and have also worked towards building inter-ethnic relations.

Its language capacity includes: Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Malayalam, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese. Interpretation in other languages can also be arranged.

APALC's mission is to advocate for civil rights, provide legal services and education and build coalitions to positively influence and impact Asian Pacific Americans and to create a more equitable and harmonious society.

Asian Law Caucus

Founded in 1972, the mission of the **Asian Law Caucus** is to promote, advance and represent the legal and civil rights of the Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Recognizing that social, economic, political and racial inequalities continue to exist in the United States, the Asian Law Caucus is committed to the pursuit of equality and justice for all sectors of our society with a specific focus directed toward addressing the needs of low-income Asian and Pacific Islanders.

Since the vast majority of Asians and Pacific Islanders in America are immigrants and refugees, the Caucus strives to create informed and educated communities empowered to assert their rights and to participate actively in American society. This perspective is reflected in our broad strategy which integrates the provision of legal services, educational programs, community organizing initiatives and advocacy.



Asian American Institute

The **Asian American Institute** was established in 1992 as a pan-Asian not-for-profit organization. The mission is to empower the Asian American community through advocacy, utilizing research, education and coalition building.

Specifically, the Institute works to improve cooperation and mutual understanding by bringing ethnic Asian American communities together, raising the visibility of the Asian American community and spotlighting its concerns so that elected officials, policy makers and the general public will understand, gather and disseminate data about Asian American communities.

Preface

English proficiency is critical to increasing immigrants' participation in the economic and civic life of their communities. It helps promote economic advancement, improved health, and civic participation. An estimated 23.3 million adults are Limited English Proficient (LEP), of which 3.5 million come from Asia or the Pacific Islands (American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). While English programs are offered in most localities, there are long waiting lists, overcrowded classrooms, programs of uneven quality, and no coherent strategy for addressing this growing challenge on a national level.

This report provides an overview of the issues discussed at the *Adult Literacy Education in Immigrant Communities* convening held in Washington, D.C. on September 22, 2006, supplemented by existing research and reports. Organized by the Asian American Justice Center, in partnership with the National Immigration Forum and the National Council of La Raza, the meeting brought together more than 50 stakeholders to discuss strategies for increasing immigrants' access to high-quality adult literacy programs. The participants, listed in the Appendix, represent many different sectors that work with LEP adults, including advocates and service providers from immigrant, literacy, education, labor, business, faith-based, refugee resettlement, government and research institutions. The convening focused on the following questions:

- “What Works” to increase English language learning for different populations?
- What are priority areas for action?
- Can the key stakeholders arrive at a shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing infrastructure and system for providing English instruction to immigrants?
- Are there specific barriers that need to be addressed and additional infrastructure that needs to be built?
- What data, public opinion research, information and participation by additional stakeholders are needed to successfully advocate for improving the system and increasing available resources? Is this best done on a local, state or national level?
- What policies, models and partnerships could improve LEP adults' access to high-quality English learning programs and increase these programs' capacity?
- Is there interest among stakeholders across various sectors in developing collaborative advocacy efforts to address these challenges? What issues are best suited for forming strategic alliances?

Follow-Up Strategies: Participants also agreed that there needs to be a concerted effort by various stakeholders – nonprofit organizations, educators, supportive foundations, labor and business groups, and others – to convince potential funders to support broad-based efforts to improve ESOL programs at a time when there are promising opportunities to effect positive, systemic changes. Support should go to

national as well as regional efforts to improve ESOL programming.

As described in this report, the current systems for providing language instruction to limited English-speaking adults are severely underfunded, and the field lacks strong infrastructure for coordinating the delivery of services, advocacy and research across sectors. With the immigrant population projected to experience rapid growth and play an increasingly important role in the U.S. economy, these shortcomings are likely to present significant economic and social challenges. If the United States wishes to remain competitive in a global economy, it must create a workforce that can meet the demands of the 21st century. Equally important, the failure to provide sufficient support for English acquisition programs undermines the ability of immigrants to integrate into U.S. communities, learn about American values and culture, and obtain citizenship.

The country's ever-changing demographics and labor force needs to

offer a unique opportunity for advocates, educators, businesses and philanthropic organizations to work together to improve English literacy and facilitate immigrant integration. The discussions at this convening were the beginning of an effort to nurture long-term collaboration among key stakeholders, develop coordinated advocacy strategies for strengthening the field, and ultimately help millions of highly-motivated, fledgling Americans improve their long-term economic prospects and become full, participating members of our community.



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extend thanks to the National Education Association for providing us with meeting space, in particular Cynthia Swann, Matt Finucane and Jackie Henderson. Most importantly, we wish to thank the participants who volunteered their time and expertise at the convening and in reviewing this report. Finally, we would like to offer thanks to Irene Lee and the Annie E. Casey Foundation for supporting and helping to lead this important effort.

Executive Summary

A number of demographic, economic and social factors have converged in recent years to increase interest in improving programs for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs. Many believe that the field is reaching a critical stage of development, in which strategic investments and innovative approaches could lead to transformative changes. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, AAJC worked in partnership with the National Immigration Forum and the National Council of La Raza to convene more than 50 ESOL practitioners and experts from immigrant, refugee, adult literacy, education, labor, business, faith-based, government and research groups to discuss challenges and opportunities facing the field. Informed by the convening's discussions, this report provides background information about ESOL issues, identifies promising program practices and highlights policy priorities for increasing adult English learners' access to high-quality ESOL courses.

Growing Needs, But Lack of Funding

Four factors have contributed to the current shortage of ESOL programs:

- Increased immigration from countries whose people speak languages other than English.* Between 1970 and 2005, the U.S. foreign-born population tripled to an estimated 35.8 million individuals, accounting for 12.4 percent of the country's population. As of 2005, one in five working-age adults between the ages of 18 and 65 in the United States spoke a language other than English at home, and more than 17 million adults
- in this age group spoke English less than "very well" – the widely recognized definition of "Limited English Proficiency" (LEP). Many LEP adults also have low levels of formal education and limited literacy skills in their native language.
- Growth in the U.S.-born population of individuals with limited English or literacy skills.* Almost 4 million LEP working-age adults are native born. The native-born LEP population (individuals who have limited English speaking skills) nearly doubled between 2000 and 2005 and is increasing at a higher rate than is the immigrant population.
- Over the last decade, as the U.S. immigrant population has grown and become more dispersed, state and local communities have faced the challenges of integrating newcomers.* While the LEP population is rapidly increasing, federal funding for ESOL programs has actually declined over the course of the past four years. In 2006, only 1.2 million participants – a fraction of the LEP adult population – were enrolled in federally funded ESOL programs. One sign that ESOL programs are severely underfunded is the difficulty that immigrants face in enrolling in such courses. A recent survey of 184 ESOL providers in 22 cities found that 57 percent maintained waiting lists – ranging from a few weeks to more than three years – simply because they cannot accommodate the high demand for

English courses. Many providers are also forced to compromise the quality of their instruction by over-enrolling participants in existing classes.

- *Misunderstandings of and lack of familiarity with immigrants and ESOL issues.* Public misperceptions about immigrants and policymakers' lack of familiarity with ESOL issues have undermined support for English acquisition programs at the federal level and in new gateway states which have recently experienced rapid growth in immigrant populations. By contrast, a number of states with historically large immigrant populations have significantly increased their funding of adult education and literacy programs, often exceeding the amount of federal support they receive for these programs.

Emerging Consensus on Promising Practices

A development that could help bring ESOL practitioners together is the emerging consensus on effective ESOL practices. Research suggests that successful ESOL programs generally share the following characteristics:

- Instructional methods that utilize:
 - materials from everyday life;
 - interactive methods that engage different learning modalities;
 - native languages to clarify and explain classroom tasks; and
 - co-enrollment or the integration of ESOL instruction within broader educational and training

programs (e.g., vocational training or GED classes).

- Successful programs also:
 - provide high levels of classroom instruction time;
 - utilize managed enrollment systems that discourage erratic program participation;
 - schedule classes at times and locations that accommodate LEP adults;
 - utilize well-trained teachers who are capable of developing high-quality ESOL programs and overseeing volunteers; and
 - collaborate with other service providers that serve LEP families.

Despite the progress made in identifying successful practices, further research is still needed in many areas, and these issues are discussed in the *Challenges and Priorities* section below. Key research priorities include identifying effective instructional methods for specific LEP adult populations, and developing innovative, cost-effective instructional methods that can serve large populations of adult English learners. The latter includes examining the use of new technologies to facilitate self-directed learning and strategies for maximizing the contributions of volunteers.

Challenges and Priorities for Strengthening the Field

Many barriers that prevent service providers from adopting promising practices exist on a large scale. Challenges that ESOL practitioners currently face include:

- The immense gap between the relatively small amount of public and private funding currently dedicated to ESOL programs and the sum needed to provide effective, high-quality services to all LEP adults;
- The diverse and fragmentary nature of the ESOL field – with a wide range of service providers and English learners – which has made it difficult to develop structures that connect practitioners and advocates across sectors to facilitate peer learning, coordination of services and the development of shared policy goals;
- Extremely resistant attitudes amid the political climate at the federal level toward those seeking to increase funding for immigrant-related services and programs;
- Limited to non-existent infrastructure for providing ESOL services in new gateway states where the LEP population is experiencing rapid growth; and
- Limited understanding of effective instructional methodologies for specific adult LEP populations.

From the *Adult Literacy Education in Immigrant Communities* convening, AAJC identified 10 priorities that are widely shared by different stakeholders in ESOL. These priorities have potential for developing broad, collaborative efforts to improve ESOL programs at the national and regional levels:

1. *Create stronger networks and coalitions at the national and local levels to share information, coordinate advocacy and develop more integrated approaches to addressing ESOL challenges.* Cross-sector coalition building among key organizations and networks that

engage in ESOL advocacy, research or service provisions could address a key barrier identified by many practitioners: the fragmentary nature of the field. Developing multi-sector alliances will ensure that program and policy development is informed by the needs and knowledge-base of the entire field.

2. *Develop more effective communications strategies for building support for ESOL programs.* Public opinion research on attitudes toward immigrants has conclusively found that newcomers' lack of English proficiency is a factor that can lead to public hostility or concern. However, there is little or no public opinion research to help ESOL practitioners craft messages to address misperceptions about LEP adults and explain the myriad reasons to support ESOL programs. Convening participants discussed a number of different ways to frame ESOL issues, including emphasizing general support for adult education (which could benefit other disadvantaged communities), immigrants' contributions to the U.S. workforce and economy, and the importance of English acquisition programs in integrating immigrants into the communities in which they live. Convening participants agreed that research is needed to better understand how the general public and stakeholders perceive ESOL issues, and how best to communicate effectively with specific audiences.

3. *Develop ESOL programs that incorporate effective practices and are designed to address the characteristics and interests of LEP adults.* With a better understanding of effective ESOL practices, the field should prioritize support for and development of high-quality ESOL programs that can demonstrate gains in English acquisition or wages. Participants emphasized the importance of supporting contextualized ESOL programs that motivate adult English learners and help them acquire language and other skills to become self-sufficient.
4. *Develop a concerted effort to increase private sector support for ESOL programs.* In the current budgetary environment, building private sector support and partnerships for ESOL programs is critical, especially among businesses and labor unions. ESOL advocates need to target greater private sector participation in three areas:
 - a) philanthropic contributions from foundations and businesses;
 - b) business and union participation in the design, planning and service delivery of ESOL programs, and
 - c) workplace ESOL programs for LEP incumbent workers. Expanding the business sector's role in all three areas is a high priority, and participants discussed specific strategies for increasing employer participation.
5. *Create a stronger advocacy voice at the federal level.* The discussions generated by the pending renewal of the Workforce Investment Act, reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act and potential comprehensive immigration legislation provide an opportunity for different sectors to collaborate and advocate for ESOL resources and appropriate standards.
6. *Increase state and local support of ESOL programs and help policymakers make better use of existing funding sources.* With state and local governments playing an increasingly important role in administering, developing and supporting ESOL programs, there is a need for tools and technical assistance to increase nonfederal expenditures and to help public agencies make the best use of their resources. State and local debates on immigration also provide an opportunity on a local level. Funders and national practitioners should document and disseminate information about innovative state and local policies and programs and build on advocacy voices at the local level.
7. *Expand the teaching workforce and make better use of volunteers for ESOL programs.* Any attempt to improve ESOL programming on a national scale needs to include increasing the number of professionally-trained full-time ESOL instructors as well as developing strategies for effective use of volunteers.
8. *Support research and data collection to help inform policy and program development.* Additional research and data can help inform the development of better ESOL programs. Specific research priorities include
 - a) developing a better understanding of the educational needs and appropriate instructional methods for different LEP populations;
 - b) identifying innovative learning

alternatives that go beyond or supplement classroom instruction, including incorporating new technologies to facilitate distance or self-directed learning; c) mapping the field to identify service or structural gaps; d) developing assessment tools to place learners in appropriate classes and to evaluate programming; e) assessing the professional needs of ESOL educators; f) identifying promising practices in workplace ESOL; g) conducting experimental studies to identify promising practices; and h) ensuring that publicly-funded programs collect and compile data on English learners so that the information can be used to inform policy and program development.

9. *Document and disseminate promising models for informing LEP adults about their ESOL options and how to select appropriate programs.* ESOL providers and local governments should help educate LEP adults about their educational options and how to select programs that address their vocational or personal goals. Web-based information systems as well as creative partnerships with ethnic media should be more fully utilized.
10. *Support advocacy efforts to create effective, high-quality ESOL programs.* Foundation and private sector support for organizations that engage in policy and program advocacy is critical to reforming and strengthening the ESOL field.

I. Introduction: A Promising Moment for Increasing Immigrants' Access to English Instruction Programs

English acquisition is fundamental to integrating immigrants¹ into U.S. communities. Developing immigrants' language skills benefits not only individuals but also the communities in which newcomers settle. English proficiency helps newcomers raise their wages and work productivity, participate in civic life as citizens and voters, and fully use their skills to contribute to their new communities. Without basic English skills, immigrants can become isolated and vulnerable to exploitation. They often become locked into jobs that provide neither a living wage nor health insurance. Most immigrants arrive in the United States with limited to moderate English proficiency but recognize its benefits, and are highly motivated to improve their skills.

A number of demographic, economic and social trends have converged in recent years to generate increased interest in programming for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Many in the field – businesses, labor unions, state and local governments, immigrant groups, educational institutions and other agencies – believe that the ESOL field has reached a critical stage in its development. Wise

investments and innovative strategies could help transform the field. Factors behind their growing interest in ESOL issues include:

- *Rapidly changing demographics in the United States resulting in immigrants playing an increasingly important role in the country's workforce and economic production.* More than half of the U.S. workforce growth during the 1990s was due to immigration, and economists predict that immigrants are likely to account for virtually all of the labor force's net growth over the next two decades.² (See "Demographic Trends" below for a more detailed analysis.) As a business representative noted at the AAJC convening, with the manufacturing and other business sectors in the United States continuing to grow, employers will require an increasing supply of skilled workers in the future. To meet future workforce demands, the adult education system must help newcomers and other adults develop literacy and other skills desired by employers.
- *A growing bipartisan consensus that helping immigrants learn and improve their English is a key strategy for integrating the rapidly*

¹ This report uses the terms "immigrants" and "newcomers" to generally describe a foreign-born person living in the United States regardless of their immigration status, or whether they have become U.S. citizens. These terms also include refugees and other specific categories of immigrants.

² Heide Spruck Wrigley, Elise Richer, Karin Martinson, Hitomi Kubo, and Julie Strawn. *The Language of Opportunity: Expanding Employment Prospects for Adults with Limited English Skills* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2003), 8.



growing U.S. newcomer population. Over the last decade, as the U.S. immigrant population has grown and become dispersed, more state and local communities have tried to address the challenges of integrating newcomers. Regardless of whether they favor or oppose high levels of immigration, policymakers of all party affiliations agree that improving newcomers' English proficiency is essential to successful immigrant integration. The high public profile of immigration issues combined with wide agreement on the importance of English acquisition offers an opportunity to build political support for increasing resources for ESOL programs.

- *English skills are important for newcomers who wish to adjust their immigration status or become U.S. citizens.* Proposed changes to the U.S. citizenship test could require future applicants to demonstrate a higher level of English proficiency. Similarly, proposed immigration reform legislation would mandate that undocumented immigrants be proficient in English, among other things, before they can become legal permanent residents.³ If implemented, these proposals could deny tens of millions of otherwise qualified residents from becoming citizens or legal residents. Strengthening the ESOL infrastructure before such measures take effect will

³ For example, in mid-2006 the U.S. Senate passed legislation, S. 2611, that would allow millions of undocumented immigrants to legalize their status under certain conditions. Among other things, applicants to the program would eventually have to demonstrate English proficiency before they could obtain legal permanent resident status. So far, the U.S. House of Representatives has not acted on this legislation. But if a large-scale legalization program is eventually adopted, as many predict, there will very likely be an extremely high demand for ESOL instruction.

be critical to helping immigrants become a part of U.S. society and ensuring the health of our democracy.

- *There is an emerging consensus among practitioners and educators on effective practices that facilitate English learning among immigrant adults.* Recent research has identified characteristics shared by many high-quality ESOL programs. These findings can help inform efforts by stakeholders in different sectors to develop shared priorities for increasing immigrants' access to such programs.
- *There is a growing recognition within different sectors on the importance of combining and coordinating their efforts to improve ESOL programs.* As discussed below, a primary challenge to improving ESOL is the field's diverse and fragmentary nature. Services and advocacy are provided by a wide range of agencies that have different missions, capacity, and constituents, with few structures for bringing together practitioners across sectors to address common interests. These sectors include groups focusing on immigrants, ethnic-specific organizations, adult and family literacy groups, adult education providers, workforce development agencies, organized labor, corporate and other employers, community colleges, faith-based institutions, refugee resettlement agencies and local and federal government

institutions. ESOL practitioners are increasingly recognizing the importance of creating broad coalitions to coordinate service delivery, increase peer learning and facilitate policy advocacy.

These factors contributed to a general sense of optimism at the AAJC convening, with many expressing the belief that the high level of interest within diverse sectors may offer unique opportunities for strengthening the field. In a representative statement, one education advocate observed, "I believe that we are at a tipping point where enacting positive legislation and policies to increase ESL resources is becoming a real possibility. Traditional allies, educators, policymakers, and even those who are not supportive of immigration are all recognizing the urgency of increasing support for English learning."

This report provides a brief overview of the issues that informed the discussions at the AAJC convening, while identifying promising emerging program practices and highlighting key priorities that could be the basis of future collaborations. The priorities section describes challenges to strengthening the ESOL field as well as specific ways in which foundations, corporations and other interested funders can support efforts to increase high-quality educational programs for adult English learners.

II. Growing Demand for and Lack of Resources to Support ESOL Programs

The current shortage of ESOL programs can be traced to four primary factors: 1) changing demographic and immigration trends driven in large part by increased employer demand for workers; 2) growth in the U.S.-born population of individuals with limited English speaking and/or literacy skills; 3) limited understanding of ESOL issues by policymakers and the general public, and 4) longstanding and severe underfunding of adult education programs that provide English language instruction.

Demographic Trends

Between 1970 and 2005, the U.S. foreign-born population tripled to an estimated 35.8 million individuals, accounting for 12.4 percent of the country's population.⁴ Today's immigrants come from every part of the world, though most migrate from countries in which English is not the primary spoken language. Immigrants from Mexico (38 percent) and Latin America (20 percent) account for more than half of the immigrants in the United States, followed by Asia (23 percent), Europe and Canada (12 percent), and

Africa, the Middle East, and other regions (8 percent).⁵ Prior to 1970, by contrast, most immigrants arriving to the U.S. from overseas were European.

Economic forces are driving a large share of the immigration to the United States.⁶ The combination of an aging workforce and the desire for sustained economic growth has led more U.S. employers to seek immigrant workers for entry-level and professional positions. In turn, immigrants are drawn to this country by the promise of higher living standards, educational advancement, democratic values and safety. The United States is not in a unique situation. Global economic and social forces are spurring increased migration throughout the world.⁷ In fact, as of 2005, one in five working-age adults between the ages of 18 and 65 in the United States spoke a language other than English at home.⁸ More than 17 million adults in this age group spoke English less than "very well" – the widely recognized definition of "Limited English Proficiency" (LEP).⁹ Interestingly, a significant portion of this LEP population – almost four million individuals – is native-born, consisting primarily of

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *2005 American Community Survey: Selected Social Characteristics: United States*, available at www.census.gov (accessed on October 5, 2006).

⁵ Daranee Petsod, Ted Wang, and Craig McGarvey. *Investing in Our Communities: Strategies for Immigrant Integration*. (Sebastopol, CA: Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, 2006), 18-19.

⁶ In addition, war and political instability in countries throughout the world have resulted in large displacements of refugees, a small percentage of whom have resettled in the U.S.

⁷ For more background, see *Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action*. (Global Commission on International Migration, 2005).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

Puerto Ricans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, Alaska Natives and American Indians.¹⁰ The native-born LEP population nearly doubled between 2000 and 2005 and is increasing at a much higher rate than is the population of immigrants. While this report focuses on the challenges faced by immigrants, these trends suggest that addressing adult literacy challenges in the United States requires strategies that target not only newcomers but also citizens with limited education and literacy skills.

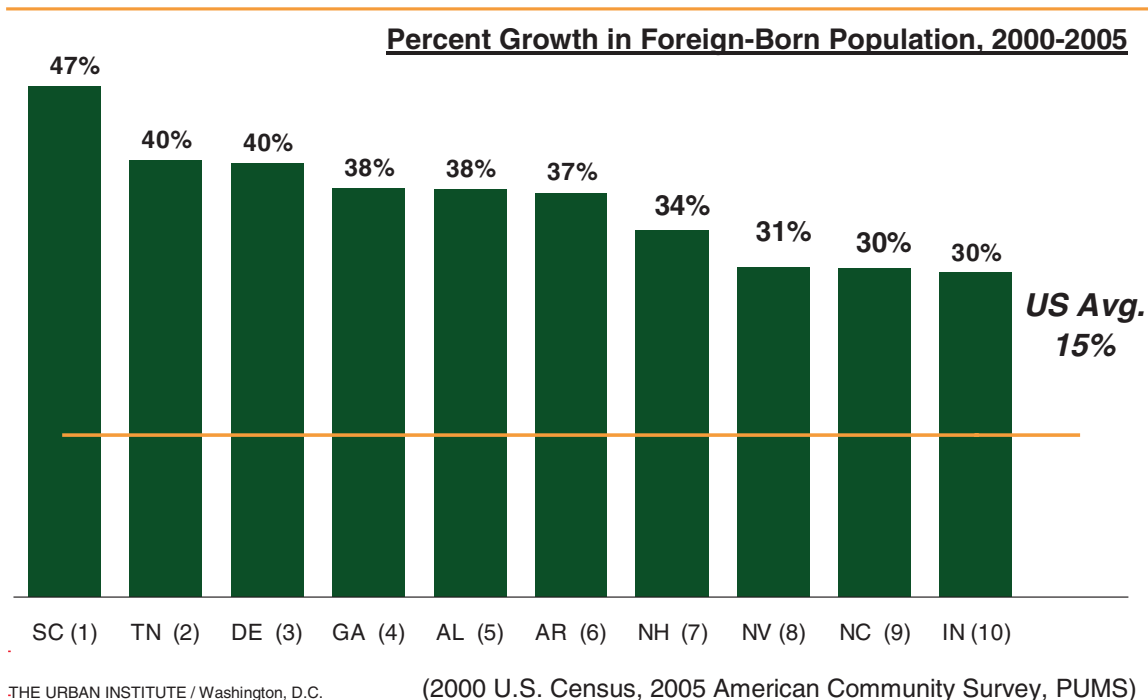
Participants at the convening pointed to several demographic changes that complicate the challenge of addressing

the growing LEP population's English acquisition and literacy needs. First, rapid growth of the adult LEP population has significantly increased demand for English acquisition programs. Although the general public often assumes that newcomers can learn English through daily life activities alone, experts estimate that between 500 and 1,000 hours of instruction are actually needed before LEP adults who are literate in their native language can master basic English verbal and literacy skills.¹¹

The second complicating factor is the growing dispersal of the LEP population to states and localities that have little or

Figure 1

10 States with the Fastest Growing Immigrant Populations, 2000-2005



¹⁰ Randy Capps, *Trends in the Low-skilled and LEP Immigrant Labor Force* (presentation, AAJC convening, Washington, DC, September 22, 2006) (citing American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau).

¹¹ National Center for ESL Literacy Education. *Adult English Language Instruction in the 21st Century*. (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2003), 17.

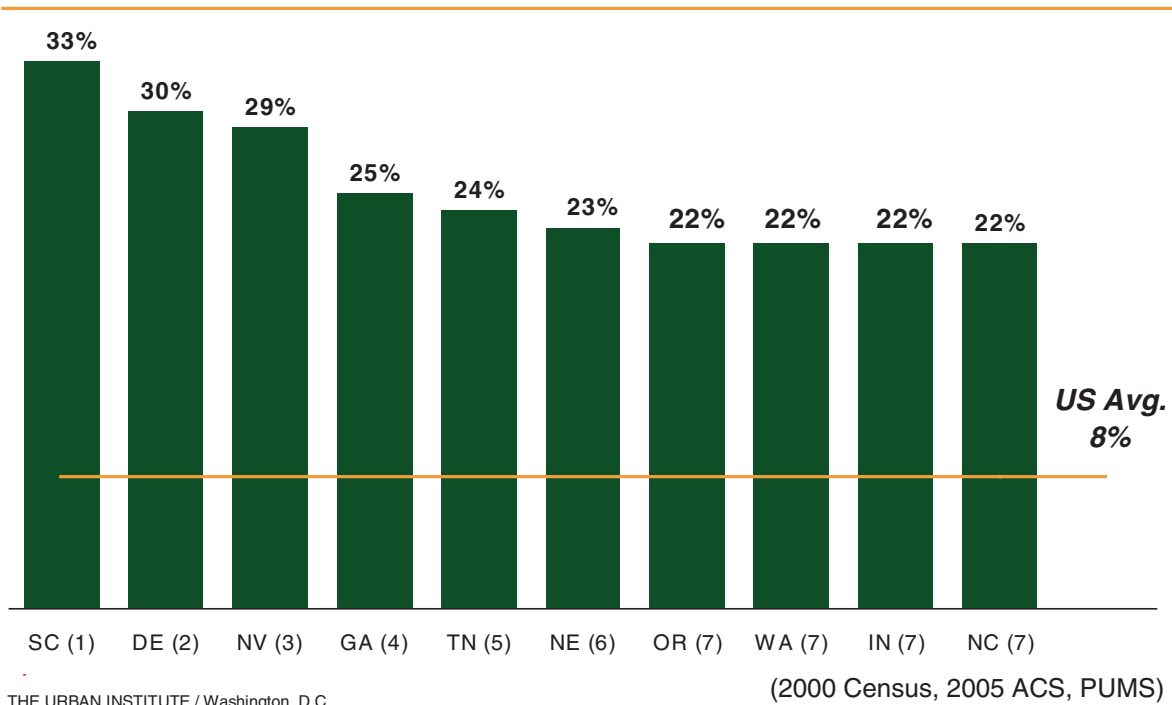
no experience addressing English acquisition. Two-thirds of all immigrants still live in the traditional gateway states of California, New York, Florida, New Jersey and Illinois. But immigrants are increasingly migrating to other states because of employment opportunities. Some of the fastest growing immigrant populations are in the Southeast, which is experiencing rapid growth in manufacturing and other business sectors. Figures 1 and 2¹² show the top 10 states with the fastest growing immigrant and LEP populations between 2000 and 2005. Most of these states have experienced

significant immigration growth only over the past 15 years, and have limited experience and infrastructure for providing ESOL programs or adult basic education to LEP adults. Shortages of programs and experienced teachers in these new gateways are all too common.¹³

A third challenging demographic trend is that LEP adults vary greatly in their education and skill levels. Some are well educated, and their learning needs are largely limited to improving their English and familiarity with U.S.

Figure 2

10 States with Fastest Growing LEP Populations (2000-2005)



¹² Unless otherwise noted, the demographic information in this section, including figures and charts, are from a presentation made by Randy Capps of the Urban Institute at the AAJC convening (see above note 10).

¹³ James Thomas Tucker. *Waiting Times for Adult ESL Classes and the Impact on English Learners*. (Los Angeles, CA: NALCO Educational Fund, 2006).

workplace norms.¹⁴ However, a growing number of immigrants – especially from Mexico, Latin America and parts of Southeast Asia – are not only LEP but also have low levels of formal education and limited literacy skills in their primary languages. Figure 3 shows that approximately 18 percent of immigrant workers in the United States have less

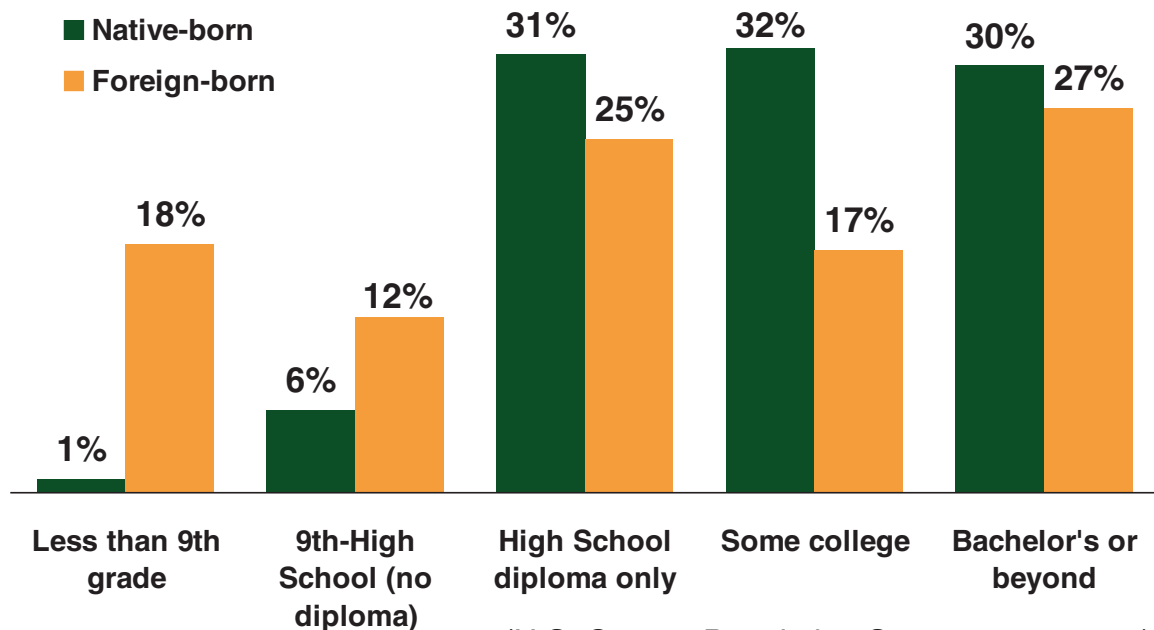
than a 9th grade educational level, and 61 percent have a high school degree or less. Numerous LEP adults need basic education in addition to ESOL instruction.¹⁵

Reflecting their limited English skills and generally lower levels of education, LEP adults are concentrated in low-wage jobs

Figure 3

Three in Ten Foreign-born Workers Lack a High School Degree

Distribution of workers by educational attainment



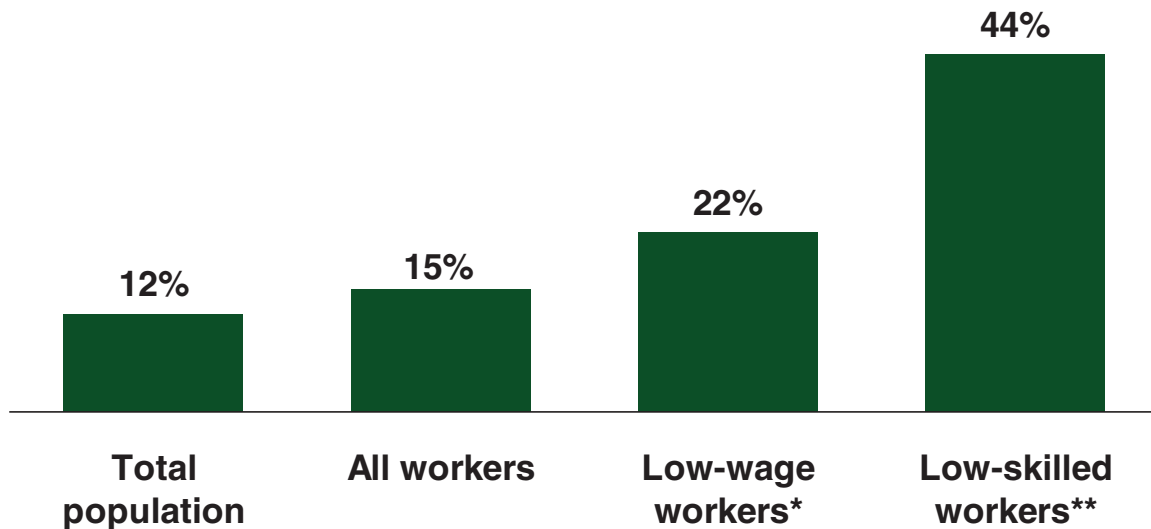
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¹⁴ For background information on addressing ESOL needs of well-educated immigrants, see Tia Elena Martinez and Ted Wang. *Supporting English Language Acquisition: Opportunities for Foundations to Strengthen the Social and Economic Well-Being of Immigrant Families*. (Sebastopol, CA: Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005), 17-19.

¹⁵ Wrigley *et al.*, 2003.

Figure 4

Almost Half of U.S. Low-skilled Workers Are Immigrants



* Low-wage workers earned less than twice the minimum wage in 2001.

** Low-skilled workers have less than a high school education.

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(U.S. Current Population Survey, 2004-2005)

and live in poverty. Figure 4 shows that although immigrants represent only 12 percent of the U.S. population, they make up 22 percent of the country's low-wage workers and 44 percent of all workers with less than a high school education.¹⁶ While immigrant participation in the workforce is generally higher than that of native-born residents, working longer hours at low-wage jobs is usually not enough to stave off poverty. Forty-three percent of immigrant families with at least one full-time worker have incomes below 20 percent of the federal poverty

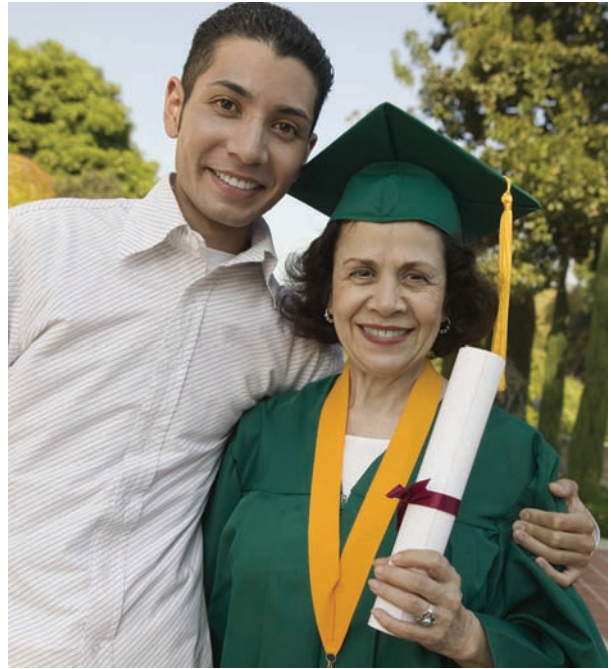
level, compared to 26 percent of native-born workers.¹⁷ The pressure on LEP immigrants to work long hours also limits their time available to learn English and attend classes. As discussed below, effective ESOL programs need to take into account LEP adults' interests and characteristics, including their limited time and resources.

Participants at the convening report that less-educated LEP adults generally have few educational options. These individuals usually must first enroll in

¹⁶ Capps, 2006.

¹⁷ Michael E. Fix and Jeffrey S. Passel. *Immigrants and Welfare Reform*. (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2002).

ESOL courses and improve their language skills significantly before they can take adult education classes, which in most localities are provided only in English. Even in places with relatively large immigrant populations, there are only small numbers of GED or ESOL programs that allow LEP adults to co-enroll in other courses. As discussed in the policy priorities section below, a critically important issue is improving LEP immigrants' access to adult education beyond ESOL classes. Increasing the number of integrated programs that provide English instruction along with other skill development could more fully address the educational needs of this growing population.



Box 1 – Funding Sources for ESOL Programs

The main funding sources for ESOL programs are federal and state programs in adult education, workforce development and welfare. As described in the following section, the primary federal source for adult education programs is the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. A number of other sources are potentially available depending on the scope of the ESOL program and the population served:

Title I of Workforce Investment Act – This program provides localities with funds to operate “one-stop” centers that offer adults and youth a wide range of workforce and educational services. Only U.S. citizens and work-authorized documented immigrants are eligible for the full range of one-stop services. Other workers are potentially eligible for “core services” that include job-search assistance, information about access to support services, employment counseling and unemployment compensation filing information. LEP adults’ participation in Title I-funded program has been relatively low.¹⁸

Even Start – This program offers grants to support family literacy projects that integrate early childhood education, adult literacy (adult basic and secondary-level education), ESOL instruction, parenting education and interactive parent and child literacy activities for low-income families.

The Refugee Resettlement Program – Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this program provides grants to voluntary resettlement agencies, state resettlement offices and community-based organizations such as mutual assistance associations (MAAs) to help resettle newly-arrived refugees. Many of these grants can be used to provide ESOL and employment services.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) – This federal block grant provides states with cash assistance for welfare programs, employment training and other services to help low-income families become self-sufficient. TANF funds can be used to fund ESOL and vocational programs for low-income families even if they do not receive cash assistance. However, federal law generally bars states from using federal TANF dollars to assist most legal immigrants until they have been in the United States for at least five years. States, however, can use their matching TANF funds to provide services to immigrants who do not meet the federal requirements.

Most of these federal programs require some state matching funds, and many states provide substantially more adult ESOL funds than the federal government. Some localities also have developed their own funding programs to address workforce

¹⁸ Wrigley et al., 2003, 20.

needs. Local funds can play an important role in supplementing federal dollars, especially if they are directed towards LEP populations that are ineligible for federally funded programs. Local funds come from a variety of different sources, including general funds, development fees, foundations and contributions from businesses and labor unions.

Funding for ESOL Programs: Failing to Meet the Need

While demographic changes in recent years have significantly increased demand for ESOL and other adult literacy programs, public funding has not kept pace. The universal consensus of experts and practitioners is that current ESOL and related literacy programs have been severely underfunded for many years, leaving many LEP and less educated native-born individuals with few or no options for improving their English and other skills.

As described in the accompanying box, funding for ESOL programs comes from a variety of federal, state, local and private sources, and no entity tracks the aggregate amount expended. The primary federal funding source is the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, which funds general adult education programming. In 2006, the federal government provided \$579.5 million in AEFLA funding, an amount that has declined since 2002.

Approximately 1.2 million participants – a fraction of the LEP adult population – are enrolled in federally funded ESOL programs, making up about 44 percent of all learners enrolled in programs supported by AEFLA.¹⁹ But because AEFLA

recipients are not required to record the amount expended on ESOL program instruction, it is impossible to determine the exact amount of federal adult education funds that go towards ESOL courses.

Many convening participants asserted that a primary reason behind scarce federal funding of ESOL programs is the lack of familiarity with newcomers and the challenges they face in acquiring English proficiency. Public opinion surveys show that large segments of the American public are concerned that immigrants are not interested in learning English – while failing to recognize the time newcomers need to become acculturated, as well as the challenges created by the current shortage of high-quality ESOL programs in many localities (see discussion below). Relatively few policymakers are familiar with ESOL issues, and most do not fully understand how the federal and local government, as well as the private sector, can be more effective in supporting and promoting English acquisition among newcomers.

Interestingly, state and local policymakers who have more direct contact and familiarity with newcomers have been more supportive. While federal funding for adult education has not kept pace with the growth of the eligible population,

¹⁹ Tucker, 2006, 18.

where there are organized immigrant advocacy efforts, a number of state and local governments have increased their expenditures in direct response to changing demographics. AEFLA requires states to provide only a 25 percent match in their allotted federal funds. Yet, over the past three decades, the proportion of federal funding compared to state and local expenditures for adult education has decreased steadily. In 1966, for example, the federal government provided 67 percent of the support for state adult education programs, while local and state governments contributed the other one-third.²⁰ By 2001, the trend had reversed, with local and state governments contributing 68 percent of the funding of AEFLA-supported programs, or approximately \$1.2 billion annually.²¹ Seven states – all with large immigrant populations – accounted for 80 percent of the \$1.2 billion investment.²² This suggests that nonfederal funding may provide a promising source for increasing ESOL programming.²³

Despite increased financial contributions to adult education by high immigrant states, one strong indication that ESOL programs remain severely underfunded is the great difficulty that immigrants face in enrolling in such programs. In many localities, LEP adults face long waiting

lists and overcrowded classrooms. The National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, for instance, recently conducted a survey of 184 ESOL providers in 22 cities and found that 57 percent maintained waiting lists because they could not accommodate the high demand for services. These waiting times ranged from a few weeks to more than three years.²⁴ Some representative examples include:

- In Phoenix, the state's largest ESOL provider had a waiting list of more than 1,000 people, with waiting times of up to 18 months for the highest-demand evening classes.
- In Boston, where state law mandates class sizes of no more than 20 students, at least 16,725 adults were on waiting lists, with waiting times as long as three years.
- In New York City, where ESOL instruction is needed by an estimated one million residents, "Only 41,347 adults were enrolled in 2005 because of limited availability. Most adult ESL programs no longer keep waiting lists because of the extreme demand, but use lotteries in which at least three of four are turned away."²⁵

²⁰ National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003, 5.

²¹ Forrest Chisman, *Leading From the Middle: The State Role in Adult Education & Literacy*. (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2002).

²² These seven states, in the order of total funding, are California, Florida, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ The \$1.2 billion figure for AEFLA-supported programs may actually understate the aggregate amount that state and local agencies spend on adult education. If one includes developmental educational programs offered by community colleges and K-12 schools, family literacy education, and literacy programs provided in libraries, correction systems, and private educational institutions, nonfederal funding for adult education and literacy could be as high as \$2.5 billion annually. How much of this amount is spent on ESOL programs is unknown because such data are not collected or compiled by many adult education programs. *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁴ Tucker, 2006.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.



- In Albuquerque, providers reported waiting lists with more than 1,000 names and waiting times up to 14 months.

The study found that many ESOL programs responded to high demand for services by taking steps that reduced the quality of their programs. These included increasing the number of students enrolled in each classroom (the study reports that providers often had classes exceeding 40 students) or enrolling LEP adults in any available English class regardless of a student's language proficiency until an opening became available in the appropriate English level class.²⁶

The under-resourcing of ESOL programs creates a number of other challenges that significantly erode the quality of instruction.²⁷ Many providers lack sufficient resources to:

- maintain a professional teaching staff, tutors and teacher aides to assist in large classrooms;
- provide students with access to computers and other technology to facilitate learning;
- develop and deliver ongoing trainings and professional development to teachers and administrators; or
- assist instructors in developing curricula and assessment plans to support instructional quality and to address learner needs. Many ESOL programs use "off-the-shelf" generalized curricula in order to serve the broadest possible learner population. But teachers are usually not "trained to incorporate specific learner needs within a generalized curriculum."²⁸

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁷ National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003, 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Box 2 - Canada's Approach: Investing in Its Future

In contrast to the United States, Canada has developed a comprehensive, national immigrant integration policy that helps newcomers and receiving communities adapt to one another. While the Canadian immigrant population is considerably smaller and generally more educated than newcomers in the United States, the Canadian government has made language acquisition (in English and French) a cornerstone of its immigration policy. Most adult permanent residents in Canada are eligible for free language acquisition classes and childcare during their first three years in the country. Like the U.S. adult education system, the Canadian government provides funding. Language classes are made available by a wide range of local agencies, including community colleges, local schools and immigrant organizations. In 2005, the national government spent 140 million Canadian dollars (approximately \$125 million in U.S. currency) to provide language training for 50,000 newcomers,²⁹ or \$2,500 per participant compared to approximately \$200 per student provided by the AEFLA program in the United States.³⁰ To help address its labor needs, the Canadian government provides specific funding for workplace language training. It spends an additional 20 million Canadian Dollars annually for an *Enhanced Language Training* program that offers job-specific language instruction to help immigrants succeed in the workplace.³¹ The program offers classroom instruction as well as mentoring, work placement and other vocational services. More information about Canadian policies can be found at the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Web site at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/index.html>.

Fragmentation of the Field

The complex and fragmentary nature of the field also contributes to the challenges faced by service providers and advocates. As AAJC convening participants noted, the ESOL field is characterized by tremendous diversity. "There is neither a typical adult ESL student nor a typical service provider," said one participant. Adult English

learners differ in their languages and cultural backgrounds, prior educational experiences, and goals for participating in ESOL programs. Service delivery models are similarly diverse, with many localities providing services through a combination of educational institutions (e.g., community colleges and secondary schools), community-based organizations, adult schools, unions and employer-sponsored programs.

²⁹ Office of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, *Investment in Enhanced Language Training Pays Off* (press release, April 25, 2005). (accessed November 7, 2006).

³⁰ Chisman, 2002, 11. (Neither the Canadian or AEFLA figures include state, provincial or local expenditures.)

³¹ *Ibid.*

Not only do service providers differ in capacity and constituency, but they pursue divergent ESOL goals and strategies.³² For example, some providers approach ESOL as educators, focusing on the acquisition of English skills as part of a larger adult education process. Others look to ESOL training primarily to improve workforce skills. Still others view English acquisition as a tool to help integrate immigrants and improve their proficiency at certain tasks, such as accessing health care, increasing parental involvement in children's education or promoting citizenship or civic participation. In many ways, the current service infrastructure is a response to the highly diverse learner population. Many practitioners believe the infrastructure's diversity is a source of strength and is needed to address different populations' language and educational needs.

Nevertheless, the diversity of the field has also resulted in practitioners working within specific sectors who have relatively little contact with groups outside of their areas of focus. The field's fragmentary nature, combined with historical underfunding, has inhibited the

development of infrastructure and national leadership that could bring practitioners from different sectors together to discuss shared interests and develop expertise. For instance, a recent report by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy states that:

*...there is no recognized national source of expertise in the delivery of ESL service to low-literate adults in the United States. Although there are substantial leadership institutions in the ESL field, their focus is almost exclusively on research in linguistics, teaching English to children, and teaching English overseas. Within the adult education field, expertise on ESL is scattered. There are no good ways to share that expertise, and progress is erratic in both research and improved service.*³³

As a practical matter, weaknesses in the current infrastructure limit communication and peer learning across sectors. "Practitioners find themselves re-inventing the wheel," observed one participant, "unaware of how others facing the same challenges have

³² According to National Center for ESL Literacy Education, the primary types of ESOL programs fall into five general categories:

Life skills or general ESOL courses which focus on the development of general English language skills, usually within the context of daily life activities.

Family literacy programs, which attempt to improve the language skills of both immigrant parents and their children. Many of these programs also help parents learn how to support their children's educational development.

English literacy/civics programs that integrate English language instruction with opportunities to learn about civic participation, citizenship and civil rights. Some also specifically prepare learners to apply for and take the naturalization examination.

Vocational English As A Second Language (VESL) programs, which provide instruction on English vocabulary commonly used in the workplace. The contents of VESL programs are quite varied, ranging from those that teach general workplace English skills to those that focus on English vocabulary used in specific industries or jobs.

Workplace ESOL classes provided to incumbent workers to help improve their language skills in their current workplace.

³³ Forrest P. Chisman and Gail Spangenberg. *The Role of Corporate Giving in Adult Literacy*. (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2006), 46.



responded.” The fragmentation also makes it difficult to coordinate service delivery or develop shared policy goals. From an advocacy perspective, the difficulty in bringing together different

stakeholders provides challenges to the development of the broad and powerful coalitions needed to convince policymakers to strengthen and expand ESOL programs.

III. Emerging Promising Practices to Increase LEP Adults' English and Related Skills³⁴

An emerging development that could help bring practitioners together is the growing consensus among researchers on promising practices in ESOL instruction. Although research in this area is still limited, recent studies have identified a set of common characteristics shared by a wide range of successful ESOL programs. Participants at the AAJC convening discussed these findings in the context of identifying shared priorities and developing strategies to promote effective programs. At the risk of oversimplifying the research findings, some key characteristics of promising programs include:

Instructional Methodologies:

- *Instructional methods that use materials from everyday life.* In a large-scale study entitled *What Works*,³⁵ Larry Condelli and Heide Spruck Wrigley collected data from 38 ESOL classes in seven states to identify effective teaching methodologies that help LEP adults develop literacy and verbal skills in English. One of their primary findings was that instructional methods that connect literacy
- teaching to everyday life are especially effective in improving the reading skills of low-level LEP adults. Examples from their study include using grocery flyers, utility bills, letters from schools or immigration authorities or newspaper advertisements to teach reading and verbal skills. Some teachers also had students develop literacy skills through outside-the-class activities, such as reading menus in restaurants or looking up children's books about their native countries on the Internet. Such real life activities foster literacy development by linking new information to what learners already know, and by engaging them in topics that are interesting and relevant to their lives.
- *Instructional methods that use different modalities.* The *What Works* study also found that students who received instruction in a variety of modalities and who had opportunities for peer interaction showed faster growth in verbal English communication skills.
- *Instructional methods that allow teachers to use learners' native language to clarify*

³⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the content of this section is based on presentations made at the AAJC convening by the following individuals: Larry Condelli, American Institutes for Research; Jodi Crandall, University of Maryland, Baltimore County; Ricardo Estrada, Instituto del Progreso Latino; Joy Kreeft Peyton, Center for Applied Linguistics; John Segota, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages; Ise Ming Tam, National Economic Development Law Center; and Judy Taylor, Jobs for the Future.

³⁵ See Larry Condelli, Heide Spruck Wrigley, Kwang Yoon, Stephanie Cronen, and Mary Seburn. *"What Works" Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students* (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 2006).

and explain classroom tasks. The *What Works* study found that ESOL students enrolled in classrooms in which teachers used native language to explain or describe classroom tasks showed greater growth in reading comprehension and oral English skills. Limited use of a native language can reduce student confusion, help create a safe learning environment and allow students to develop critical thinking skills.

- *Co-enrollment and/or the integration of ESOL instruction within broader education and training programs.* Learning English takes a long time, and less educated LEP adults usually need to develop other skills. A growing number of experts and practitioners believe that integrating ESOL instruction within programs that provide vocational training, basic literacy, math skills, computer training and/or employment soft skills training is an especially effective method of helping LEP adults become more self-sufficient. A recent Center for Law and Social Policy report analyzing ESOL vocational programs found that combining English instruction with other types of skill development yields a number of benefits:
 1. Participants gain important job skills while developing the communications skills needed to find employment;

2. The language and cultural skills needed for job search and job retention are more easily integrated into training;
3. Learning is both focused and contextualized and, therefore, more easily absorbed by participants who have little experience with formal schooling; and
4. Motivation to learn remains high as participants see a clear end goal.³⁶

Intensity of Instruction and Attendance

- *Increased intensity of instruction.* The preliminary findings from a comprehensive study of ESOL programs in five community colleges across the country³⁷ suggests that a key factor in improving English proficiency among LEP adults is to increase the amount of time they spend in instructional settings. The study found that higher amounts of instruction time per week correlates with greater learning of English. This finding is generally consistent with the *What Works* study, which also reported that longer scheduled classes and higher attendance rates resulted in increased growth in English reading comprehension and oral communication skills. The authors of the community college study recommend that the intensity of

³⁶ Wrigley *et al.*, 2003, 22. For example, at the convening, Ricardo Estrada from the Instituto del Progreso Latino contrasted two ESOL programs operated by his organization: a general ESOL program versus a vocational ESL program to help prepare learners for healthcare jobs. While the participants in the general ESOL program often took years to gain several levels of English proficiency, most learners in the vocational ESL class gained at least two levels in a 16-week program. According to Mr. Estrada, retention in the vocational ESL class also was considerably higher.

³⁷ A description of this study is available at www.caalusa.org/commcollproject.html#anchor68610. The preliminary findings described in this report are based on Professor Jodi Crandall's presentation at the AAJC convening. Dr. Crandall is a co-author of the study.

instruction should be increased not only through classroom instruction but also through structured learning outside of the class, including the use of computers and other technologies (e.g., audio, video, and on-line instruction).

- *Managed enrollment.* To accommodate the busy lives of LEP adults and the high demand for instruction, many ESOL programs offer open enrollment and exit, allowing students to come in and out of specific courses as their schedules permit and when class space becomes available for individuals on waiting lists. But both the *What Works* and the community colleges studies suggest that this approach undermines the ability of LEP adults to develop better English skills. Both found that managed enrollment systems that specify that students can join a class only during certain time periods (e.g., the first three weeks of class), foster

greater attendance and more learning gains.

- *Scheduling of ESOL classes at times and locations that enable the greatest number of LEP adults to attend.* To accommodate the busy lives of LEP adults, a growing number of providers are offering evening and weekend courses at locations that are convenient for learners.³⁸ Some are also offering childcare or classes³⁹ for children while their parents attend ESOL programs.

Development of Professional Teaching Staff & Effective Use of Volunteers

- *Well-trained ESOL faculty.* Part-time teachers and volunteers teach a majority of ESOL courses in the United States. While these individuals play a very important role in ESOL programming, experts believe that the field can be strengthened by increased



³⁸ For examples of promising practices implemented by City College of San Francisco, see Petsod *et al.*, 2006, p. 100.

³⁹ Family literacy programs, which help both parents and their children develop English and literacy skills have become especially popular among LEP adults. See Martinez and Wang, 2005, for more information about these programs.

professional development of ESOL teachers. Full-time ESOL teachers and administrators who receive training in the learning challenges faced by LEP adults are generally in a better position not only to develop and implement high-quality ESOL programs, but also to make better use of volunteers by providing well defined roles, supervision and training.

Collaboration With Other Service Providers

There is also growing recognition that collaboration between ESOL providers and other organizations or public agencies that serve LEP families is important to addressing the wide range of challenges faced by this population. One area of increased collaboration between ESOL programs and other service providers is in providing workforce development services (e.g., helping learners develop job search and interview skills).⁴⁰ In recent years, increasing numbers of ESOL programs have worked with community-based organizations and public agencies to ensure that their students have access to other important services.

Promising Areas for Future Research⁴¹

Despite progress made in identifying promising ESOL practices, further research

is still needed to help develop programs that address the educational needs of LEP adults. A more extensive discussion of these issues is provided in Section IV, below. However, the convening discussion of research priorities focused on two general issue areas.

The first is developing a better understanding of specific LEP populations, their learning needs and effective instructional methods. For instance, what are the most effective methods of teaching English to individuals who have limited literacy skills in their native language? To what extent and in which circumstances is it effective to help these individuals develop literacy in their own language as they learn English? Likewise, are there learning strategies that are especially effective with specific LEP sub-populations, such as individuals whose primary languages do not use a Roman alphabet?

A second research priority is to develop more cost-effective instructional methods that can reach large numbers of LEP adults. As several participants observed at the convening, the current underfunding of the field is so severe that any incremental increase in resources for traditional English classes will not fully address the growing need for more ESOL programs. Research is needed to help develop innovative and cost-effective

⁴⁰ Martinez and Wang, 2005.

⁴¹ In addition to the recent studies documenting promising practices of general ESOL programs, there also have been a number of new reports that examine promising efforts in the employment context. Examples include Wrigley et al., 2003, and "English Language Proficiency and the Immigrant Workforce: An Overview of Practice in the Manufacturing Sector," (Washington, DC: The Manufacturing Institute & Jobs for the Future)(Publication Pending)



teaching methods, increase the use of new technologies that improve distance learning (e.g., self-instruction via the Web, DVDs or computer programs), and more creative utilization of volunteers as instructors, teaching assistants, tutors or cultural liaisons. In particular,

participants noted that new technologies have the potential for improving self-directed learning by allowing busy adults to learn at their own pace, receive feedback, and engage in interactive activities.

IV. Identifying Challenges, Priorities and Strategies for Strengthening the Field

Even as a consensus on promising ESOL practices emerges, there remain numerous barriers to their implementation in the field. The AAJC convening provided a unique opportunity for a diverse group of participants to discuss the field's challenges and to begin identifying overarching priorities that could become the building blocks for future, multi-sector collaborations. Some of the challenges that were discussed included:

- The immense gap between the relatively small amount of public funding currently dedicated to ESOL programs and the sum needed to provide effective, high-quality services to all LEP adults. Increasing federal resources for the field is especially challenging given the current budgetary environment, as illustrated by recent cuts to AEFLA funding.
- The fragmentary nature of the ESOL field in which services are provided by various institutions and agencies with different missions, constituencies and capacity. There are few structures for bringing together stakeholders across sectors to increase peer learning and to coordinate advocacy or the provision of services at the regional, state or national levels.
- The challenging political climate with respect to immigrant-related issues, coupled with significant public opposition to expending public resources on newcomers at the national level and in numerous states.
- Limited or non-existent infrastructure for providing ESOL services in new gateway states where the LEP population is experiencing rapid growth.
- Limited understanding of effective instructional methodologies for specific adult LEP populations.

With these challenges in mind, the convening focused on identifying priorities and strategies to increase LEP adults' access to high-quality ESOL programs. Key themes included the need for collaboration, innovation, advocacy and infrastructure development. Out of these broad discussions, AAJC identified the following 10 priorities as critical to strengthening the field:⁴²

1. ***Build strong coalitions and develop leadership on ESOL issues at the national level to share information, coordinate advocacy and develop more integrated approaches to addressing service and policy challenges.*** Participants

⁴² Other organizations have also undertaken broad efforts to identify priorities and develop action plans to strengthen the ESOL field, and at least two reports provide detailed recommendations. See *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 21st Century, From the Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy*, (The National Literacy Summit, 2000, Washington, DC).

acknowledged that the fragmentary nature of the ESOL field means that advocacy and provision of services are often done within “silos” despite best intentions. While each sector (e.g., literacy, immigrant rights, labor, etc.) may have its own networks that address ESOL issues, there is a critical need to communicate and collaborate across networks. The current high level of interest in improving ESOL programming provides a unique opportunity for practitioners from different sectors to share their knowledge and coordinate their efforts to increase the availability of high-quality ESOL programs. At the national level, the sharing of information and expertise, currently scattered across different sectors, is critical to improving research and practice. Similarly, collaboration among advocates could significantly strengthen policy work. As an experienced advocate stated, “Congressional offices are tired of listening to the same group of literacy advocates on these issues. But if we can infuse this work with participation from immigrant groups and businesses... if we can coordinate our efforts and demonstrate that improving English literacy is a high priority for many different constituencies, then we will be in a much stronger position.”

Follow-Up Strategies: Many participants point to the lack of structure for facilitating collaboration between sectors as a primary reason for their lack of more frequent interaction with those outside of their existing networks. To address this challenge,

participants from the various sectors should consider forming one or more coalitions to share information and coordinate activities specific to ESOL issues. The initial efforts should focus on creating alliances at the national level that include key organizations and networks engaged in advocacy, research, or service provision. Ideally, these organizations should

- 1) be familiar with the issues of providing ESOL or adult literacy services at the local and state levels;
- 2) have the capacity to share information through broad networks;
- 3) be capable of engaging in advocacy at the federal level to strengthen adult education programs and
- 4) be able to share promising practices and encourage similar collaboration at the local and state levels.

While any new coalitions should primarily focus on ESOL issues, their strategies must ultimately garner support from the broader community. In addition to working with traditional supporters in immigrant and ethnic communities, they should collaborate with unlikely allies who share an interest in strengthening adult education systems that provide ESOL programming. Examples of other potential allies include:

- African American and Native American organizations;
- business associations;
- mainstream education groups and professional education associations;
- faith-based organizations;

- workforce development groups; and
- local and state elected officials.⁴³

A number of participants emphasized the importance of building multiracial coalitions to avoid actions that create tensions between immigrant advocates and other disadvantaged communities. As ESOL becomes the largest sector within adult education, it is especially important for its practitioners to work with representatives of other underserved populations to ensure that all communities have access to high-quality educational programs.

2. ***Develop more effective communication strategies to build support for ESOL programs.***

Participants agreed that one of the first steps towards building support for and increasing knowledge of ESOL issues is to develop more effective public messages and communication strategies. This task is especially challenging in the current political environment because of significant public opposition to increasing government spending for services to immigrants, and widely-held misperceptions that immigrants are not interested in learning English.

Unfortunately, there has been little or no public opinion research on

how the public views the issue of increasing public support for ESOL programs. Convening participants identified a number of potential messages that could resonate with different target audiences and should be tested with focus groups and/or polling. These include:

- Using an education, rather than an immigration frame with which to build support for improving the U.S. adult education system.* A substantial number of participants believe that policy and messaging considerations argue for framing the goal as improving education for all low-literate Americans rather than focusing on immigrants. An education frame, argue its proponents, has a number of advantages. First, it could potentially bring resources to underfunded adult education state systems that would benefit all LEP and low-literate adults. Since English learners make up more than 40 percent of the individuals enrolled in adult education courses nationally, strengthening the adult education infrastructure would directly benefit newcomers. This approach would also provide resources to the tens of millions of native-born adults who are LEP or have limited literacy skills. Second, an education frame is

⁴³ Many of these allies participated in the AAJC convening, including representatives from educational groups (e.g., community colleges, the National Education Association, and the American Library Association), faith-based organizations (Episcopal Migration Ministries [EMM]), refugee groups (EMM, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center and Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning), and elected officials (the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials).

likely to attract other important allies, including businesses, adult literacy and African American groups, who could help build a broad and multiracial coalition to improve adult education. Third, previous public opinion research suggests that an education improvement theme resonates with many Americans who believe that support for public education is critical to maintaining a “high-wage and high-skill society.”

- b. *Emphasize immigrants’ increasingly important role in the U.S. workforce and their contributions to the economy.* With economists predicting that immigrants will account for virtually all of the net growth in the U.S. workforce over the next two decades,⁴⁴ an investment in improving newcomers’ English skills is critical to developing workers needed by U.S. employers. While this message would appeal to businesses, some participants also believe that variations of it might resonate with regional audiences by demonstrating how an increased investment in ESOL programs will directly benefit local economies or revive communities whose populations are shrinking. The development of this type of message, however, needs to take into account potential concerns that immigrants are displacing American citizens in the workforce.
- c. *Frame increased support for ESOL programs as a critical element to helping immigrants “become Americans” and integrating into U.S. communities.* Tamar Jacoby of the Manhattan Institute, who studies and conducts public opinion research on immigration, made the case at the convening that advocates need to develop a broader frame – beyond literacy improvement or workforce development – if they are to increase resources for this field. According to Ms. Jacoby, polls and focus groups indicate that the public is especially supportive of immigrants when they believe newcomers are interested in “becoming American.” Many view immigration as a social contract between newcomers and the receiving community in which immigrants can enjoy the benefits of living in this country but, in turn, have an obligation to learn English and integrate into their new communities. Advocates for ESOL programs, Ms. Jacoby argues, should make the case that increased funding for ESOL instruction is part of society’s responsibility to help immigrants act on their interest in becoming Americans. Such programs help newcomers learn mainstream American language and values. Other participants discussed variations of this theme and urged further research of messages that use an *immigrant integration* frame to explore whether they would resonate

⁴⁴ Wrigley et al., 2003.

with the public as well as with immigrant or ethnic communities.

Follow-Up Strategies: Participants agreed that 1) public opinion research should be conducted in a comprehensive manner so that it can be used to develop support within different sectors – including the general public, the business sector, ethnic communities, and national, state and local policymakers; and 2) its findings should be widely distributed so that advocates in public and private sectors can use the information to advocate for increased support of effective programs.

3. **Develop high-quality ESOL programs that incorporate effective practices and are designed to address the characteristics and interests of LEP adults.** With a growing consensus on effective program practices, policymakers at the local, state and national levels should develop and support programs responsive to LEP adults' interests and needs. Programs that demonstrate results in English acquisition and/or wage gains should be prioritized. Where such programs exist, a greater investment may be needed to bring them to scale. In particular, convening participants stressed that greater resources are mandatory in addressing the needs of LEP adults with limited educational background or literacy skills in their native language.

Follow-Up Strategies: Participants emphasized the importance of providing ESOL programs that

incorporate promising practices described above in Section III, including those that provide classroom materials from everyday life, different learning modalities, high levels of instruction, managed enrollment systems, well-trained instructors and collaboration with other service providers that address the target population's needs. Participants also stressed the need for program diversity and flexibility. Given the diverse LEP population and educational needs, "a one size fits all" approach simply will not work in this field. For instance, while some adult learners will be primarily interested in vocational ESL to improve their immediate employment prospects, others are learning English to further their education and to improve their long-term economic prospects.

One trend that many participants support is the development of *contextualized* ESOL programs. Building on competency-based ESL practices, contextualized programs draw not only on the life experiences and interests of LEP adults, but they also incorporate learning in other subject areas. Examples of promising ESOL program models that utilize this approach include:

- VESL programs that teach workplace vocabulary;
- workplace-based programs that integrate ESOL instruction with job skill training;
- adult education programs that allow ESOL learners to co-enroll in other courses to develop



- additional skills;
- programs that integrate ESOL instruction within GED or other courses that provide adult basic education; and
- multigenerational family literacy programs that teach adults and children English skills and help parents participate in their children's education.

Participants recognized that the development of contextualized ESOL programs is relatively new and still faces many challenges, especially in the development of curriculum and assessment tools (e.g., to ensure that a learner's English and education levels are appropriate for specific programs). More research and conventions of practitioners are needed to refine and further develop these promising instructional methods.

Participants also agreed that ESOL programming needs to not only help entry-level students but also provide

pathways for those who wish to become fully proficient in English and obtain further adult education. Policymakers must ensure that ESOL or adult education options are available for LEP individuals who complete introductory courses.

4. ***Develop a concerted effort to increase private sector support of ESOL programs.*** A number of participants believe that the expansion of ESOL programs in the current fiscal and political environment will require advocates to develop public-private partnerships in which the private sector provides substantial support. Prospects for increasing business support for ESOL programs are promising, given the private sector's interest in workforce development, its potential for becoming an active partner in ESOL program development, and its resources.

Follow-Up Strategies: Participants identified three areas in which ESOL advocates need to target greater private sector participation:

- 1) philanthropic contributions;
- 2) business and union participation in the design, planning and service delivery of ESOL programs; and
- 3) workplace ESOL programs for LEP incumbent workers.

Increasing philanthropic contributions from foundations and the business sector is key to strengthening the ESOL field. Despite the business sector's stake in preparing immigrants for the workforce, a recent report analyzing corporate contributions to adult literacy found that only a handful of corporations give substantial amounts.⁴⁵ The report suggests a number of strategies for increasing private sector contributions, emphasizing support needed in the following areas:

- National organizations that can provide leadership for the field and technical assistance to local groups;
- Literacy programs that are not funded primarily by public resources;
- Public-private partnerships and other efforts that leverage public expenditures; and
- Increased business participation in ESOL programs is especially important given the link to workforce development and the potential for employers to become active partners.

Increasing the private sector's support of ESOL programs, however, requires more than expanding charitable contributions. Because many LEP adults view English proficiency as a path to better jobs and economic mobility, involving businesses and labor unions in the design, planning, outreach and implementation of any ESOL initiatives is important to their success. Business representatives, in particular, urged advocates at the convening to be more strategic in identifying potential allies in the commercial sector and working with them to develop policies that address their economic interests or labor needs. In building support for ESOL programs, a manufacturing representative urged ESOL advocates to work with business consortiums that can "aggregate" the interests of a wide range of businesses and invite them to participate in community planning processes to design or allocate funding for ESOL workplace training programs. Many interested firms are too small to provide training for their workers, understand how to utilize public funding sources or contribute financial support for specific programs. But business consortiums can represent these firms, engage in advocacy and help design programs that address local communities' needs.

One area in which business participation is especially critical is

⁴⁵ Chisman and Spangenberg, 2006.

the development of workplace English acquisition programs. Many ESOL service providers do not focus on these programs because they primarily serve incumbent workers, who represent only a small segment of the LEP adult population and typically have more education and skills. In addition, most workplace programs tend to be short-term, making it challenging to structure sufficiently intensive instruction to improve learners' language skills. Nevertheless, workplace has an important place in the ESOL field because employers can help create space within the workday for busy, low-literate adults to receive English instruction. Employers and workers can also be highly motivated to participate in these programs because of their potential benefits (e.g., increased productivity for employers and better job security or promotional opportunities for workers).

An upcoming report by the Manufacturing Institute and Jobs for the Future provides an overview of promising workplace-based ESOL programs.⁴⁶ Focusing on four case studies, the report suggests that such programs are especially effective when three factors are present:

- *Business practices that promote employee participation in ESOL programs*, such as including ESOL instruction as part of the firm's business model, delivering instruction on-site while workers are paid and tying the

instructional content to work and skill development as well as broader competitiveness strategies.

- *Public resources that can be leveraged to support an active role for intermediary organizations.* Workplace intermediaries – experienced community-based, education or business organizations – can play a number of important roles, including helping to secure access to public funding, brokering and providing customized ESOL services, connecting firms and workers to broader community services and aggregating employer demand to make it economically feasible to operate such programs.
- *Union support for workplace ESOL.* Organized labor is increasingly negotiating contracts that include English instruction for their members.

These findings suggest that further research is needed to identify effective incentive-based or market strategies to encourage businesses to offer ESOL services. Past experience has shown that the general economic incentives – e.g., tax credits or public funding – by themselves are not effective in motivating businesses. However, programs that combine economic incentives with support services and business planning could be more successful. In addition, some participants proposed examining

⁴⁶ “English Language Proficiency and the Immigrant Workforce” (Washington, DC: The Manufacturing Institute and Jobs for the Future) (Publication Pending).

whether “for-profit” market strategies could be used to expand the role of the private sector in offering ESOL services that are currently provided by community-based organizations and public educational institutions. While it was beyond the scope of the convening to discuss these strategies, they are worthy of further research in identifying innovative approaches for increasing the private sector’s role in ESOL programs.

5. ***Develop a stronger advocacy voice at the federal level.*** The consensus of participants was that any new effort to increase public resources for ESOL programs should initially focus on the federal level. Although the federal government’s funding of adult education has declined relative to state and local contributions, changes at the federal level can still have significant effect on the field, especially in establishing standards or allocating additional resources (which are often matched at the state level).

Follow-Up Strategies: Convening participants believe a separate, big-picture discussion to identify specific issues or frameworks for federal advocacy is needed. For instance, some identified the pending reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in Congress as an opportunity for advocates to work together to seek legislative changes for addressing LEP adults’ educational and workforce needs. This type of collaboration could build on work already done by the National Coalition for Literacy and

other groups that have analyzed legislative proposals and developed recommendations to increase LEP adults’ access to literacy and employment services. Other participants expressed interest in having a discussion about whether WIA is the best framework for shaping federal ESOL policies or if there needs to be a broader effort to change the adult education system to make it more responsive to ESOL issues.

6. ***Increase state and local support of ESOL programs and help policymakers make better use of existing funding sources.*** With state and local governments playing an increasingly important role in administering, developing and supporting ESOL programs, there is a need for tools and technical assistance to increase nonfederal expenditures and to help public agencies make the best use of their resources. As discussed in Section II, a number of states with large newcomer populations have significantly increased their support of adult education in recent years, and there may be opportunities to develop similar programs in new immigrant gateways. Regardless of the size of a state’s or local government’s contribution to ESOL programs, they are uniquely positioned to address the fragmented nature of the field by aggregating and leveraging various sources of funding to develop programs that respond to local needs. “Simply put, ‘fragmentation’ provides abundant raw material from which states can craft leadership roles – from which they can create a whole that is

greater than the sum of its parts.”⁴⁷

Achieving this goal, however, is easier said than done. Funding for ESOL programs comes from a large number of federal and state sources with different, often complicated, program and reporting requirements. At the local level, these funds are usually administered by separate public agencies, making it difficult to engage in strategic planning or combine funding for multi-disciplinary programs (e.g., integrating English instruction with vocational or other skills training). However, there are models of successful advocacy at the state and local levels that can be shared, and there is also a need to increase capacity and networking at a local level, particularly in gateway cities. Many local policymakers and community advocates, especially in new gateway states, could benefit from training and assistance on developing planning processes and programs that fully utilize and coordinate existing funding sources to address the ESOL needs of their communities.

Follow-Up Strategies: Support the development of materials, documentation of promising practices, and provision of training and technical assistance to local policymakers and community representatives interested in either increasing state or local support of ESOL programs or making the best use of their existing funds. Funders

and national practitioners should also document and disseminate information about innovative state and local policies and programs, especially those that can serve as models for other jurisdictions.

7. **Expand the teaching workforce and make better use of volunteers for ESOL programs.** The demand for qualified ESOL teachers will continue to rise as the immigrant population grows and as the federal government increasingly requires high levels of English proficiency for obtaining U.S. citizenship or changing immigration status. Yet, current adult education systems provide few resources for developing well-trained ESOL instructors and volunteers.

Follow-Up Strategies: Within the context of AAJC’s convening, participants prioritized educating stakeholders outside of the teaching profession about the challenges created by the current shortage of instructors. Any new effort to bring more resources to the field needs to incorporate the recommendations that have been developed by ESOL educators to increase the supply of well-trained teachers and volunteers.⁴⁸ Given the historical underfunding of ESOL programs, developing innovative strategies for using volunteers – especially bilingual individuals – to teach, tutor or improve communications between teachers and students is especially important.

⁴⁷ Chisman, 2002, 7.

⁴⁸ Several recent reports and studies have made detailed recommendations for improving teacher development and training. See, e.g., *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages*, 2000, National Center for ESL Literacy Education (2003), 20.



8. ***Support research and data collection to help inform policy and program development.*** Although researchers have made considerable progress in identifying characteristics of effective ESOL programs, there remain a number of areas in which more data and research are needed to inform policy and program development. In addition, there was substantial agreement among participants that the traditional models for delivering ESOL instruction – primarily in classrooms or work settings – may not be sufficient for addressing the growing demand for such services. Additional research is needed to identify and assess effective instructional methods that have the potential to help large numbers of learners improve their language skills at relatively low cost.

Follow-Up Strategies: Areas of research and data analysis that should be prioritized include:⁴⁹

- Developing a better understanding of the different LEP populations (e.g., their country of origin, literacy skills in native language and other relevant demographic characteristics), their language and educational needs and the types of programs that are most effective for them. Participants noted that there is currently very little ESOL research on specific adult population groups, such as various Asian ethnic groups whose languages are not European-based.
- Conducting research to identify learning alternatives that

⁴⁹ This analysis relies primarily on presentations made by Joy Kreeft Peyton of the Center for Applied Linguistics, Larry Condelli of the American Institutes for Research, and Margie McHugh of the Migration Policy Institute at the AAJC convening.

supplement or go beyond formal classroom instruction. Prioritized issues include expanding the use of distance learning, combining formal English language instruction with self-study via technology and other options and identifying other activities that bolster learning outside of the classroom.

- Identifying gaps in the ESOL system by mapping the field at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, there needs to be a better understanding of who currently provides services to LEP adults. Such mapping should analyze 1) the characteristics of various service providers; 2) their capacity; 3) their service populations; 4) their strengths and weaknesses; and 5) their sources of funding. At the micro level, there needs to be more detailed assessment of service gaps by geographic regions. Research on specific regions is needed to assess (i) the demand for ESOL services; (ii) the characteristics of the LEP populations; (iii) the types of ESOL services and programs available; (iv) the characteristics of the region's service providers; and (v) any specific service gaps.
- Identifying and/or developing assessment tools needed to place learners in appropriate level classes, inform instructional practices and evaluate learner progress.⁵⁰
- Assessing the professional development needs of various groups of educators and volunteers, as well as options for providing training and helping to integrate research into practice.
- Identifying promising practices for workplace ESOL programs, including the use of intermediary organizations to facilitate greater employer participation. This research should also identify incentives and factors that motivate businesses to provide ESOL programs to their employees and develop toolkits that can provide guidance to interested employers.
- Following up on the *What Works* and other relevant studies to test their findings through experimental studies that randomly assign ESOL students into classes with different instructional modes.
- Ensuring that public agencies and their recipients collect and compile data on ESOL expenditures and the characteristics of learners so that the information can be used to inform policy and program development.

⁵⁰ LEP adults who have completed community-based ESOL programs sometimes have difficulty transferring into mid-level ESOL classes at community colleges or other educational institutions because they do not meet the formal course prerequisites. Developing accurate assessment tools is one way to address this situation so that LEP adults can be placed into courses of the appropriate level regardless of whether they have taken the required classes at their new educational institutions.

9. ***Document and disseminate promising models for informing LEP adults about their ESOL options and how to select appropriate programs.*** Given the wide range of ESOL programs, LEP adults need to assess which programs are best suited for their English levels and their personal or career goals – in other words, to be well-informed consumers.⁵¹ Unfortunately, information about the availability, type and quality of ESOL programs is not easily available in most communities. Instead, most adult English learners rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from family members or neighbors.

Follow-Up Strategies: Public agencies need to develop more effective outreach strategies to inform LEP adults of the availability of ESOL programs and how to choose those that address their goals. While the details of such outreach efforts depend on local circumstances, elements shared by promising outreach programs in this area include: 1) developing written materials in commonly spoken non-English languages to inform LEP adults of ESOL options in their areas; 2) working with local ethnic media to publicize the availability of ESOL programs and to provide information about how learners should select appropriate courses based on their language skills and

goals; and 3) developing strategic relationships with community-based organizations that serve newcomers. A few localities have established newcomer “welcoming” offices within government agencies to help LEP adults enroll in appropriate-level ESOL courses. The County of Santa Clara has gone a step further and set up an innovative Web site⁵² that allows individuals to explore the availability of different types of ESOL programs by locality. Foundations and other funders should support such efforts to improve outreach on ESOL programming, as well as to document and distribute information about promising practices.

10. ***Support policy advocacy efforts to create effective, high-quality ESOL programs.*** Achieving the priorities identified in the convening is only possible if there are strong organizations in the various sectors to provide much-needed advocacy. Participants observed that one reason why ESOL programs are consistently underfunded is that the constituency benefiting from these services – LEP adults – has little political power, and their needs can be easily overlooked by policymakers. The role of advocacy, therefore, is critical to reforming the field.

⁵¹ Participants pointed out that private funders for ESOL programs – including businesses, labor unions, community groups, and government agencies – also need this type of information to select appropriate service providers for their constituents. For a service providers’ guide to selecting ESOL programs, see *A Guide For Providers: Engaging Immigrant Seniors in Community Service and Employment Programs*. (Silver Spring, MD: Senior Service America & Center for Applied Linguistics), 65-72.

⁵² <http://www.immigrantinfo.org/esl/index.html>. The Web site allows a user to search by city, English level, provider type, and languages spoken by a provider’s staff.

V. Conclusion



The current convergence of interest in ESOL provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen the field through collaboration and the development of policies to increase high-quality programming. The discussion at the AAJC convening suggests that despite the field's diversity, ESOL practitioners agree on many priorities and are enthusiastic about working together to advocate for more resources, better programs and stronger infrastructure. The ten priorities identified in this report provide multiple entry points for funders, policymakers and practitioners to support and participate in

efforts to improve ESOL systems.

AAJC's hope is that ESOL practitioners and policymakers will take advantage of their shared interest and develop creative strategies and partnerships to strengthen the field. With the LEP adult population projected to continue its dramatic rise for the foreseeable future, the issues discussed at the convening will become more pressing in the coming years. The effective provision of ESOL and literacy programs to newcomers is critical to this nation's future.

Appendix: Adult Literacy Education in Immigrant Communities

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