

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

LITERACY MINNESOTA began in 1972 when a group of volunteers realized if one person taught someone to read, and that person taught someone to read, they could create a movement. Today, Literacy Minnesota is recognized as a local and national leader and a driving force behind the latest developments in literacy learning. We continue to build a movement of learners, educators, literacy advocates and organizations in pursuit of a world where life-changing learning is within everyone's reach.

IN THIS REPORT on our fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, you will read about Literacy Minnesota's commitment to building a more equitable society by making quality education available to all. Despite a year where nearly all of our programming took place remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued to bring about **innovation** in our work. Our local and statewide digital literacy **leadership** continued to garner attention outside our state. A few of our favorite creative and collaborative projects are given the **spotlight**. And, you will see how use of Northstar Digital Literacy and our online Educator Resources elevated our **reach**, both nationally and internationally.

In this past year, issues of police violence and racial injustice in Minnesota and beyond took center stage. We acknowledge the toll that our nation's long history, and current reality, of institutionalized racism takes on communities. The hard work of confronting this head-on is a challenge we simply must stretch ourselves to meet. Literacy Minnesota is actively examining our role in dismantling systemic racism and advancing our mission of bringing about a more just and equitable world.

At a glance...

2 OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS

3-6 INNOVATION

Core Values
Open Door Learning Center
Open Door Preschool
Parenting Program
AmeriCorps Programs

7-12 LEADERSHIP

Introduction to Digital Equity Northstar Digital Literacy Digital Navigation in Action Other Tech Projects

13-14 SPOTLIGHTS

Publications
Open Door Collective
Beyond Words Event

15-16 **REACH**

By the Numbers Educator Resources

17 FINANCIALS

18-22 THANK YOU, DONORS!

23 WHO WE ARE

Board of Directors Our Staff AmeriCorps Members

Front cover: An adult learner from Literacy Minnesota's Open Door Learning Center in North Minneapolis uses a laptop and headset with microphone for an interactive, self-paced learning experience. "When I say 'learners,' I'm not just talking about the students enrolled in our learning centers. I'm talking about myself and the staff at Literacy Minnesota. I'm talking about all of us."

Eric Nesheim
Executive Director



OUR PROGRAMS

MINNESOTA PROGRAMS

Open Door Learning Center - The six Twin Cities sites offering English, GED, computer, citizenship, job-readiness and other basic-skills classes for adults.

- Preschool Program A free preschool for children of adult students at our Arlington Hills location.
- Parenting Program Provides families with tools to break through inequitable power structures and create a more just education system for their children.

Adult Literacy Hotline - Online and phone referral service to adult literacy programs across Minnesota.

AmeriCorps Programs

- Summer Reads Provides reading tutors and mentors for children entering grades K-5.
- Literacy Leadership Program –
 Engages AmeriCorps members to design and carry out literacy initiatives in partnership with schools and community organizations.

Tutor Training - Pre-service and in-service workshops for literacy volunteers and educators.

Volunteer Recruitment - Recruits and places volunteers into service organizations across Minnesota.

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

Northstar Digital Literacy - Assesses digital skills through online modules and provides classroom curriculum and self-directed online learning.

Advocacy - Mobilizes stakeholders to influence policy and legislation around the literacy cause.

Educator Resources Library - Searchable online library of literacy curriculum and teaching tools.

Journeys - An anthology of adult student writing with accompanying classroom resources.

Literacy Strategies - Consulting services to help organizations launch and develop literacy programming.

Open Door Collective - Combats poverty through literacy education, policy and research.

OUR VISION

We believe literacy has the power to advance equity and justice, and we envision a world where life-changing learning is within everyone's reach.

OUR MISSION

To share the power of learning through education, community building and advocacy.

CORE VALUES

LIFELONG LEARNING

We believe the pursuit of knowledge is a lifelong journey. We all have something to teach each other.

INDIVIDUAL DIGNITY

We believe individuals have the power to create their own potential through teaching, learning and community involvement. We create learning environments where the dignity, worth and complexity of each person is honored.

EQUITY & JUSTICE

We believe access to quality education is a cornerstone of a more just and equitable society. We work to provide transformative learning opportunities to people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities.

LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

We believe in nimbly responding to a changing landscape, creating new pathways for groups and individuals to reach their full potential.

INNOVATION

OPEN DOOR LEARNING CENTER

Literacy Minnesota operates six adult learning centers in Minneapolis and Saint Paul offering free classes in English, GED basics, computer skills, college prep, career readiness, citizenship and more. Though our schools were closed for in-person learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, learners continued to pursue their educational goals by taking classes remotely.

For teachers and staff, the pandemic provided a paradigm shift that pushed them to relax, evaluate programming and implement ideas they'd been wanting to try for years. "The pandemic actually gave us an opportunity to slow down and fill in some gaps in service we were seeing," says Lindsey Pust, GED teacher.



The year provided a big push for moving classes online, but hybrid learning (combining online and in-person elements) was something our learning centers had already been working to develop. "Some students feel more comfortable learning online," says Lindsey. "There is more flexibility, and it's more accessible."

The online learning options developed during the pandemic will help our learning centers better work with students' schedules and needs for years to come.

PRESCHOOL AT HOME

Due to COVID-19, our Open Door Preschool operated remotely from March 2020 through August 2021. In order to keep kids and parents engaged while classrooms were shuttered, preschool teacher Rachel Lyness invented Preschool at Home. She assembled at-home learning kits for each preschooler, containing books and interactive activities handpicked for their developmental level. Every two weeks, preschoolers and their families picked up the kits.





Each family received **240 activities** (average of 20 activities per month) last fiscal year.



450 videos were filmed with demonstrations of how to do the take-home activities and book readalouds.

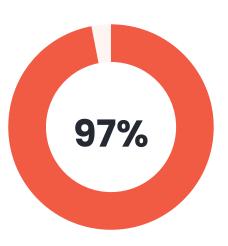


More than 72 books were sent home with each family (average of 6 books per month).

PARENTING PROGRAM

Literacy Minnesota's Parenting Program provides families with the tools they need to break through inequitable power structures and create a more just education system for their children. Much like other Open Door Learning Center classes this past year, parenting classes were held virtually to offer remote opportunities to stay connected and continue participating in the programs. Adult learners from two Open Door learning centers attended classes on Tuesday and Wednesdays to navigate cultural differences in the education system, discover effective ways to advocate for their children and learn to promote literacy at home.

In comparison to the start of the pandemic, Parent Mentoring Manager Ebyan Abdulle says, "Now we are more prepared in terms of programming and communicating internally and externally."



of parents surveyed showed an increase in knowledge of how to talk with teachers about their children.

AMERICORPS PROGRAMS

Literacy Minnesota operates two **full-time AmeriCorps opportunities** where we recruit and train national service members who serve at partner organizations or within our own programs. This past year, Literacy Minnesota also hosted seven national service members from two other AmeriCorps programs, the Community Technology Empowerment Program and Emergency Response Initiative.

LITERACY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Our year-long Literacy Leadership Program engages service members to work behind the scenes with schools and community organizations to design and carry out literacy initiatives.



of organizations surveyed reported that hosting Literacy Leaders made them more effective at "developing and implementing new or enhanced program content."



of organizations surveyed reported being able to serve more individuals and provide more services as a result of hosting Literacy Leaders.



of Literacy Leaders reported that during their year of service they developed or improved skills and confidence in their ability to effect community change.

LITERACY LEADER KESHIA

Keshia Anderson King became a Literacy Leader because she wanted to help others, increase her emotional intelligence and inspire those around her. In 2020, she was placed with the United Way of Central Minnesota, where she trained youth providers with a literacy curriculum designed for multilingual learners and other historically underserved students.

Keshia played a role in establishing new relationships with partners to reach more students and provide access to books online. She successfully moved trainings to virtual settings to adapt to COVID-19 and set a good foundation for the program's future growth.

"When I arrived the students would light up, telling me about 'This is what I've read,' or 'This is what I've learned,' or 'I was behind, but now I comprehend more.' When students told me, 'Ms. Keshia, you really helped,' those moments were really inspiring."



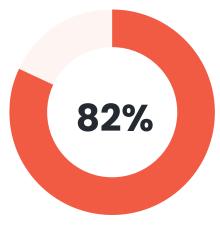


SUMMER READS

This AmeriCorps program brings literacy mentors to children in grades K-5 at libraries, schools and community organizations across Minnesota.



free books were distributed to kids participating in Summer Reads.



of children surveyed maintained or increased their reading fluency.



of students assessed maintained or increased their reading engagement.

LEADERSHIP

DIGITAL EQUITY

The past year brought an increased focus on **bridging the digital divide** — equipping people with the devices, connectivity and digital literacy skills needed to access information and thrive in society.

Digital equity requires three elements:



1. Equitable access to devices.



2. Equitable access to internet service.



3. Equitable access to education and skills to make use of these tools.

Literacy Minnesota's programs offer participants devices and assistance with internet access, but also coaching for adults who need to build digital literacy skills. Literacy Minnesota is sharing this expertise in digital literacy and digital navigation with adult education programs and other groups such as libraries, workforce programs and community colleges to bridge the digital divide.

Digital Literacy: The ability and knowledge needed to access and operate internet-connected devices, to successfully use commonly available software, and to navigate and utilize online resources in order to effectively communicate and complete social and work-related tasks in a virtual space.



"Digital literacy really does affect almost all areas of people's lives."

- Theresa Sladek, Literacy Minnesota's National Partnerships and Northstar Business Development Specialist





5.5 million Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments have been completed online **since its inception in 2012**.



721,527 Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments were completed online during the fiscal year.



There was a **104% increase** in Northstar testing site locations bringing us to 1,520 sites around the world.

NORTHSTAR + HAWAII

200 years ago, the Kingdom of Hawaii reached a 91% literacy rate, the highest in the world. Today, Hawaii's government is trying to repeat this success in the realm of digital literacy by achieving a 91% digital literacy rate among its residents. Equipped with Northstar assessments and curricula, Hawaiian libraries, workforce centers, businesses and colleges have formed a dynamic partnership to dramatically raise digital literacy.

- Through this partnership, Northstar is now available in all public libraries across the islands.
 - Ka'ala Sousa, the state's workforce development specialist, has posed a challenge to businesses to have all employees take and pass the three basic Northstar assessments: essential computer skills, essential software skills and using technology in

daily life. This has turned into a fun competition

SUCCESS! All employees of Zippy's, a chain

between companies.

restaurant across the islands, have now been assessed.

"Hawaii is determined to achieve a 91% digital literacy rate over the next 12 months with the help of Northstar assessments and curricula. Together, libraries, workforce centers and businesses will work to close the digital literacy gap in Hawaii."

- Ka'ala Sousa, Hawaii Workforce Development Specialist



DIGITAL NAVIGATION

In 2020, Ramsey County partnered with Literacy Minnesota, Tech Dump/Tech Discounts, Saint Paul Public Libraries and other community organizations to create the TechPak initiative providing computers, internet and digital literacy training to 2,150 residents impacted by COVID-19.

Literacy Minnesota's role was to connect with 750 of these Ramsey County residents and provide digital navigation services. Our digital navigators supported participants by:

- Facilitating computer pick-ups.
- Teaching and assessing digital literacy skills using Northstar.
- Offering IT support.

Digital navigators also referred participants to classes, job searches and workforce training. For every \$1 spent by the TechPak initiative, there is a projected \$2.40 in social value generated through improved earnings, well-being and cost savings.

The TechPak initiative kickstarted Literacy Minnesota's digital navigation leadership.

"Digital navigation is like a learner-centered, lighter side of tech support," says Digital Navigator Nick Houlson. "We help people understand how websites and apps work; we troubleshoot when things go wrong."

The goal is to remove tech obstacles for students so they can better pursue their goals of learning English, getting their GED, preparing for careers and more. "We offer coaching and guidance," says Nick. "Interpersonal connections are paramount."

Digital navigation "turns the computer from a black box into something workable," says Nick.

Literacy Minnesota trains digital navigators and provides consulting for organizations working to develop their digital navigation programs.

EXAMPLES:

Hennepin County

Organizations in Hennepin County that had received devices from **CARES Act*** funding received training from Literacy Minnesota on how to implement digital navigation.

Vantage Aging

Literacy Minnesota trained three digital navigators to assist this Ohio organization in getting older adults back to work.

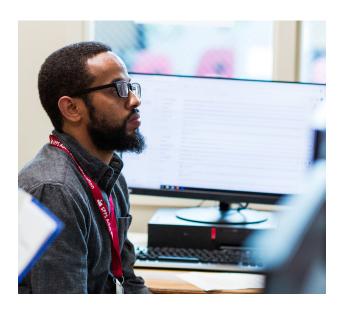
National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)

NDIA consults with Literacy Minnesota around implementing Northstar and helping digital navigators use the assesssments in their teaching.

Digital Navigation: Mentorship for digital literacy learners in using technology, building digital skills and setting goals.

*CARES Act: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act







DIGITAL NAVIGATION IN ACTION

Meron, a mother of four, started taking classes through our Open Door Learning Center in September 2020, six months after all classes had gone online due to COVID-19. Her goal was to improve her English and find a steady job.

"I need more English to communicate with everyone at work and everything," she says.

When she got started with online learning, she struggled at first with getting the hang of computers and computer programs, but she persevered with support from her Open Door teachers and Digital Navigator Nick Houlson.

To make sure she had the support she needed to successfully attend class and do her schoolwork, Nick coached her over the phone and visited her house to help set up her computer and get her logged into the necessary programs.

This direct, personalized approach to digital navigation proved very effective. "Meron went from totally nervous about computers to successfully logging on," says Nick. "This is one way of helping people get control over their lives in these challenging times."

"Nick is very good. He is humble," says Meron.

While most classes have resumed in person at our Open Door Learning Centers, some adult learners have found that attending class remotely is a better fit for their schedules. Based on this feedback, we are now offering a wider array of options for in-person, at-home and hybrid learning. These options mean that Meron can continue her learning journey even with two kids still home with her full-time. "It's easy now," she says with regards to using Zoom and other online platforms for learning. "I'm relaxing in class. I'm comfy. I'm good now."

DIGITAL EQUITY TOWN HALL

In October 2020, Literacy Minnesota hosted our first-ever **Digital Equity Town Hall** live on Zoom.

More than 100 attendees heard from a panel of experts working on the frontlines to close the digital divide, including Gwenn Weaver, independent management consultant, and Literacy Minnesota staff Eric Nesheim, executive director; Theresa Sladek, national partnerships and Northstar new business specialist; and Deqa Hassan, digital navigator.

View the Zoom recording and slides from the presentation at

literacymn.org/digitalequitytownhall.

"I found the presentation to be extremely helpful, particularly thinking about how people need to have three things to achieve digital literacy: knowledge, affordable broadband internet service and access to the appropriate devices. We have many clients who are missing one of those pieces and it makes their everyday life tasks very difficult.

I really appreciated being able to share space with others who are thinking about this as an equity issue."

-Digital Equity Town Hall attendee

"Digital inclusion gives individuals and communities the entrée for full participation, but digital equity is the means to level the playing field, **and that's what we're striving for**."



TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION INITIATIVE

The Technology Integration Initiative (TII) is a professional development opportunity for Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs and practitioners across Minnesota. This past year's cohort was focused on developing digital equity plans for Minnesota ABE programs based on established best practices.

"We knew from the field that digital equity was a big concern," says Susan Wetenkamp-Brandt, Literacy Minnesota's senior manager, educational technology and digital literacy. "This year, we modified the program to have at least two participants from each ABE program—one teacher and at least one person in a program or management role."

Participants worked to develop digital equity plans for their programs that addressed the following five elements:

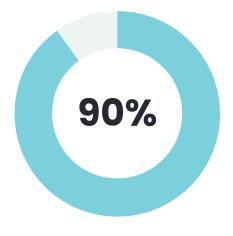
- 1. Robust, affordable broadband internet service.
- 2. Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user.
- 3. Access to digital literacy training.
- 4. Quality technical support.
- 5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Each month, the cohort met virtually and tackled a different element. During breakout sessions, partner teams from different programs met to share questions, address challenges and provide feedback for solutions. "It was very rich and productive," says Susan. "Managers rarely have the opportunity to collaborate with other programs like that."

The 2021 TII cohort began in February of 2021 and ended in May. Participants finished the training with a final presentation meeting, where they shared their digital equity plans. "One ABE program (Faribault) took the lead in developing a digital equity plan for the entire school district," says Susan, recognizing them for a significant change in their district's technology practices.



This past year's
Technology Integration
Initiative cohort had
more than double the
amount of trainings
and participants than a
typical year.

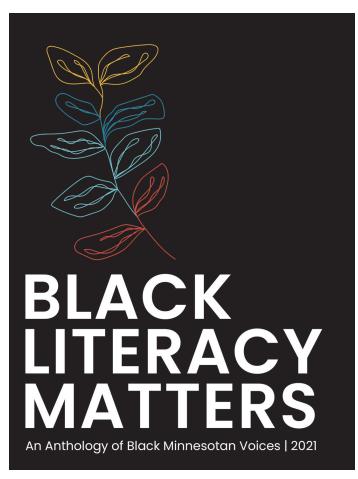


9 out of 10 programs completed their presentations about digital equity plan implementation.

"TII is a different model of professional development. It's not just a one-off training. You're meeting with the same people for five to six months and you have teammates for accountability."

Susan
 Wetenkamp-Brandt,
 Senior Manager,
 Educational Technology
 and Digital Literacy

SPOTLIGHTS



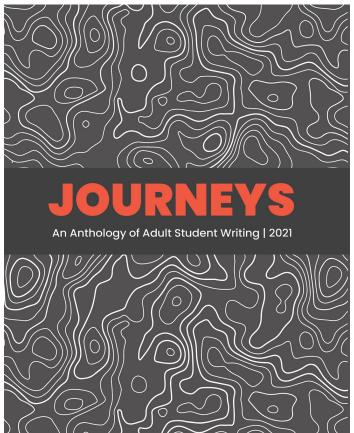
Literacy Minnesota introduced a new anthology: BLACK LITERACY MATTERS, which creates a space for Black voices to be published and heard, celebrates the creativity and diversity of Black culture and lifts up the narratives and lived experience of Black Minnesotans.

Like Journeys, **Black Literacy Matters** will function as a teaching tool that can be adapted to curriculum and for discussion needs in the Adult Basic Education community and beyond.

Order copies of *Black Literacy Matters* at literacymn.org/blackliteracymatters.

"I am a firm believer that everyone within the Black community has their own culture and value. This makes it difficult for outside communities to identify and support the needs of members of the Black community. So projects like these need to exist."

-Christian McCleary, publication visionary and Literacy Minnesota's Program Assistant - St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium and Open Door Learning Center



JOURNEYS: AN ANTHOLOGY OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING contains original stories, poems, tall tales, memories and art submitted by adults enrolled in English, GED, citizenship and basic-skills classes across the state of Minnesota.

The 2021 edition includes a special chapter called "Teaching and Learning in the Pandemic," in which learners, teachers and tutors tell their stories of resilience, creativity and dedication to their studies and work despite the hurdles presented by COVID-19. The book also includes an accompanying curriculum unit, which has been updated to include suggested activity modifications for the virtual classroom.

Order copies of the 2021 edition of *Journeys*: An Anthology of Adult Student Writing at literacymn.org/journeys.



The Open Door Collective is a national program of Literacy Minnesota whose mission is to reduce poverty in the U.S. by building partnerships between adult foundational skills programs and organizations supporting social and economic justice.

The vision for their **Evidence-Based Adult Education System (E-BAES)** research initiative is to make the case for the value of adult education as a key mechanism for reducing poverty and increasing social and economic justice, while acknowledging interactions of adult learner needs and interests, resources, community contexts and program capacity. As the vision indicates, a multidisciplinary approach to research is required.

In 2021, the E-BAES Taskforce finalized its research agenda. The future work of the E-BAES Taskforce involves three activities that are currently underway and will continue through 2022 and 2023.



Bring adult education and other partners together to generate actionable plans for national scaling of successful partnerships and for needed research.

The convening will focus on integrating adult education into the delivery of other poverty-reducing services such as healthcare, housing, food security and community development so that access to adult education can be expanded to millions of learners who would otherwise not be in formal adult education programs.



Review research on partnership cases to evaluate successful outcomes and increase visibility and understanding of adult education's value.

This review will include synthesizing cases and models from multiple studies and disciplines, examining the quality and patterns of findings about partnerships and service delivery approaches.



Initiate return-on-investment/cost-benefit research on what works with adult learners whose needs are hard to serve, with respect to their well-being.

This task will focus on outcomes of importance to learners (e.g., earnings, children's learning and health).

BEYOND WORDS AT HOME

For the second year running, Literacy Minnesota's Beyond Words Bash was held virtually. On April 7, Beyond Words at Home was brought to life by our Open Door Book Club in conversation with beloved Minnesota author Kao Kalia Yang. Yang answered questions from the book club about her essay "Dark Trees in the Landscape of Love," which appears in A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota.

"It was the work of Literacy Minnesota that gave my parents a foundation in English and taught them how to read," she shared at the event. "My heart speaks in Hmong first, but in English I build bridges. I open up windows and doors. It is with everything in this writer's heart that I speak to the importance of literacy, the importance of stories."

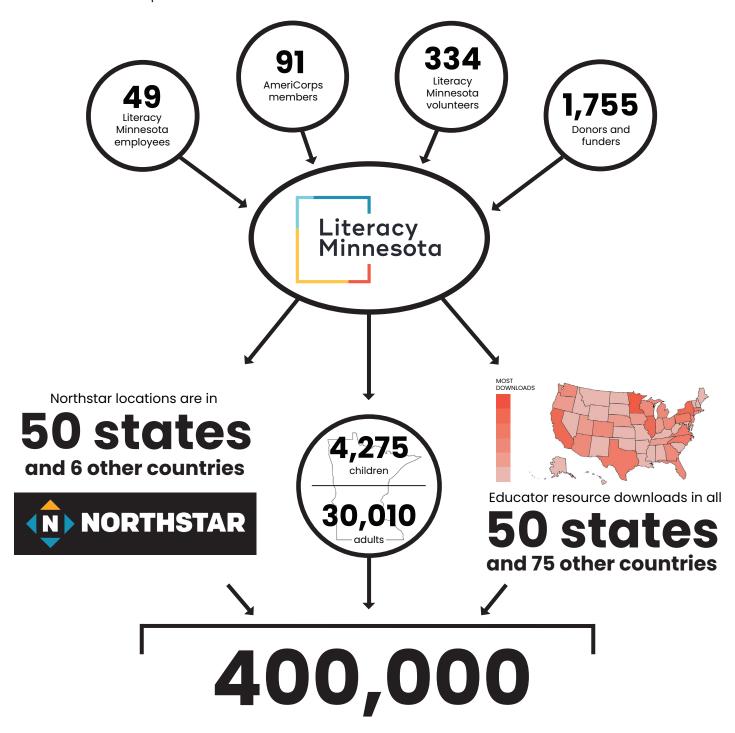
Additionally, Kao Kalia Yang provided the foreword to our 2021 edition of *Journeys: An Anthology of Adult Student Writing*. Make sure you get a chance to read her beautiful words by getting a copy of *Journeys* at literacymn.org/journeys.



REACH

Literacy Minnesota advances the literacy cause with hands-on programming for Minnesota children and adults; legislative advocacy; and capacity-building work that includes strengthening other organizations through volunteer recruitment and training, developing resources for educators and convening a broad network of partnerships.

Our reach is increasingly national and international. Our strong roots in Minnesota bolster this broader leadership.



literacy learners are impacted globally



EDUCATOR RESOURCES & TRAININGS

Our curriculum and teaching tools are created by educators, for educators. Tools developed in the context of our learning centers and immediate community are broadly applicable and in high demand by literacy programs everywhere.

Literacy Minnesota's website has hundreds of accessible resources for teachers and tutors alike in an easily searchable Educator Resources library. The online library contains teaching tools that span skill level, topics, formats and audiences. In 2020, all in-person training sessions transitioned to webinars. On average, Literacy Minnesota offered 12 webinars a month and hosted educators and volunteers from around the world.

195

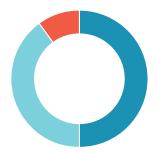
webinars held over the reporting year 5,206

adult tutor training participants attended webinars 7,111

individual downloads from our educator resources library

More than 4,000 literacy educators and volunteers receive a monthly update from Literacy Minnesota featuring timely resources and trainings. 139 contacts responded to a survey about how they use Literacy Minnesota's resources.

What type of educator are you?



Professional teacher - 50% Volunteer tutor - 40% Other - 10%

How helpful did you find our resources?



Very helpful- 73% Helpful - 24% Other - 3%

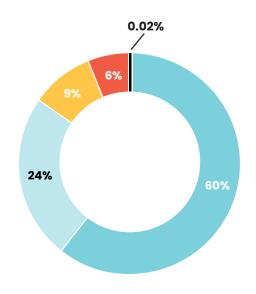
- "Literacy Minnesota has been a great resource, especially to those dealing with remote teaching techniques."
- Jane Freeman, Metro South Adult Basic Education in Minnesota
- "Our Adult ESL students respond to the Literacy Minnesota lessons and they scored high on their standardized tests when I used the Literacy Minnesota lesson plans."
- Gertie Cole, Selma Unified/Selma Adult School in California

- "Literacy Minnesota's webinars have empowered me to make learning interactive, fun and student-based."
- Valeh Abbasi, South Piedmont
 Community College in North Carolina
- "I haven't been offered trainings/ refreshers like this in the UK, so it's really helping me rethink my approach to teaching."
- Joanna, ESL teacher, Edinburgh College in Scotland

2020-2021 FINANCIALS

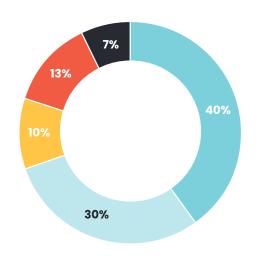
Financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021

FINANCIAL SUMMARY



WHERE DID OUR SUPPORT COME FROM?

Total Support & Revenue	\$5.331.047
In-Kind Contributions	\$11,200
Corporate & Foundation Grants	\$340,009
Contributions/ Special Events	\$501,620
Program Service Fees/ Other	\$1,278,846
Government Grants	\$3,199,372



HOW DID WE SPEND OUR MONEY?

Minnesota Programs	\$3,626,961
Serving Minnesotans	\$2,064,041
Supporting Organizations	\$1,562,920
National Programs	\$520,600
Administration	\$672,221
Fundraising	\$369,047
Total Expenses	\$5,188,829

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS

TOTAL ASSETS	\$3,123,869
Long-term assets	\$51,208
Other current assets	\$135,083
Board designated special purpose reserve	\$200,000
Accounts/grants receivable	\$313,924
Board designated operating reserve	\$500,000
Endowment	\$926,037
Cash and cash equivalents	\$997,617

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$3,123,869
Accounts payable	\$65,638
Board designated special purpose reserve	\$200,000
Unrestricted net assets	\$340,473
Board designated operating reserve	\$500,000
Restricted net assets	\$574,793
Accrued expenses and other	\$594,758
Board designated permanent endowment	\$848,207

Thank you, donors!

Donors who made tax-deductible contributions to Literacy Minnesota from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 are listed below. Literacy Minnesota recognizes that gifts of any size and type help create a world where all individuals have access to life-changing learning. To learn more about why we choose to list donors without gift level categories, please contact Development Director Susan Godon at sgodon@literacymn.org or 651-251-9092.

Provide life-changing literacy skills for future generations. Please remember Literacy Minnesota in your will.

GOVERNMENT FUNDERS

Corporation for National and Community Service, Minnesota Department of Education, Ramsey County, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Labor

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