

NCL Virtual Follow-up Strategic Planning Session

Facilitator: Jeffrey A Fantine, Ph.D., NCL Executive Director

Meeting Summary:

The National Coalition for Literacy (NCL) held a virtual follow-up session to discuss critical issues emerging from their strategic planning process. Jeffrey, with facilitators Lauren and Laura, outlined the current status of the planning effort, including member surveys, in-person meetings, and the strategic planning hub. Key environmental challenges were highlighted, such as adult literacy issues, the need for public awareness, and a shift towards state and local advocacy due to the challenging federal climate. The group discussed NCL's mission and potential future actions, emphasizing the importance of collaboration with external stakeholders and building field capacity. David raised concerns about prioritizing member-driven ideas, and Jeffrey confirmed that the current priorities were derived from member input, with further member involvement planned to narrow down and rank these priorities.

Adult Literacy Focus and Scope

The group discussed the focus of literacy, with Alisa and Patricia agreeing to maintain a narrow population focus on adult low-literacy while recognizing multiple literacies in the context of adults with low literacy. Heidi emphasized the need to treat numeracy as a distinct category separate from literacy, while Denean highlighted the importance of connecting literacy skills to workforce credentials and degree pathways. The discussion concluded with Jeffrey raising the question of whether the National Coalition for Literacy should expand its focus of literacy broadly across the lifespan in an attempt to bridge systems addressing literacy in the U.S.

Adult Education Focus

The group discussed the focus of adult education, agreeing that NCL should maintain its focus on adult basic or foundational education rather than expanding to the field of adult education more broadly, noting that it encompasses more than just foundational education and includes areas like CTE, human resources development, continuing education and community education (as well as other areas). Sarah mentioned using the AFLA definition as a way to describe adult education focus.

NCL's Advocacy Role

The meeting focused on the role and approach of NCL in adult literacy advocacy. Participants discussed whether NCL should continue its advocacy work and how to manage potential overlaps with other organizations' efforts. Amanda emphasized that multiple organizations advocating can be beneficial, while concerns were raised about limited resources and the need for coordinated messaging. Sharon shared that COABE does not support other organizations

doing advocacy as they spent a lot of money to be able to do this for the field, so they see it as competing and unnecessary for other organizations to do it. Patricia echoed the value of COABE's advocacy work. It was suggested that NCL could serve as a convener to help member organizations align messages and help amplify the collective voice of its members, but not be involved in direct advocacy. They also discussed the importance of listening to and understanding the changing needs of adult learners to inform advocacy strategies.

Advocacy Focus Discussion

The group discussed NCL's advocacy focus, with Jeffrey posing a question about whether to maintain Federal focus or shift to state/local or stakeholder advocacy. The discussion revealed that libraries serve multiple levels (national, state, local) and could be a key stakeholder group for NCL to model their advocacy. Alisa and Gwenn suggested that before deciding on focus area, NCL needs to decide if they will continue advocacy at all. Laura re-emphasized NCL's critical role as a convener bringing together different voices to present a unified message about adult education and literacy, while Todd suggested expanding advocacy beyond federal to areas that could provide more funding. Participants shared valuable insights, including the importance of unified messaging and collaboration, and the need to support both national and state-level advocacy efforts. The discussion ended with participants reinforcing the need for NCL to maintain advocacy as its core mission.

Stakeholders

As time was running out, Jeffrey emphasized the importance of connecting with stakeholder groups and posted a poll asking for input on two key stakeholders NCL should connect and collaborate with.

Building Capacity

The group also discussed how NCL could support building capacity, with Jen requesting that the concept be framed more clearly. There was no further time to have this conversation, so the meeting ended with plans for further discussion on this topic on the hub website.

Jeffrey said all questions from this meeting will be posted on the hub site for input and discussion. He asked for participants to include in the chat on what they think is the most important area for NCL to focus and what they enjoyed hearing most during this meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.

Next Steps:

- Send the meeting recording and summary to the board for consideration
- Move the discussion questions to the strategic planning hub website
 - How NCL will focus their efforts in literacy
 - How NCL will be involved in advocacy
 - Clarify NCL's focus with advocacy for the field
 - If/how NCL will address the overlap in advocacy efforts
 - Identify stakeholders NCL should work with
 - How can NCL support capacity building – increase access, improve professional learning, promote innovation and research, improve learner outcomes, support more full-time teachers
- NCL should continue to serve as the convener for unified advocacy messaging across member organizations
- Develop strategy for supporting state adult education fellows and associations
- Provide more resources for state-level adult education advocacy efforts
- Share updated information and resources for local advocacy use
- Consider shifting advocacy focus to include more stakeholder engagement beyond federal level
- Develop framework for expanded stakeholder engagement and collaboration

Poll Results:

What should the “literacy” focus be for the National Coalition for Literacy?	
Broadly – multiple literacies across the lifespan	2 (8%)
Adult and Family only	6 (24%)
Adult + more intentional about multiple literacies in context of low-literacy	17 (68%)

What should focus of “adult education” be for NCL?	
Broadly – entire field of adult education	9 (38%)
Adult Basic Education (Adult Foundational Education)	15 (63%)

There is overlap in the advocacy space for adult literacy and adult education. How should NCL address advocacy in the future?	
NCL should shift away from advocacy and focus on other priorities	1 (5%)
NCL should identify an advocacy niche that isn't overlapping with other member organizations	1 (5%)
NCL should be a convenor of members to discuss, shape, align and share individual advocacy efforts and solely promote advocacy efforts of its members (not involved in direct advocacy)	7 (35%)
NCL should continue to do direct advocacy for the field of adult & family literacy and adult education that may overlap with other members - involves coordination, collaboration, reinforcement – and also be a convenor of it's members to help discuss, shape and align messaging	11 (55%)

What should the advocacy focus be for NCL in the future?	
Federal policy and funding only	2 (12%)
Shift to State and Local Policy and Funding	0 (0%)
Shift to Stakeholder Groups (employers, workforce, philanthropy, etc.)	0 (0%)
All of the above	14 (82%)
Shift away from advocacy and focus on other priorities	1(6%)

List 2 Stakeholders NCL should connect/collaborate with?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sectors working in anti poverty. That encompasses more than two, but I think that is a good umbrella • state organization and agencies; corporate organizations • COABE & State Directors • National Skills Coalition and a national affordable housing organization • faith based communities (i.e. places of worship) and workforce development • National Association of Workforce Boards; National Conference of Mayors • NAWDP - National Assoc of Workforce Development Professionals • Business & philanthropic organizations that support literacy or other social issues that low literacy effects. • Workforce WIOA Title II • Congress and state-level leaders • Voc Rehab Centers and Workforce Partners that represent a cross-section of employer needs and skills need from employees • Parallel orgs that operate in the training side of WIOA • National Education Association and Nat'l Council of Teachers of English

Chat Summary:

Link to NCL Strategic Planning Hub website shared: <https://ncl-strategicplanning.blogspot.com>

The summary of NCL's strategic planning process – the May meetings and the Member and Non-member surveys is posted on the NCL Strategic Planning Hub.

Is this a comprehensive list of members? <https://nationalcoalitionforliteracy.org/about/about-ncl/members/>

- Jeff's reply – turns out this is updated, so yes!

Alisa - this does not include individual members like me.

- Jeff's reply – correct, it does not include the individual members – there are about 35 of those.

Sarah Cacicio, ALL IN/BBF : I agree about focusing on population of adults in need of foundational skills. If helpful, sharing a white paper that ALL IN published in 2023 that talks about the intersection of foundational skills with multiple literacies:

<https://allinliteracy.org/adult-literacy-and-learning-impact-network-releases-new-white-paper-investing-in-multiple-literacies-for-individual-and-collective-empowerment/>

Chrissie Klinger : Agree numeracy needs to be there not just lumped into literacy

David Rosen : I agree with Alisa but would suggest two populations: below the level of high school completion and immigrants and refugees who need to improve their English skills

Alisa Belzer, Rutgers University : Replying to "I agree Heidi" Me too. I didn't mean to exclude numeracy. I suggest that we focus on literacy, numeracy, and language learning but keep to the definition of learners defined by Title II. If learners in dev ed are struggling then that's a source of reflection regarding transitions to work and college.

David Rosen : to improve their English skills

Mark Vineis - ProLiteracy : I agree with Alisa, Pat, and Heidi. I think as Natl organizations we have all been using the broader concept of literacies while also advocating for and building capacity for numeracy. All this without changing the names of our organizations.

Sarah Cacicio, ALL IN/BBF :

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OPA/newsreleases/2025/08/Americas-Talent-Strategy-Building-the-Workforce-for-the-Golden-Age.pdf>

Alisa Belzer, Rutgers University : I think if we are learner centered and focus on meeting the broad array of our target learner population, we're going to be meeting needs around a broad array of literacies, language, and numeracies.

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Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : Yes, I've thoroughly digested the Talent Strategy:(.

Meghan McBride, WestEd : "For individuals with significant barriers to employment" captures the population we are trying to serve, in my opinion.

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : They don't understand what is different about AFE learners.

Jen Vanek, World Education : re heidi's point.... are financial literacy and numeracy that same thing?

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : I don't think so

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : Absolutely not.

Sharon Bonney : Replying to "re heidi's point.... a..." They are not. COABE will be copublishing a financial literacy edition of the COABE Journal with Jump\$tart Coalition.

Heidi Schuler : Replying to "re heidi's point.... a..." No, they are different. Here's the PIAAC definition used for numeracy: "Numeracy is the ability to access, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life."

Alisa Belzer, Rutgers University : Replying to "I think if we are le..." I would like to center learners' needs rather than identifying specific focus areas even if that makes things feel diffuse. Mostly I really want to put learners' needs back in the center.

Alisa Belzer, Rutgers University : Replying to "I think if we are le..." But I understand this might not be a popular sell for policy makers. I wonder if there is a way to center learners' needs in a way that makes a compelling policy argument as well. It's a fine line to walk.

Heidi Schuler : Replying to "re heidi's point.... a..." ANN is revamping our "What is Numeracy?" page on our website, but this is what's on there at the moment. The infographic is the new element. We'll be moving the text beside the infographic to a new area on the page.

<https://www.adultnumeracynetwork.org/What-is-Numeracy>

Jen Vanek, World Education : I think it's tough to disentangle literacy (from a reading perspective) and other applications of literacy skills (health lit, fin lit, dig lit, etc). And that the context for adults using those skills includes but is broader than WFD.

Alisa Belzer, Rutgers University : Not all ROI is easy to measure but that doesn't make it unimportant.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : I don't think NCL should focus on children's literacy. That is an entire field with a very different history, set of assumptions, population served, etc. It doesn't make sense for us to pivot like that.

Todd Evans : I think our definition of preparing adults for the workforce is very narrow. It is almost always focused on adults working for someone else. In addition to the folks Chrissie just described who may not enter the workforce, when I worked for a local program in Memphis we had plenty of students who were small business owners. They didn't need literacy to get a job, they needed literacy so they didn't have to rely on others to interpret contracts or balance their books.

Chrissie Klinger : Replying to "Not all ROI is easy ..." Yes! Too many times the ROI is about the "money" but many other returns for sure!

David Rosen : I think children's literacy, as important as it is, should not be a responsibility of the National Coalition of Literacy because it will dilute our efforts on behalf of adult literacy.

Sarah Cacicio, ALL IN/BBF : Replying to "I don't think NCL sh..." Agree that children's literacy is another area - keep focused on adults and parenting adults/whole families.

Denean Jones-Ward : The skilled immigrant community should also be considered. Their skillset needs are different from some of the other communities whom we serve.

Mark Vineis - ProLiteracy : Replying to "I don't think NCL sh..." I agree with Amanda. Children's Literacy is a separate field.

Margaret Patterson : The race is on!

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : Replying to "I think if we are le..." One of the eternally frustrating things about the very good goal of centering learners is figuring out how to navigate funders and policymakers who then hyper-focus on the people and only want to fund

"deserving" learners. I don't think that's a helpful frame, but it's incredibly widespread nevertheless. :(

Eric Nesheim (He Him) : Agree Amanda

kolesentracey : I support what Amanda said about advocacy

Jen Vanek, World Education : Are we louder on the Hill if there is more than 1 org representing the field?

kolesentracey : It appears we could be walking in step with each other

Sarah Cacicio, ALL IN/BBF : I think NCL could take the lead on coordinating some shared messaging across groups/orgs, such as what ALL IN was able to do with the Senate Caucus recommendations: <https://allinliteracy.org/recommendations-to-strengthen-the-u-s-workforce-and-wellbeing-by-increasing-adult-literacy/>

kolesentracey : and how we can build on each other's strenghts

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : Replying to "Are we louder on the..." Absolutely; that was one of my points -- if you look at other fields, most of them don't just have one voice on the Hill; they have multiple.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : Replying to "Are we louder on the..." Certainly that is the case for CCs and for workforce!

Denean Jones-Ward : Replying to "Are we louder on the..." Definitely!

Gwenn Weaver, Digital Durham : Agree very much with Amanda. Should be a collaborative effort.

Lauren Osowski : Replying to "Agree very much with..." Yes, collaboration and using our collective voices to speak for adult education is key.

Margaret Patterson : The advocacy "elephant" in the room is how we collectively advocate for the survival of adult foundational education over the next three plus years.

Denean Jones-Ward : Great points, Ira.

Mark Vineis - ProLiteracy : Ira ++++++ yes. ensure we have a larger chorus singing the same song. I need to go to another meeting.

Ira Yankwitt : Thanks all. So maybe the issue is the "role" of NCL in advocacy, not whether it should or shouldn't "continue to be involved" in advocacy.

Chrissie Klinger : I think we continue advocacy but maybe different members lead different efforts... sometimes NCL takes the lead and other times a member org takes the lead. So maybe the push forward is better communication and unified messaging.

Sarah Cacicio, ALL IN/BBF : Replying to "Thanks all. So maybe..." Yes, I think coordinating information, resources, messages and amplification is a key part of NCL.

Jen Vanek, World Education : Coordination of multiple efforts

Ira Yankwitt : Thanks for all of that, David. Completely agree!

David Rosen : I share Patricia's thanks to COABE for the amazing work they have done.

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : One shared kind of messaging is about the various benefits and value of any type of support for literacy, whether it's literacy programming from libraries and others, workforce development-oriented programming, or something else.

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Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : Strongly agree with Jen

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : Yes to Jen

Eric Nesheim (He Him) : This conversation is deeply appreciated. The diversity of opinion is important. I look forward to continuing the conversation so that multiple groups can come together to unify behind what makes sense. I believe it's possible.

Deborah Kennedy : +1 to Jen, and I would note that the American Library Association (not represented here today, unfortunately) is one of the original founding members of the NCL.

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : Replying to "+1 to Jen, and I wou..." They are going to be even more important now.

David Rosen : +1 to Deborah. ALA was a lead organization in the formation of the NCL.

Sharon Bonney : I agree that NCL is a trusted convener for multiple organizations and in my opinion, NCL's super power is uplifting their member orgs work.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (she/her/ella) : I unfortunately have to hop off at 4:45 for another call. I look forward to staying engaged and to thinking together about how we can amplify and support each other's advocacy efforts to sustain our beleaguered field and support our learners.

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : We all represent pieces of the big picture and add something important.

Ira Yankwitt : Thank you for all of that, Sarah!

Denean Jones-Ward : I like Sarah's comment. Our entities serve drastically different demographics geographically alone. The concern is to ensure that all communities are represented well.

Sarah Cacicio, ALL IN/BBF : Replying to "Thank you for all of..." We need ALL of us and more people I would argue to make sure we continuously listen and understand the needs because they change.

Jen Vanek, World Education : I want to add context to choosing between first and second options. I feel like both could happen

Margaret Patterson : Really want to congratulate you all on how well organized this process is! It's tough to do strategic planning, but you are helping us keep the focus on what is critical. Kudos on that!

David Rosen : Several states have state adult foundational education advocacy groups that have been very effective. Perhaps the NCL could convene period meetings with state advocacy groups to share their strategies.

Sharon Bonney : Thank you for all you are doing! I have a hard stop but wish you the best!

Patricia Tyler : Thanks everyone for a great conversation

Denean Jones-Ward : Thanks, all! This has been great!

Ira Yankwitt : Agreed! Thanks all! Also have to jump. Thanks again, Jeff - and everyone!

Gwenn Weaver, Digital Durham : Have to leave for another meeting, as well. Thanks for this session!

Responses are to question posed: What is most important thing you heard today that NCL should be doing?

Denean Jones-Ward : Keeping the momentum!

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : Making the importance of adult literacy clear to all

Heidi Schuler (Adult Numeracy Network) : Stay unified in our messaging that communicates clearly to the field and to funders.

Jen Vanek, World Education : One of the voices working in concert to increase visibility of and support for adult foundational education.

Jane Eiguez, CASAS : Bring us together to discuss messages and priorities.

Margaret Patterson : Collaboration and keeping ourselves together in our messaging and outreach

Denean Jones-Ward : Everything! Until next time!

Laura Fetter, CASAS : Unified messaging and collaboration

Jen Vanek, World Education : Hearing perspectives from others... I like that the discussion preceded the polls

Jane Eiguez, CASAS : Unified messaging is key

David Rosen : Supporting national advocacy efforts, and perhaps helping state advocacy organizations to share strategies at the state level

Todd Evans : Unified/Coordinated messaging

Heidi Schuler (Adult Numeracy Network) : Learning from one another on these key topics

Laura Fetter, CASAS : Thank you for the courageous conversation!

Stephanie Cronen - CREATE Network : Thanks!!!

Todd Evans : Thank you for this. Very important for NCL and adult literacy

Heidi Schuler (Adult Numeracy Network) : Thanks for organizing these conversations, Jeff and Lauren, and for keeping the momentum going throughout the dialogue!

David Rosen : Thanks!