

Letter Writing for Adult Literacy Program Advocacy



Purpose

To facilitate a letter-writing campaign for students to write to their elected officials. The letters will let officials know about the things that happen at your adult education program and encourage their support.

Rationale

National Adult Education and Family Literacy Week (AEFLW) takes place this year from September 15 to 21. Adult education programs need support from their local elected officials so they can continue to offer their excellent classes and tutoring sessions to those who need it. This support includes funding for local programs.

One important way to help make local elected officials aware of what your program does is with a letter-writing campaign featuring letters from your students. By sharing their own stories, local elected officials gain a better sense of just how impactful your program is.

This type of activity can be used in any adult education setting, although a letter-writing campaign among those with lower literacy will require more support and guidance.

The Basic Activity

- 1. Decide in advance what type of local elected official you'd like to target with your letter-writing campaign.** For instance, would it be city or county officials? A state or federal legislator? Someone else? Leaders at your program can likely provide guidance if you aren't sure who would be best. You can also decide in advance if you'd like students to handwrite letters or type them. Although typing is more common, there is still a personal touch with handwritten letters.
- 2. Ask students if they know who any of their local elected officials are.** Make sure to mention the various levels of local elected officials, which may start at a city level and continue up to the national level with members of Congress. Even though you may have a specific person in mind already, it's good to get students thinking about the different layers of government. Ask why might it be important for local elected officials to know about your adult

Advocacy

The Difference Between Advocacy and Lobbying

Depending on what you are teaching in class, it may be helpful to explain to students the difference between advocacy and lobbying.

You can explain that advocacy is:

- Identifying, embracing, and promoting a cause,
- Attempting to share public opinion, and
- Promoting the interests of your community.

You can let them know that the letter-writing activity is considered advocacy.

Lobbying is a specific legally defined activity that involves stating your position on specific legislation to legislators and/or asking them to support your position. You can point out that many big industries, such as gun rights and insurance, often employ lobbyists to help influence politicians regarding their stance on certain issues.

Check your organization's rules and guidelines about advocacy and lobbying prior to undertaking any advocacy activities.

The ProLiteracy Advocacy Toolkit

<https://www.proliteracy.org/resources/advocacy-toolkit/>

The ProLiteracy Advocacy Toolkit for adult education and literacy programs offers strategies for advocating at state and local levels, utilizing skills data, messaging, and engaging with legislators, donors, and foundations.

It emphasizes virtual advocacy and provides valuable tools such as the PIAAC Skills Map and the Barbara Bush Foundation Literacy Gap Map.

Other information included in the 121-page toolkit include:

- Creating effective messages
- Asking for support
- How to write and call local and state legislators
- Advocating in the private sector

ProLiteracy aims to create awareness, influence public policy, and empower individuals to make a difference in adult literacy.

Stay tuned in early 2025 for the release of an updated Advocacy Toolkit and news of new advocacy-related benefits for ProLiteracy members!

education program. Facilitate a discussion, but make sure to point out that the government often funds these programs. You can let them know what specific leader you are targeting and why. If your class has a specific interest or focus on civics, you also can show them where online to find names of local legislators and learn about their responsibilities.

- 3. Let students know that they will write letters to briefly share a story about their adult education experience and why it's important to support adult literacy programs.** Let them know that they will write a draft of their letter before finalizing it.
- 4. Provide a template for students to follow for their letter (see page 13).** Point out different elements it contains, such as:
 - the student's address (or program's if they are not comfortable using their own)
 - the legislator's address
 - a brief introduction
 - a brief explanation of why they are taking the class
 - how the school or class has helped them
 - brief statement of future plans
 - stating at the end, "Please support funding for adult education."
- 5. Provide time for students to write their letter draft.** Remind them that they don't have to share anything that they think is too personal.
- 6. Have students share their draft letter with you and/or a fellow classmate for feedback.** This feedback can help improve any content, grammar, or spelling issues. However, the letters don't have to be perfect. The goal is authenticity.
- 7. Give students time to revise their letters.** Make sure that they sign them as well.
- 8. When finished, have letter copies ready to send.** If it's by email, then it's as quick as emailing the official. If it's by mail, provide stamps (if you can) and help students address the envelopes correctly.
- 9. Keep the conversation going about your program's advocacy efforts.** Encourage students to let you know about any replies they receive from their letters. Share any feedback or relevant updates with students as you get them.

Programs can also follow this same format to have staff members write letters as well. They can share their passion and experience to advocate for their program/ students and perhaps even invite the local elected official to the class or program.