

responsibilities of citizenship. A critical aspect of NIFL's work is to measure the nation's progress toward this Goal.

Over the past two years the NIFL has been involved in a joint effort with the National Education Goals Panel aimed at developing a functional definition of Goal 6 that can guide the improvement of literacy services as well as the measurement of success. As part of this joint effort, the NIFL turned to adult learners across the country, soliciting, collating, and analyzing responses to the question: "What skills and knowledge do adults need to be literate, to compete in a global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?"

In their writings, respondents identified their roles as parents and family members as an important part of their roles as citizens and workers. In discussing the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in these three primary roles, adults pointed us to four fundamental purposes literacy fulfills in their lives:

- Providing access to information so they can orient themselves in the world.
- Enabling them to give voice to their ideas and have an impact on the world around them.
- Enabling them to make decisions and act independently, without needing to rely on others.
- Laying a foundation for continued learning, so they can keep up with the world as it changes.

In essence, adults told us that in order to attain Goal 6, every adult needs the knowledge and skills to accomplish these four purposes in the context of their roles as parents, citizens and workers. (These four purposes are described more fully, with examples from adults' writings, in the NIFL publication *Equipped for the Future*.) If Goal 6 were rephrased to reflect these learner purposes it might read: By the year 2000 every adult will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to orient themselves in a rapidly changing world, to voice their ideas and be heard, and to act independently as a parent, a citizen and a worker, for the good of family, community, and nation.

The National Institute for Literacy has determined to use this customer-driven definition of Goal 6 as a starting point for improving and enhancing the adult literacy system to accelerate progress toward this Goal. In shaping the course of this initiative, the Institute has taken into account the following related national initiatives focused on outcomes and accountability:

1. Several national efforts in the K-12 system, either underway or completed,

identify content standards—criteria for what students should know and be able to do—in specific curriculum areas such as math, history, and geography. In addition, several states have established or are establishing curriculum frameworks that build on these national content standards and define more specifically what skills and knowledge students are expected to master.

2. Equally pertinent to this project, the Departments of Labor and Education are working with partnerships of business, labor, and other private organizations to develop "skills standards"—criteria for skills that are necessary to perform effectively and productively in particular occupational fields, such as the electronics industry or the allied health field.

Every partnership engaged in defining the skill standards for an occupational field, or "cluster," has confronted the same reality: there is no consensus on what basic skills, knowledge, and abilities constitute a foundation for more technical skills. In other words, there are no commonly accepted standards for adult literacy and basic skills and, consequently, no supplier system that can assure employers that their workers develop this foundation.

3. At the same time, there has been increasing interest at the state and national policy level in focusing adult literacy and basic skills education on "real world" outcomes—the changes that occur in adults' lives when they acquire the skills, knowledge and abilities they need to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as parents, citizens, and workers.

This emphasis on outcomes has already gained considerable support in family and workplace literacy programs, where instruction focuses explicitly on enabling adults to be more effective parents or more flexible workers. In addition, several states, some of them working within the framework of NIFL's state capacity-building initiatives, have begun to shift the focus of measurement and reporting for adult education from inputs (such as number of class hours attended) to outcomes related to broader state policy goals (such as decreased poverty, welfare dependence and unemployment; increased community involvement and citizen activism; and more children starting school ready to learn).

In proposals to improve the effectiveness of the national adult education and training system, both the Congress and the Administration have also focused on real world outcomes. Various legislative proposals introduced in the Congress to authorize adult

education and literacy services require states to—

- Establish program goals related to work, family, and community outcomes,
- Set performance standards or benchmarks for such goals, and
- Use information generated in response to these standards to monitor and improve program outcomes.

These proposals reflect the growing influence of a broader movement in both public and private sectors toward continuous improvement, where organizations and work units are held accountable for achieving desired results and given greater flexibility in how they achieve those results.

Given this background, the NIFL proposes to support activities for reform and improvement of the adult literacy system that emphasize real-world outcomes, accountability for achieving those outcomes, and continuous improvement of programs and systems.

PURPOSE OF PROGRAM: The purpose of this planning grant program is to launch a multi-year initiative to strengthen the capacity of adult literacy programs to achieve and measure learner outcomes. This initiative will focus on: (a) defining what adults need to know and be able to do to fulfill their roles as parents, citizens and workers; (b) investigating the most effective ways to help adults attain those skills and knowledge; and (c) developing and refining approaches to learner assessment and program evaluation that are congruent with this focus on achieving real-world outcomes.

Grantees will use these one year planning grants to launch a collaborative, grass roots process of system reform and improvement, beginning with the development of content standards for adult literacy and basic skills. Content standards will be the first major step toward improving the effectiveness of the adult literacy system in helping adults fulfill their roles as parents, citizens, and workers. The entire initiative is intended to enhance our ability as a nation to achieve Goal 6 of the National Education Goals.

Grantees will have the opportunity to—

(1) work with the Institute, the National Education Goals Panel, and each other to develop a common framework for system reform and to facilitate broad sharing of information and results.

(2) compete for funding, as available, to continue the process of system reform in the next stage of NIFL's multi-year initiative. The NIFL expects to be able to fund no more than 3 or 4 system implementation grants in year 2.