



LITERACY INITIATIVE

The Germination Project is a leadership development initiative for a competitively selected group of Philadelphia's most talented and promising high school students. Designed to expand the horizons of its student fellows, the Germination Project seeks to foster an abiding sense of civic citizenship among these young leaders. To achieve this goal, a central component of the Germination Project experience is active participation in an ongoing service initiative. In its inaugural year, one aspect of the service initiative will be improving literacy. Fellows will work to improve reading, writing and computer skills of struggling students and adults in the city's most underserved communities. The Germination Project will do this in partnership with two highly regarded volunteer-focused organizations, Achieve Now and Code For Philly.

The Need for Literacy

For Philadelphia to remain a world-class city, its populace must be equipped with the skills demanded by the rapidly changing economy of the 21st century. The Center for Literacy estimates 550,000 adults in Philadelphia are considered low literate, which means they would struggle to fill out a job application. Roughly half of the city's adult population lacks the educational resources and skills needed to participate in the workforce. This has contributed to Philadelphia's devastating poverty rate – at 27 percent, nearly twice the national average and the highest of America's large cities.

Unfortunately, the discouraging state of literacy in Philadelphia is exacerbated by an underfunded school district, which lurches from one budget crisis to the next. Graduation rates hover around 60 percent, meaning every year a new cohort of young Philadelphians join more than 200,000 adults in the city without a high school diploma, and find themselves at a disadvantage trying to find work.

The Germination Project's Literacy Initiative, driven by a collaboration of its student fellows, Achieve Now educators and Code For Philly tech tutors, seeks to increase access to educational services for all Philadelphians and prepare the city's residents to thrive in a knowledge-based economy. By focusing their efforts in underserved communities and partnering with local leaders and grassroots organizations, Germination Project student fellows will deliver valuable literacy-boosting services to hundreds of Philadelphians.

Initial Planning

Student fellows will play an active role at every step of the Germination Project Literacy Initiative. With guidance from Achieve Now staff, as well as local education experts in the private, public and social sectors, student fellows will conduct research into Philadelphia's 18 planning districts and identify communities with the greatest unmet need for educational services in general and literacy training in particular. Student fellows will also conduct a landscape analysis of existing literacy programs in each community to determine which programs are appropriate for scaling with additional volunteer tutors and partnerships. Based on insights from this initial research, student fellows and partner education professionals will develop a plan to guide their initial efforts to deliver literacy services in underserved communities.

Outreach

Following the creation of this plan, Germination Project student fellows will design and implement a coordinated outreach campaign to promote literacy training opportunities in select underserved communities throughout Philadelphia. Student fellows will begin by seeking out community leaders (e.g., clergy, block captains, neighborhood association members) in those selected areas who are willing to help promote the Literacy Initiative and where feasible, offer a location (e.g., a church or recreation center) where literacy training may be delivered. As part of the outreach phase, student fellows will be encouraged to contact City Council members, ward leaders and party committee persons whose jurisdictions coincide with the communities where the Germination Project operates. This component of the initiative will give student fellows an opportunity to engage directly with local elected officials as they work to amplify the reach and impact of the Literacy Initiative.

Training

In the weeks leading to the launch of the Germination Project Literacy Initiative, student fellows will attend a series of wide-ranging training sessions and seminars. These sessions will prepare students for their interactions with community leaders and literacy training recipients, as well as provide deeper insight into issues of education inequality, literacy and workforce readiness in Philadelphia. For example, students will learn how education levels are directly tied to likely employment, economic and health outcomes. Education experts will conduct seminars on the intersection of race, class, socioeconomic status and other factors with education levels to provide student fellows with a context for their interactions with community members and to offer a macro-level picture of the education challenges facing large urban centers around the country.

In addition to this foundational grounding in education challenges, student fellows will be taught practical skills to deliver literacy training focused on improving reading comprehension, writing and computer skills. Student fellows will be trained by Achieve Now education professionals to deliver literacy training to children, adolescents and adults. Student fellows will learn to use Achieve Now's proprietary educational materials

providing a step-by-step map to guide learners to mastery of reading skills. Student fellows will also be trained by Code For Philly tech tutors to deliver digital literacy training and teach basic computer skills to both younger students and adults.

Field Work

Following the training period, Germination Project student fellows will accompany Achieve Now educators and Code For Philly tech tutors to community centers where those organizations currently provide literacy and digital literacy training. For the initial two months of their field work, student fellows will deliver training at those sites, working as peer-to-peer tutors coaching younger students in reading, writing and computer skills. Where appropriate, they will also work help prepare young adults for the workforce, either by helping them study for the GED exam or assisting in the preparation of resumes, cover letters and job applications. Student fellows will also work with administrators from Achieve Now, Code For Philly and the community centers to learn how to set up and manage other literacy training sites.

The Literacy Initiative aims to achieve impact at scale. Thus, after the initial two-month ramp up period, student fellows will identify additional community centers to serve as literacy training sites in coordination with Achieve Now and Code For Philly. Furthermore, student fellows will recruit other students from their schools and communities to participate as volunteer tutors, building a local grassroots student teacher corps.

Impact

Upon the conclusion of the initial two-month period where student fellows deliver literacy training at sites where Achieve Now and Code For Philly currently operate, student fellows will prepare comprehensive impact statements of their work. These statements will include quantitative and qualitative analyses of the education services delivered, statistical analyses on the effect on student literacy rates, interviews with literacy training recipients, individual impressions of the experience, and a substantive evaluation of the project with recommendations for improvements and best practices. The impact statements will be reviewed and evaluated by Achieve Now and Code For Philly partners and other Germination Project faculty. If suitable, the impact statements will be published for the benefit of educators and Philadelphians at large.

Through its institutional partnership with Achieve Now and Code For Philly, the Germination Project's Literacy Initiative will be a singular opportunity for student fellows to gain unparalleled access into dimensions of this city they might not otherwise encounter, to acquire new skill sets with a wide range of applicability, and perhaps most importantly, to begin making good on their commitment to pay it forward in Philadelphia.