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**D.C. LEARNs to Develop Professional Development Center for
Washington, D.C. Adult Literacy Programs**

**Collaborative Project Includes the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library
and the Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee**

Washington, DC, December 12, 2006 — The State Education Office (SEO) of the Government of the District of Columbia has announced that **D.C. LEARNs**, Washington D.C.'s literacy coalition, has been selected to lead the development, design, and management of an Adult Literacy Professional Development Center for adult literacy, GED preparation, workplace literacy, family literacy, and adult English language learning programs in the District of Columbia. The State Education Office (SEO) will provide a one-year grant of \$100,000 to D.C. LEARNs in support of this project, with an additional \$100,000 expected from the Fannie Mae Foundation. D.C. LEARNs plans to work aggressively to attract additional support for the project with other philanthropic organizations and private partners once it is underway.

The award was made through a competitive grant process completed in September. The SEO has indicated that it hopes to budget awards for subsequent years based on outcomes and the availability of funds from D.C. government. "Two hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money, and it's great news for D.C. residents that both the public sector and philanthropic partners like the Fannie Mae Foundation continue to recognize the importance of investing in adult literacy," notes Jeff Carter, the Executive Director of D.C. LEARNs. "On the other hand, when you think about the continuous need for well-trained adult literacy teachers and tutors, this grant award is really just a beginning. The SEO, in its request for proposals, was wise to ask proponents for a long-term vision for improving program quality for D.C. residents. The first year will be laying the groundwork for that vision."

To do this, he adds, D.C. LEARNs' plans to work closely with the city's most experienced adult literacy programs and teachers. "Our work is going to be very tightly focused on strengthening the ability of these programs to provide quality training and support for their own teachers and tutors, and in asking them to provide the city with leadership on how to do this system-wide."

The latest national data suggests that 37% of D.C. adults lack the literacy skills needed to successfully function in society.¹ Many organizations in the District of Columbia, thankfully, are working hard to remedy this literacy gap, but these programs are mostly independent, community-based organizations with limited public support. “Historically, the adult literacy system here is largely the result of the efforts of these fiercely committed, independent, community-based programs,” says Carter. “There’s no reason to believe that, given the proper resources, a system of independent, non-profit, community-based programs can’t provide quality adult literacy services. In fact, these organizations offer many advantages in terms of their commitment to and understanding of the people that they are serving. But, in our view, such a system requires participatory, facilitative leadership. We’re hoping that this new professional development center will provide that kind of leadership. We also hope that this process will encourage additional public and private investment in these programs.”

A second major strategy, according to Carter, is to leverage existing professional development resources currently available here in the District wherever possible. This philosophy led to D.C. LEARNs’ decision to include two major organizational partners in the project, the **Adult Literacy Resource Center (ALRC)** at the **Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library** and the **EFF Center for Training and Technical Assistance Center** at the **Center for Literacy Studies (CLS), University of Tennessee**. CLS will provide support for Equipped for the Future (EFF), a national standards-based educational improvement initiative for adult basic education and English language learning—a role that builds off of work that D.C. literacy programs and CLS have accomplished to date in implementing EFF under the leadership of the **State Education Agency (SEA)** at the **University of the District of Columbia**. The ALRC will improve and expand its role as a professional development resource hub. All D.C. literacy teachers and program staff will be able to avail themselves of books, manuals, and other print resources through the ALRC and selected branch libraries.

Two D.C. LEARNs members, in addition to the ALRC, have agreed to be designated training sites: **The Carlos Rosario Public Charter School** and **Covenant House Washington** (Mississippi Avenue, SE location). Local practitioners from agencies such as the **Spanish Education Development (SED) Center, Literacy Volunteers of the National Capital Area (LVA-NCA), the Even Start Multicultural Family Literacy Program at Mary’s Center**, and others, have agreed to develop workshops and other professional development activities associated with the Center.

An advisory Board of representatives from city agencies such as the SEA, SEO, local/national experts, corporate and foundation communities, and adult education agencies will provide additional

¹ This estimate is based on a ten-year-old U.S. Department of Education study, but it is the only official estimate currently available. A new estimate based on a 2003 study is tentatively scheduled for release by the end of 2006.

expertise. “We will be counting on the SEO, SEA, other experienced city agencies such as the Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation to advise us as we make decisions that flesh out the initial plans we set out in our proposal.”

The SEO announced the award of the grant on October 10th, 2006, and it is anticipated that a grant agreement will be finalized between D.C. LEARNs and the SEO before the end of the year. In the meantime, planning is already underway, and the search for a director and associated staff for the project begins this month.

D.C. LEARNs (<http://www.dclearns.org>) is a nonprofit citywide coalition of more than 80 members (<http://www.dclearns.org/members.html>), most of whom are organizations providing adult, family, and children’s literacy services to the residents of Washington, D.C. Our mission is to work with these organizations to strengthen adult, family, and children's literacy services and present a strong, unified voice on the importance of literacy as an investment in the community. We work to raise public awareness of literacy issues, recruit volunteers, and provide the materials, research, training, and technical assistance needed to raise the quality of literacy services available to D.C. residents.

Our vision is that Washington, D.C. will become a city where effective and innovative literacy services are available to all, guided by the leadership of the literacy providers themselves, and supported by a community that is committed to the education of all its citizens.

D.C. LEARNs manages the *Read Out Loud* Literacy Hotline, 1-866-READ-OUT (1-866-732-3688). *Read Out Loud* is Washington, D.C.’s public service campaign designed to help people looking to improve their literacy skills find opportunities and services available here in the District of Columbia.

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