

First Literacy of Boston awards nearly \$40k in grants to boost adult basic education across Massachusetts

By [Rita Chandler](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated July 2, 2025, 12:02 a.m.

First Literacy, a Boston-based nonprofit, announced Tuesday that it has awarded grants to eight organizations across Massachusetts to advance adult basic education and English-language learning.

“Adult basic education programs are consistently underfunded,” said Terry Witherell, executive director of the nonprofit, in a statement.

The grants are intended to support “new and innovative programs that will have a lasting impact,” including financing pilot program ideas, supporting short-term classes that fill unmet student needs, and backing organization-wide initiatives, the statement said.

This year’s recipients include a range of programs, from a mother-child reading initiative for incarcerated women in Chicopee—the [Criminal Justice Organization of Hampden County](#) received \$3,750, their second consecutive First Literacy grant—to several ESL efforts focused on supporting low-income and immigrant adults.

[Blue Hills Adult Education](#) received the largest award, \$6,821, for “Digital Literacy for the Future,” a program designed to help adults in Canton, Dedham and Norwood navigate online English-learning tools, according to the First Literacy [website](#).

On Cape Cod, [Osterville Village Library](#)’s “Book Tasting” program, which aims to give adult learners the opportunity to try media beyond print books, was awarded \$5,750

expand its collection to include audiobooks, interactive digital books, educational tablets, and bilingual materials.

[The Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center](#), the Hyde Park–based [Jewish Vocational Service](#), and [The House of the Seven Gables Museum](#) in Salem each won grants to launch pilot courses that teach English instruction and career-readiness skills to help immigrants gain footing and independence. The organizations were awarded \$4,365, \$5,727, and \$5,049 respectively, according to the website.

[Community Action, Inc.](#) in Haverhill will use its \$4,898 grant to offer a six-week English course for students who have been on the waitlist for their language learning classes for more than 18 months.

[The Friends of the Community Learning Center](#) in Cambridge also received a second year of funding for its “Students Are Leaders” program. The organization was awarded \$2,161 to help adult learners build leadership skills, share knowledge, and engage with civic and cultural issues through peer-led workshops.

“We are excited to expand our impact into new communities and watch these innovative ideas come to life,” said Annie Sferrazza, First Literacy Program Director.

Founded in 1988, First Literacy aims to advance adult basic education statewide through a variety of programs. In addition to annual grants, it offers [student scholarships](#) and free professional-development workshops for instructors, according to its website.

The nonprofit funds its operations through foundation grants, individual donations, and special events, according to its website. In April, its biggest fund-raiser, an annual spelling bee, raised \$250,000, the Globe [reported](#).

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