



RESULTS FOR  
DEVELOPMENT

# Project Literacy Qualitative Midline Evaluation Final Report

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## I. Introduction

Project Literacy reached its midpoint in June 2017, and as that midpoint approached, Pearson partnered with Results for Development Institute (R4D), Project Literacy's Learning and Evaluation partner to search for a deeper understanding of the true impact of the project to date. This Qualitative Midline Evaluation is meant to highlight the successes and challenges of the work thus far, but also to be an actionable document for Project Literacy leadership to use to actively improve the implementation and associated impacts of Project Literacy. This report introduces the evaluation, describes our methodology, presents our findings, and concludes with reflections and recommendations for Project Literacy in the years to come.

### A. Background

Pearson launched Project Literacy, its flagship social impact campaign, in 2015 as part of its effort to improve the lives of vulnerable and marginalized populations. The goal of Project Literacy was to make measurable and sustainable gains in addressing the needs of the 758 million illiterate people in the world by 2030, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to reduce the number of people affected by illiteracy worldwide, Project Literacy developed a Theory of Change based on a landscape analysis of global literacy. The team identified three pillars of action:

1. **Raising awareness and mobilizing action.** Project Literacy sought to build a movement of people and organizations seeking to combat illiteracy who could push for greater attention to and investment in the issue.
2. **Advancing best practice.** Project Literacy sought to partner with and support organizations who were already implementing impactful literacy interventions in order to expand their scope and reach.
3. **Innovating for new solutions.** Project Literacy recognized the need to develop and test new solutions to improve literacy and sought to partner with organizations in the design and implementation of innovative literacy interventions.

Project Literacy partnered with about 100 different organizations across sectors (including nonprofit, corporate, multilateral, government, and social enterprise) who contributed to each of these key strategic areas. In addition to the support that it provided to these organizations, Project Literacy itself developed and rolled out three main large-scale campaigns. This began with the Unsigned Petition in 2015 which was launched on behalf of the 758 million illiterate people globally who were unable to sign their own names in order to draw the attention of the United Nations' leaders to the international issue of illiteracy. In February of 2016, Project Literacy launched a video campaign called The Alphabet of Illiteracy to highlight the many global development challenges that are interconnected with illiteracy. In early 2017, Project Literacy launched the Give Your Word campaign with First Words films which shared the stories of courageous adults learning to read and write in order to decrease the stigma around adult illiteracy. These are just some of the examples of activities that Project Literacy led over the last 2.5 years. According to monitoring reports shared by Project Literacy, their work reached 698,000 beneficiaries work in 21 countries, and 2.9 billion people were reached worldwide through media messaging at the time of this midline assessment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.projectliteracy.com/evaluating-impact>

The community of literacy advocates that Project Literacy fostered was comprised of three different types of members; community partners, unfunded collaborating partners, and funded collaborating partners. Community partners consist of organizations whose missions and goals align with that of Project Literacy, and actively worked to expand the reach of the Project Literacy movement through content sharing and outreach activities. Unfunded collaborating partners were more deeply involved with Project Literacy and acted as sponsors of awareness campaign content. These partners contributed to the content of Project Literacy's marketing campaigns and often co-convened Project Literacy-related events. Funded collaborating partners differed in that they were directly supported by Project Literacy financially or in-kind and worked with Project Literacy staff to jointly design and implement programs.

## **B. Evaluation overview and research questions**

This evaluation of Project Literacy is meant to supplement the monitoring data collected by the various implementing partners by collecting and analyzing data around the successes and challenges of the program, and the qualitative impacts achieved thus far. This Midline Evaluation incorporated rigorous qualitative methods including interviews, focus groups, and document review with the widest range of stakeholders possible. The evaluation sought to answer the following research questions around implementation, outcomes, and sustainability:

**Implementation.** These questions centered around the ways that Project Literacy-affiliated activities and partners were carried out.

- How did partners rate the partnership with Pearson?
- What activities did partnerships with Pearson and/or direct funding allow partners to implement?
- What successes and challenges did partners face in implementing the activities?
- How could the partnership have been improved?

**Outcomes.** These questions focused on the impact of the various program activities and activities related to Project Literacy.

- To what extent do Pearson's funding and partnerships have an impact on the fight against illiteracy (both globally and in target geographies)?
- To what extent does Pearson's funding and partnerships have an impact on employability of low-literate individuals?
- How many illiterate people are now literate because of activities funded by Project Literacy?
- How many people have improved their literacy because of activities funded by Project Literacy?
- To what extent do Project Literacy activities remove barriers to literacy (such as absenteeism, light, access to technology, etc.)? How so?
- How could Project Literacy achieve greater impact on literacy rates [defined as the binary outcome of making illiterate individuals literate]?
- How could Project Literacy achieve greater impact on literacy skills [defined as the literacy gains achieved by literate people]?
- What are the enabling factors that are needed for Project Literacy to make an impact?
- What barriers exist to inhibit that impact?

**Sustainability.** These questions focused on the ways in which the benefits, as well as the actual activities of Project Literacy could be sustained over time.

- To what extent does Project Literacy funding allow affiliated activities to be sustained over time?
- To what extent do Project Literacy activities lead to sustained literacy gains?

## II. Methodology

### A. Overview of qualitative data collection process

Qualitative data for the Pearson midline evaluation was collected in April 2017. Interviews were conducted over the phone, and the team traveled to London, San Francisco, and New York City to conduct focus group discussions with Project Literacy stakeholders. The interviews and focus groups sought to examine the successes, challenges, and impact of Project Literacy's three strategic areas (raising awareness, advancing best practice, and innovating for new solutions), and to understand how the initiative might be improved moving forward. Once the interviews were developed, the R4D team translated and transcribed notes, and conducted rigorous qualitative research and quality assurance, including coding of interviews in Atlas.ti, analyzing data in Excel to develop themes, and reporting those findings in this report.

### B. Instrument development

Interview and focus group protocols were developed based on the previously defined research questions. The protocol questions centered around respondents' engagement with Project Literacy as well as their perceptions and opinions of the implementation, outcomes, and sustainability of the initiative. Within each of these sections, the protocols addressed the themes of raising awareness, advancing best practice, and innovating for new solutions. Both interviews and focus group protocols were developed for representatives of organizations who fell into each of the respondent type categories previously described: funded collaborating partner, unfunded collaborating partner, and community member. Interview protocols were also developed for the Pearson staff and advisory group members, and external respondents.

### C. Sampling

#### Data sources

**Interviews:** One-on-one interviews were conducted over the phone by one of four R4D team members, with another team member serving as note-taker. These interview calls were held with Pearson staff and members of the Pearson advisory group, respondents identified as raising awareness and mobilizing action, advancing best practice, or innovating for new solutions, as well as several external respondents who served a triangulation function.

**Focus groups:** In-person focus group discussions were conducted in London, San Francisco, and New York City by pairs of R4D staff. Participants included two to three stakeholders who fell into one of the three respondent type categories: community partner, unfunded collaborating partner, or funded collaborating partner.

#### Sampling strategy

For both interviews and focus groups, the R4D team worked with Pearson to identify a list of potential respondents who fell into the categories of Pearson Leader, community partner, unfunded collaborating partner, funded collaborating partner, or triangulation. These respondents were further categorized by the strategic area to which they could speak. From this list, respondents were selected based on their

availability within the given timeline of completing data collection within the month of April. Several additional interviews were held based on the recommendation of interview participants.

## **D. Data collection**

### **Site visits**

R4D team members travelled to London, San Francisco, and New York City for a period of one to two days each in order to conduct in-person focus groups discussions. While interviews can be easily conducted by phone, focus groups benefit from in-person interaction to build a dialogue.

### **Data cleaning**

The interviews and focus group discussions were, whenever possible, conducted by one interviewer and a note-taker from the R4D team. Following the interview or focus group, the note-taker would develop a verbatim transcript of the interview based on the notes taken during the interview or focus group, and supplemented by the saved recording of the discussion or interview. The final Word documents were then uploaded into Atlas.ti for coding.

## **E. Analysis and Reporting**

### **Coding**

Coding is the process of identifying relevant topics, typically based on research questions, within transcripts, observation notes, and documents collected to prepare the data for rigorous analysis. The codebook for this research was developed based on the questions in the interview and focus group protocols, which were informed by the co-developed research questions from Pearson and R4D. Codes were grouped by the topic to which they related; engagement, implementation, outcomes, or sustainability. They were further delineated by their relation to the three strategic areas.

The four R4D team members completed an initial round of coding on a single interview transcript to test for inter-rater reliability (IRR). Once issues were discussed and it was confirmed that the team was coding consistently, team members continued coding the transcripts that they had personally developed.

### **Analysis**

Using Microsoft Excel, each relevant code was assigned to a separate tab. The first column of each tab listed the respondents' name and role, as well as who had conducted the interview, the date on which it was conducted, and the name of the note-taker. The second column contained the verbatim text that had been coded using a specific code and the third column allowed the analyst to input notes from the verbatim text. Subsequent columns were created based on the themes (discussed in the next paragraph) that emerged from the verbatim text across respondents, and the last column contained quotes or examples from the coded text that clearly highlighted or exemplified a particular theme.

### **Synthesizing findings**

Themes were identified in the analysis spreadsheet if they emerged as a topic of conversation across interviews and focus groups more than two times. This strategy was used to distinguish between interesting comments and findings, and more consistent and recurring emergent themes. As themes emerged, the analyst recorded whether subsequent respondents agreed, disagreed, or did not comment on a particular theme. The Findings section below includes each of these themes as bold topic sentences with additional details included in the associated paragraph.

## Quality Assurance

Each step of this process included quality assurance to ensure the integrity of our findings. Interview notes were improved by reviewing the raw audio, coding was improved through an IRR check, and findings were reviewed by the team lead, and by an R4D staff member not on the team, but familiar with the work of Project Literacy.

## F. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Work

The main limitation to this evaluation was that it is a midline evaluation. As such, the effects of Project Literacy may not have taken effect yet, or may be in early stages. Similarly, partners were engaged with Project Literacy for different time periods, which impacts the extent to which they can speak to the effects of Project Literacy overall, and specifically as it relates to their own work. It would be beneficial to repeat the evaluation at endline to better understand the impacts of Project Literacy overall.

A second limitation to this evaluation was the fact that the R4D could not speak directly to beneficiaries of Project Literacy-related work. Gaining the perspectives of the people who are impacted by Project Literacy-related interventions is an important component to fully understanding the impact of the work being done. As such, the R4D team will be referencing some qualitative data gathered for Worldreader's Read to Kids initiative in India to affirm the findings through the lens of some of Project Literacy's direct beneficiaries.

Finally, a third limitation is the lack of monitoring and evaluation capacity of the participant organizations. In order to fully understand the scope and reach of Project Literacy's influence, it is important for partners to be able to describe the impact of their programs. Moving forward, Project Literacy may consider supporting their partners' monitoring and evaluation capacity, as that would also benefit Pearson's ability to report on the impact of the project.

## III. Key Findings

### A. Respondent Background and Level of Engagement with Project Literacy

Respondents were first asked to describe the ways in which they interacted with Project Literacy. Specifically, they described the amount of time they spent on Project Literacy-related work in the context of their broader role at their organization, as well as the extent to which they communicate with Pearson staff.

#### Key Findings on Respondent Background and Level of Engagement with Project Literacy

- Respondents represented diverse view points and were able to speak to each of the three strategic areas of Project Literacy: Raising awareness, advancing best practice, and innovating for new solutions.
- Respondents communicated with Pearson with varying frequency, but typically those communications ranged from infrequent to monthly.
- Respondents typically worked on Project Literacy less than five percent of the time, while a couple respondents were dedicated to Project Literacy full-time.

#### Strategic Area and Respondent Type

Respondents were categorized by the type of partnership their organization had with Pearson through Project Literacy, and subsequently by the strategic area that they were most able to speak about.

<b>Respondent Type</b>	<b>All Strategic Areas</b>	<b>Advancing Best Practice</b>	<b>Innovating for New Solutions</b>	<b>Raising Awareness</b>
<b>Advisor</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Community Partner</b>	1	0	0	3
<b>Funded Partner</b>	1	1	4	1
<b>Pearson Leader</b>	2	0	0	1
<b>Triangulation</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Unfunded Collaborating Partner</b>	2	1	0	6

Unfunded collaborating partners and community partners were primarily involved in efforts related to raising awareness, whereas funded partners were most often involved in innovating for new solutions. Respondents acting as Project Literacy advisors and leadership spoke to all the strategic areas.

**Percentage of Time Spent on Project Literacy Related Work**

The extent to which respondents spent time on Project Literacy-related work varied greatly; however, the majority of respondents spent between one and five percent of their time on this work within the context of their broader role at their organization.

<b>No time</b>	<b>1-5%</b>	<b>5-25%</b>	<b>25-50%</b>	<b>50-90%</b>	<b>Full Time</b>
2	12	5	0	2	3

**Frequency of Communication**

**Respondents did not communicate frequently with the Pearson staff, if at all.** Most respondents reported infrequent communication with Pearson staff and six respondents reported that they were not in communication with the Pearson staff at all unless they participated in the monthly phone calls. This lack of communication was for a variety of reasons, from language barriers to the nature of the particular organization’s role in relation to Pearson to the stage of the partnership with Pearson.

**Respondents who did communicate with Pearson staff cited the monthly calls as the main opportunity to connect.** Respondents expressed that the monthly partner calls were the primary means of engaging with Pearson staff and the other Project Literacy community members. There was overall consensus that the calls were a useful tool for checking in, and receiving and sharing updates. Furthermore, despite the infrequent nature of communication, respondents generally viewed their relationship with Pearson positively.

**Some respondents communicated with Pearson regularly, particularly at the early stages of engagement.** Two respondents reported that they communicated with Pearson staff on a weekly and even daily basis. These respondents included one funded partner and one unfunded collaborating partner. The funded partner worked closely with Pearson on a long-term basis while the unfunded collaborating partner was in the very early stages of setting up the partnership with Pearson, so the frequent communication was uniquely necessary. The nature of these relationships corresponded to the frequency of communication that Pearson administrators intended. One administrator confirmed that there is more



regular communication with funded partners due to the co-designing of programs and assistance with managing implementation.

**The majority of respondents communicated with Pearson monthly to quarterly in addition to the monthly calls.** Seven respondents reported that they were in contact with the Pearson staff on a regular basis outside of the monthly calls. These respondents agreed that the frequency of their communication was dictated on an as needed basis, when there were relevant updates to share. Overall, there was consensus that the Pearson staff were available to speak when needed.

#### **Involvement with Project Literacy**

**Respondents frequently mentioned the monthly calls as one of the primary ways of being involved with Project Literacy.** Respondents overwhelmingly cited the monthly calls as the most regular form of engagement they had with Project Literacy. There was agreement among respondents that a concerted effort was made every month to have at least one member of the organization's team join the call to share updates, learn about other organizations' work, and receive information from Pearson.

**Many respondents attended Project Literacy related events and workshops.** Twelve respondents had engaged with Project Literacy by attending their events and workshops. Eight of these twelve respondents reported that this was the only way that they had engaged with Project Literacy. The other four respondents had also been involved in the monthly calls and, in some cases, been a part of raising awareness campaigns and content sharing.

**Respondents engaged with Project Literacy through content sharing and raising awareness campaigns.** Ten respondents were primarily engaged with Project Literacy as a result of content sharing and involvement in Project Literacy's large-scale raising awareness campaigns. Content sharing included not only sharing Project Literacy-related materials but also having Project Literacy promote or share an organization's own materials.

**Several respondents were engaged with Project Literacy only through their work on activities being directly funded by Project Literacy.** Eight partners reported that their engagement with Project Literacy was limited to the work related to Project Literacy-funded activities. Half of the partners who received direct funding from Project Literacy mentioned that the nature of their engagement was collaborative. They reported that Project Literacy was directly involved in the implementation and program design of the activities they were funding.

## B. Findings on the Implementation of Project Literacy and related work

In this section, we summarize insights from respondents regarding the implementation of Project Literacy. Respondents were asked to reflect on the quality of Project Literacy partnerships, what Project Literacy support has allowed them to accomplish, as well as successes and challenges they encountered while implementing the initiative over the past two and a half years. Lastly, respondents were asked for their suggestions on how the Project Literacy partnerships might be improved.

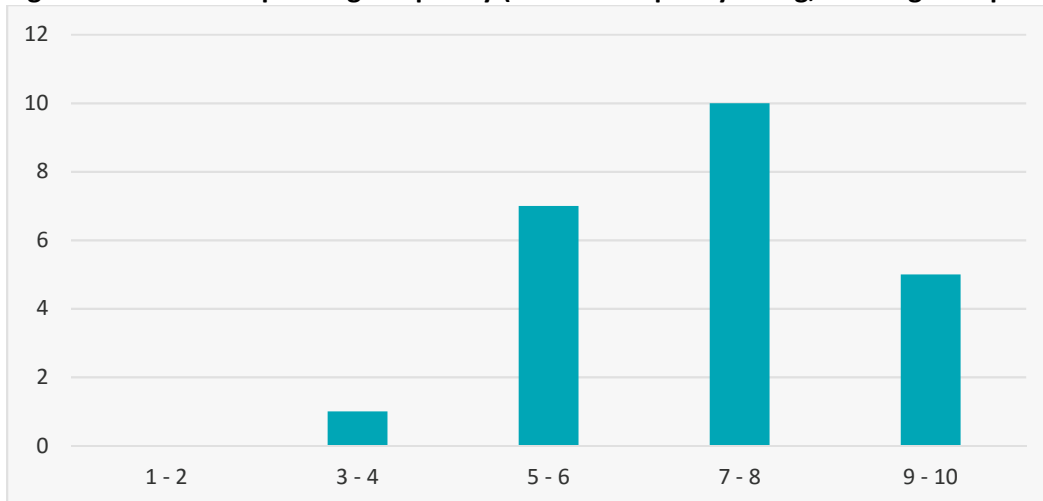
### Key Findings on Respondent Background and Level of Engagement with Project Literacy

- Partners' rating and characterization of Project Literacy partnerships were positive to mixed, with some respondents feeling extremely satisfied and positive about their engagement while others reported being unsure of the extent and purpose of their involvement in Project Literacy.
- Funded and unfunded partnerships were characterized differently by respondents. Funded partners seemed to benefit from in-depth relationships with Pearson, while unfunded partners experienced a more superficial partnership.
- Project Literacy's greatest success was its ability to convene diverse, yet like-minded, and impact-driven organizations to collaborate and learn from each other, as well as to help raise awareness about literacy as an issue.
- Project Literacy struggled with a lack of specificity around partner roles and action steps, as well as the lack of clarity regarding its own goals and objectives.

### Characterizing Project Literacy Partnerships

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of Project Literacy partnerships from one to ten, with ten being the highest possible rating. Based on the twenty-three respondents who provided numerical responses to this question, the average partnership rating was 7.3. Figure B.1 (below), illustrates the frequency of ratings from respondents along this scale.

**Figure B.1 Partnership Rating Frequency (1 is lowest quality rating; 10 is highest quality rating)**



Respondents were also asked to explore this rating by characterizing their own partnership with Pearson and Project Literacy, or (if not partners themselves) to characterize the different partnerships forged through Project Literacy. Our analysis suggests that the different types of Project Literacy partnerships

were understood as having varying levels of depth and that satisfaction with the partnership was mixed, with some partners noting very positive relationships, while lower ratings were often attributed to a lack of depth in the partnership, rather than any negativity toward the partnership.

**Unfunded partnerships included basic information sharing, but little in-depth collaboration.** Nine respondents described collaborative and community partnerships (generally unfunded partnerships) within Project Literacy as being superficial and light-touch, based primarily on cross-promotion of literacy initiatives and awareness campaigns. One respondent noted that, “Community partners are really just sharing content and kind of working together to share each others’ initiatives but it doesn’t go deeper than that.” Several collaborative partners, who per Project Literacy are meant to be “close thought-partners,” described a similarly shallow relationship with Project Literacy.

**Programmatic partnerships included more in-depth, focused, and impactful collaboration.** Nine respondents saw programmatic partnerships as more extensive, including opportunities for partners to co-create interventions with Project Literacy staff. Respondents also noted a closer relationship to impact, for example, one respondent noted that in comparison to unfunded partnerships, programmatic partnerships felt more like they were working towards “joint objectives.”

**Partnerships were positive, with a diverse set of players working towards the same goal.** Six respondents claimed that Project Literacy partnerships were valuable, noting that interactions with Project Literacy staff were productive and that the broader connection to other like-minded organizations and initiatives provided by the partnership was a major benefit.

**Respondents are unclear about what the partnership means.** Four respondents were not sure of how to define their relationship with Pearson and Project Literacy, with two explicitly noting they would not characterize it as a partnership. One respondent noted that their organization does not think of Pearson as a partner, instead seeing “Project Literacy as a communications channel.”

#### **Partnership Activities**

Funded and unfunded partners were asked what specific activities their partnership with Project Literacy allowed them to do. Their responses are outlined below.

#### ***Funded partners***

- 1. Partners sustained or expanded existing literacy work:** Support from Project Literacy allowed partners to continue their existing work, or broaden their reach by expanding their services to more beneficiaries, purchasing additional resources, or training and paying additional staff.
- 2. Partners worked more closely with community change agents:** Project Literacy support enabled partners to implement initiatives that engaged with parents, teachers, and other community-based actors.
- 3. Partners improved monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices:** Project Literacy supported improvements in grantees’ M&E capacity, including funding engagement with R4D’s Adaptive Learning team.
- 4. Partners invested in technology:** Project Literacy support allowed some programmatic partners to test new technology-based interventions for improving literacy including web-based platforms and apps.
- 5. Partners piloted new initiatives:** Project Literacy supported testing of innovative new approaches to challenging literacy barriers through pilot programs.

### Unfunded Partners

1. **Partners accessed the broader Project Literacy network members:** Unfunded partners were able to engage with other literacy organizations through Project Literacy conference calls and events, giving them the opportunity to learn and collaborate from each other.
2. **Partners received in-kind support and connectivity to Pearson:** In some cases, unfunded partners benefited from in-kind support from Pearson, such as the donation of books or academic content, as well as staff volunteer time.
3. **Partners contributed to campaign and awareness raising:** Unfunded partners engaged and contributed to Project Literacy awareness raising campaigns, such as the Alphabet of Illiteracy, the Unsigned Petition, and the Mighty Pencil Machine.

### Incentives for Unfunded Partners

Given the unfunded nature of collaborative and community partnerships through Project Literacy, respondents were asked to explain what incentivized them to join and contribute to the initiative. They provided the following responses:

1. **Excited to meet like-minded organizations and learn about best practices:** Respondents cited the broader connection with other literacy organizations as a major driver in their decision to contribute to Project Literacy.
2. **Fostered a partnership with Pearson:** Establishing a formal partnership with a well-established education company like Pearson, even if no funding was exchanged, was appealing to several respondents.
3. **Increased visibility of one's work:** Project Literacy's communications platform gave unfunded partners an opportunity to market and elevate the profile their initiatives.
4. **No harm in doing so:** A couple respondents simply stated that they saw no down-side to joining such a partnership.

### New Activities Allowed by Project Literacy Support

Respondents were also asked about any *new* activities they pursued thanks to Project Literacy support which could not have otherwise been accomplished. Their responses include:

1. **Engaged and collaborated with partners through Project Literacy network activities:** Seven respondents mentioned the connections fostered through Project Literacy conference calls and events would likely not have occurred if not for Project Literacy.
2. **Unable to do anything new:** Six respondents, including collaborating and community partners, claimed that their involvement in Project Literacy has not allowed them to do anything they could not have done without Project Literacy.
3. **Improve M&E capacity:** Four respondents cited their ability to conduct improved M&E on their initiatives, through capacity building as well as partnerships with R4D's Adaptive Learning team, as new activities enabled by Project Literacy.
4. **Deeper engagement with beneficiary communities:** Four respondents noted that Project Literacy enabled their interventions to reach deeper into beneficiary communities than they had ever done before, allowing them to work more closely with community change agents such as parents and teachers.
5. **Increased reach of pre-existing intervention:** Four respondents supplemented and/or expanded on their programs through Project Literacy resources.

- 6. Experimented with new approaches (pilots), conducted research, and tested new technology:** Project Literacy allowed three respondents to conduct additional research or pilot/invest in new approaches to improve literacy rates.

#### **Partnership successes**

Respondents were asked to describe any successes of Project Literacy partnerships. Our analysis suggests respondents were very happy to be connected with one another through Project Literacy activities, and generally see the Project Literacy partnership network as an opportunity to increase their own visibility, as well as raise awareness about literacy.

**Project Literacy successfully convened an impressive list of partners via network events and conference calls, allowing them to learn from one another, share challenges, and collaborate.** Most respondents expressed they were very pleased to connect with other like-minded, impact-driven organizations through Project Literacy, citing this as a major success of the initiative. Respondents spoke positively of the Project Literacy conference calls and workshops they attended. One respondent illustrated the learning opportunities associated with these events, noting that while participants were “working in different ways in different countries they (Project Literacy staff) were very clearly able to bring together commonalities, and put some peer support things in place.”

**Project Literacy staff were capable and helpful, communicated well, and provided useful resources to partners.**

Pearson’s Project Literacy staff were recognized by nine respondents as being extremely capable, warm, and helpful. Respondents were impressed with Project Literacy staff members’ ability to bring together a diverse number of stakeholders for workshops and keep them engaged. Interactions with the Project Literacy staff were cited as extremely positive and productive.

**Project Literacy provided visibility for their partners’ work, and partners benefit from the relationship with Pearson and the Project Literacy platform.** Seven respondents noted that the platform provided by Project Literacy, including its awareness campaigns, helped them to promote their own work as well as the work of other partners. A collaborating partner described the added value of Project Literacy communications in raising awareness about their initiative’s work, saying “Project Literacy takes us to other folks who are not familiar with us,...it’s been a great sharing platform not just for knowledge but also for [sharing] success stories.” The connection with Pearson, inherent in participation with Project Literacy, was also cited as beneficial.

**Project Literacy co-designed interventions with funded partners, scaling the impact of existing best practices, and leveraging Pearson’s many assets as an education company.** Six respondents, including funded and collaborating partners as well as Project Literacy administrators, cited Project Literacy’s collaborative and best practice-focused grant-making as a success. Programmatic partners enjoyed being in a funding relationship which also included project co-creation, dedicated evaluation and learning support, and in some cases, in-kind support (in the form of Pearson content- or expertise-sharing).

**Awareness campaigns have been impactful at raising visibility of literacy and garnering support from partners.** The reach of Project Literacy’s communication efforts and awareness campaigns, including the Alphabet of Illiteracy campaign, was cited by respondents as a major accomplishment. One respondent illustrated this impact by saying “they (Project Literacy) have managed to develop a global brand around the issue of illiteracy and they have brought some pretty impressive people to the table from around the

world.” Importantly, it should be noted that three out of the five respondents who emphasized the success of Project Literacy’s awareness campaigns were Project Literacy staff.

**Project Literacy provided a sounding board, and built capacity of partner organizations through financial or in-kind resources.** Project Literacy’s broader support to community and collaborating (unfunded) partners was seen by four respondents as a success. In some cases, in-kind support (advice, expertise, or content) was provided to partners, where in others, Project Literacy helped to fundraise for smaller organizations or facilitated volunteer opportunities with Pearson staff.

**Project Literacy has successfully and precisely served as a voice for literacy.** As put by one respondent, “Pearson appreciates the nuances of reading.” Their complex messaging about literacy as an issue, which is inclusive of partners not working *directly* on literacy but on other related issues (such as Early Childhood Development, gender, and employability), was cited as a success by four respondents. Another respondent illustrated the importance of this nuanced perspective, saying “when people think of poverty they think of famine, illness, and war, but we (Project Literacy) are trying to show them that literacy plays into all of those things.”

### **Implementation Challenges**

Respondents were asked to identify challenges in implementing Project Literacy partnerships. Their responses indicate that Project Literacy’s lack of clarity around roles, objectives, and action steps, as well as the limited capacity of both Project Literacy staff and partners were seen as significant challenges to successful implementation.

**The Project Literacy partner network seemed to lack an objective and direction.** Though respondents were glad to be part of the Project Literacy partner network, 14 of them expressed not always knowing exactly what they were working towards. This was perceived as a major challenge. According to these respondents, Project Literacy partnership activities and events lacked a clear definition of partner roles as well as a plan of action or next steps for collaboration. As noted by one respondent, “partners are sometimes confused about what their role is and what to get out of it.” The monthly conference calls, for example, were described by one respondent as less of a collaborative activity, and “more of a show and tell.” Similarly, a community partner who had participated in conference calls and workshops mentioned “feeling like we (the partner network) need to get things going, we do a lot of talking, but there’s not as much action in terms of the partnerships that they (Project Literacy) bring together.”

**Partner buy-in, involvement, and collaboration is challenging given the lack of financial support, capacity, and clear communication of Project Literacy.** 13 respondents noted that participating in Project Literacy network events and campaigns was not always easy. Partners mentioned individual and organizational capacity issues as barriers to participation. Others noted that the pro bono nature of Project Literacy activities makes it difficult to prioritize them. Unclear or inconsistent communication regarding how and when partners should contribute to Project Literacy, including long periods of silence followed by sudden requests to contribute, were also cited as hindering involvement.

**The broad scope of the partnership means partners struggle to find direction or value of Project Literacy relevant to their work.** While many respondents highlighted the diverse and inclusive partnership network developed by Project Literacy as a success, 11 respondents also noted this made it difficult to find a direct link between Project Literacy activities and their own work. These comments came from respondents whose organizations have a primary objective other than literacy.

**The scope, goals, and activities of Project Literacy are not clear – this impedes collaboration and action from partners.** Ten respondents found it a challenge that Project Literacy has not clearly defined its goals and objectives. The lack of concrete measurable short- or long-term goals make it difficult for partners to know exactly what they are working towards. One respondent made this point by stating that “Project Literacy hasn’t quite known what it is.” Another respondent went further to describe some of the uncertainty around partner roles and goals, saying that “there’s difficulty in defining Project Literacy sometimes...I think it’s difficult to know where it starts and ends and where partner efforts exist in their own right.”

**The provocative and controversial tone of Project Literacy proved to be a challenge for many respondents whose messaging did not align.** Specifically referring to the Alphabet of Illiteracy campaign, six respondents cited their inability to contribute due to the campaigns’ controversial (and in their view) overly negative tone. These respondents expressed their belief that to be effective communications about literacy should be positive, citing conflict with their own organization’s messaging as an example. In addition to the mismatch in tone and style, some respondents felt the campaign was not effective or sustainable but “more shock value than anything else.”

**Project Literacy and partners faced challenges measuring impact.** Five respondents, including two Project Literacy staff, noted that measuring the impact of Project Literacy, both in terms of its awareness raising and programmatic activities proved to be a challenge. On the awareness side, respondents were not quite sure how their figures related to campaign reach translated to tangible impacts on literacy. On the programmatic front, the effect of investments in new innovations (including some that operate outside the traditional literacy realm) were difficult to measure.

**Perceived internal challenges within the Project Literacy team, including limited capacity and coordination, seem to hinder execution and communication.** Five respondents, including funded and unfunded partners, advisors, and Project Literacy staff, cited capacity challenges within Pearson’s Project Literacy team as hindering implementation. Examples included the team’s limited capacity and a lack of clarity about how Project Literacy fits within Pearson. One respondent noted the team’s size was inappropriate considering their scope of work, saying “it is surprising how small it (team) is given how much work they do. We (Project Literacy as a whole) have great ideas, but we have to be cognizant of resources, and staff support for those ideas. So we have to balance that enthusiasm with reality.”

**No major challenges.** Five respondents were not able to name any challenges when asked. From their perspective, Project Literacy and its relevant partnerships had successfully met expectations. One respondent noted the team does “an amazing job with limited resources.”

**The network favors quantity (of partnerships) over quality.** Four respondents questioned the value of having such an extensive list of light-touch partnerships involved in Project Literacy. These respondents cautioned that the partnerships might not be more than a “logo soup” on a website. One collaborating partner claimed this made the return on investment for his organization less clear, saying “...there are so many people involved in this. If you have all these people, what’s the point?” Respondents also noted that some crucial partners (including additional funders or government) were missing from the network, hindering its impact. One respondent stated that “for this (Project Literacy) to be successful and sustainable and scalable it needs to be owned by more than just Pearson.”

## Suggestions for Improving the Partnership

Respondents were asked for their suggestions on how Project Literacy partnerships might be improved in the coming years. Their responses included both “big picture” suggestions, more general in nature, and specific “suggested solutions” which were more specific. These are outlined below.

### *Big Picture Suggestions*

#### **Partnerships should be deeper, with richer engagement, more purpose, action steps, and partner input.**

The most widely cited suggestion for improving Project Literacy partnerships was to develop them further, fostering more in-depth relationships with partner organizations. It was suggested Project Literacy could be more proactive about defining partner roles and action steps, as well as bringing partners closer to internal Project Literacy decision-making (including shaping of messaging and articulating of goals). Partners’ interest in being consulted more closely on Project Literacy activities was explained by one respondent, who said it would be great to “sit down with all the other Project Literacy partners and have this very candid dialogue and shape the program together to the extent that we can.”

**To be more impactful, Project Literacy needs to more clearly define and communicate its agenda and goals.** Twelve respondents noted the importance of, in the words of one programmatic partner “making sure that we define our outcomes and making sure that we study and understand how/if we are getting there.” Clarity around Project Literacy’s vision, in the form of concrete and measureable short/long-term goals, was deemed crucial to gather buy-in and contributions from current and future partners.

### *Suggested Solutions*

**Raise more funds and awareness for literacy interventions.** Eight respondents noted that a more deliberate effort to shore-up financial support for Project Literacy partners and other proven literacy interventions would improve the partnership. Respondents noted a variety of ways this could be done, including crowdsourcing, partnering with consumer-facing brands and/or other corporate funders, or simply distributing more direct grant funding from Pearson. Strategic cross-promotion of Project Literacy partner organizations and activities was also seen as an important way to demonstrate the value of Project Literacy to partners.

**Ensure non-literacy-focused organizations and initiatives understand their role and feel included.** Given the diverse range of partners involved in Project Literacy, six respondents believe that organizations not *directly* working on literacy related initiatives should be engaged by Project Literacy staff to make sure they understand their value-add to the initiative and how they should contribute.

#### **Facilitate more meaningful learning exchanges among partners, so they can learn from each other.**

While respondents valued learning from partner organizations in the monthly Project Literacy conference calls and in-person workshops, five of them suggested that Project Literacy could provide more in-depth facilitation of learning exchanges among partner organizations. One respondent suggested this should be done through targeted in-person meetings, where organizations doing similar work could be brought together.

**Project Literacy can work even more closely with funded partners.** Though funded partners enjoyed the closest relationship with Pearson staff, five respondents (including four programmatic partners) thought their partnership with Project Literacy could be improved by a more in-depth, collaborative funding relationship. Respondents felt Project Literacy could be more closely aligned with funded partners by co-creating and ensuring common understanding of program design and scope, helping organizations



monitor their impact, and allowing for more in-person engagement between Pearson staff and program teams.

**Provide further support to partners as an education company.** Five respondents, including one Project Literacy administrator, noted that Pearson could improve Project Literacy by leveraging its education content and expertise to provide more in-kind support to its initiatives. Pearson's connections to other corporate education and government leaders could also be leveraged to further the impact of Project Literacy.

**A narrowed scope and targeted focus could create a more effective campaign.** Given the complexity of the literacy challenges faced throughout the world and the broad scope of Project Literacy's partnership network, four respondents noted that Project Literacy might be more impactful if it focused its resources on a specific literacy challenge, priority geography/region, or promising approach.

**Improve coordination on communication and marketing.** Project Literacy's cross-promotion of partners' work and activities was seen as an area for improvement by four respondents. This could include providing incentives for partner organizations to promote each other's initiatives.

**Improve partner calls and communication by selecting a stronger conferencing platform, considering time zones and language, and including action steps at conclusion of calls.** Several specific improvements to partner phone calls were suggested by respondents, including identifying a more effective conferencing platform, so they do not have to dial-in and participate in a chat at the same time. Other ideas include being aware of language and time-zone limitations. Ensuring action steps for each partner are defined at the end of each call was also suggested.

#### Implementation Recommendations and Reflections:

1. ***Project Literacy should clearly articulate its goals and objectives in order to guide its work and generate buy-in from current or potential partners.*** Respondents were uncertain about the overall objectives which limited their ability to be ambassadors for the initiative.
2. ***Partner network activities should be more active and work towards joint goals, partner roles and action steps should be clearly defined.*** Rather than holding one off engagements, Project Literacy could benefit from more of a curriculum-based or coordinated series of network events that provide clarity and goals for partners.
3. ***Given the broad scope of literacy as an issue, Project Literacy should consider narrowing its focus or creating smaller "working groups" to directly address specific challenges within the literacy spectrum.*** This reflection presents an interesting debate, as Project Literacy is targeting a large scale global impact, but may benefit from targeted work, as well. Perhaps geographic clusters could be identified for an infusion of support while maintaining a global agenda.
4. ***Project Literacy should further leverage Pearson's expertise and connections to provide in-kind support and raise more funding for literacy organizations.*** Respondents were grateful for the attention Project Literacy brought to their work, and the initiative may do more to connect partners with influencers and investors without raising the cost of Project Literacy directly.
5. ***Project Literacy should consider expanding its team or narrowing the partnership network to allow for more in-depth relationship building and collaboration with partners.*** Respondents appreciated opportunities to collaborate with Project Literacy staff, but those opportunities were limited given the size of the network.

## C. Findings on the Outcomes of Project Literacy

### Key Findings on Outcomes of Project Literacy

- Project Literacy succeeded in raising awareness of the issue of illiteracy, but more could be done to expand the reach of this effort.
- Project Literacy advanced best practice by allowing partners to refine their program model, and providing a platform to share best practices, but concrete results were minimal.
- Respondents were mixed on whether or not Project Literacy innovated for new solutions.
- Respondents struggled to articulate the impact of their work within the context of improving literacy skills and rates of beneficiaries.

Project Literacy was established to generate outcomes across their three strategic areas: 1) Raising awareness and mobilizing action, 2) Advancing best practice, and 3) Innovating for new solutions. Project Literacy measured its results across the following core impact areas, as related to the above strategic areas of activity: the fight against illiteracy, employability of low-literate individuals, literacy rates, and literacy skills. The key findings related to these outcomes are as follows. Note that in some cases partners were unable to point to Project Literacy-specific outcomes, so we included data on the outcomes their organization would yield with or without the support of Project Literacy. Below, we aim to clarify where outcomes can be attributed to Project Literacy, and where they would have happened with or without the program.

### Outcomes on Raising Awareness

**Project Literacy built an established network of partners around the issue of illiteracy.** Respondents shared that the network is large and diverse, including a number of organizations that are not what immediately come to mind when thinking of literacy – and cited that as an asset. As one respondent shared, "I think movement building is a complicated process, but from my experience, it's about bringing as many actors into the conversation as you can, and just the fact that they brought us into the conversation, means that they are open to being inclusive, and sort of gaining momentum...by being inclusive and broadening the tent." In addition, respondents cited the web platform and in person events as the primary ways in which they have experienced the Project Literacy network.

**Project Literacy activities raised exposure to illiteracy as an issue.** This includes Project Literacy-specific activities like the Alphabet of Illiteracy campaign, participation in events with the United Nations and at the World Economic Forum, and in leveraging the network to increase exposure to partners' respective literacy-focused activities. As one respondent shared, "They've done a good job of getting social media partners, their content is clean, lovely, it looks good, so it helps people know literacy is a big deal."

**Participation in the Project Literacy network helped partners promote their own or other programs' activities.** Many respondents noted in particular that the Project Literacy web platform and monthly partner calls have been key outlets for sharing program updates and learning about others': "I think one of the things is collaborating with groups together cause a lot of times we're trying to do the same thing in different ways and wasting a lot of resources. So at least from my perspective that's been great to you know get something that's already there instead of seeking it out yourself."

**Several respondents were unsure of the specific number of people who had been reached through Project Literacy-related raising awareness activities.** Five respondents were unable to provide specific

data on the number of people who had been reached through raising awareness activities related to Project Literacy. Much of the data collected around raising awareness was focused on the number of followers gained and other social media measures.

**Respondents cited specific examples of how they have participated in or seen Project Literacy's raising awareness activities in action.** This included (in order of frequency) through the use of social media, traditional media such as op-eds, campaigns like the Alphabet of Illiteracy, or participation in external events ranging from Project Literacy-sponsored workshops to Project Literacy's participation in the World Economic Forum.

**Most of those who were able to report on the number of people reached through raising awareness activities reported having reached over 1,000 people.** Although these numbers generally represented estimates rather than specific numbers, people believed that their programs had a wide reach and had raised a substantial amount of awareness.

#### **Additional Enabling Factors Needed to Raise Awareness**

**Many respondents noted they were unable to see any outcomes related to raising awareness.** Twenty-one respondents noted that while it is clear that there's an establish network through Project Literacy, they still have not experienced concrete outcomes related to their respective participation it. There was a general sense that the next stage in leveraging the network, now that it has been built, is in how to build stronger connections and generate concrete action from partners. In some cases, this was because their involvement with Project Literacy was still in early stages. Others noted that their engagement was too superficial at this stage, and that it was challenging for them to follow through on collaboration opportunities with others in the network: "I worry what we're seeing is a really exciting reach, but it's a mile wide and an inch deep. People being engaged aren't being engaged in a way that's meaningful to them." Six respondents specifically noted that Project Literacy has not resulted in new collaboration of partnership opportunities, and four respondents shared that Project Literacy activities have not changed behaviors or caused people to take action on illiteracy.

**Respondents overall did not have a good understanding of the number of people impacted.** Few, if any, respondents were able to share specific numbers, unless they were speaking to media tracking measurements (e.g. the number of newsletter clicks, website visits, etc.) This was both within their individual organizations and through their Project Literacy-associated work.

#### **Ideas to Further Raise Awareness**

**Respondents highlighted opportunities to increase the reach of Project Literacy to more people.** This included increasing the reach of public-facing activities to external audiences, such as through ongoing literacy campaigns, and to extend the network to form large-scale partnerships to support the initiative – particularly through partnerships with government and corporate actors.

**Project Literacy should consider opportunities to further support the existing network of partners.** Some respondents shared that there is room for Project Literacy to further nurture its partner network by playing a more active role in fostering strong relationships and collaboration opportunities, and increasing opportunities to access funding. Some explicitly asked "When there are so many people involved in this, what's the point? ... That's where you get the ROI question," with others noting "There's an element of collaboration that is missing from our experience."

**Project Literacy could bring greater focus to the initiative overall.** Some respondents noted that as the initiative is now at a tipping point where it needs to clarify what is its real priority and focus – with ideas ranging from tailored activities and messages to be more locally relevant (“separating the domestics vs. the international a bit... – they’re different environments to navigate”), better leveraging the existing network to broaden Project Literacy’s external reach (rather than bringing on additional partners), and bringing greater clarity and focus to the initiative overall (“You’ve done 1-2 years of promotion – [Now we need] a little bit more tangibility around what the campaign seeks to do.”). As previously noted in the implementation section, the broad scope has meant in some cases that partners may struggle to find the direction or value of Project Literacy relevant to their work.

#### **Outcomes on Advancing Best Practice**

**Some respondents were able to leverage support from Project Literacy to improve program activities or reach.** Four respondents noted that Project Literacy led to direct refinements in their program model, ranging from targeted program interventions to overall program activities like communications and marketing. Four respondents also noted that they were able to use the Project Literacy platform – namely the partner network and the website – to share best practices with external audiences.

**A few other respondents noted that Project Literacy improved their organization’s understanding of literacy, advanced best practice on the use of technology, provided funding for their own research, and to measure their own impact.** However, each outcome was capped at two respondents each and even in those positive responses many noted that the outcomes were too early to quantify at this stage. These partners seemed to be organizations that have had a longer relationship with Pearson or that have received direct funding from Project Literacy or Pearson.

#### **Outcomes on Innovating for New Solutions**

**Responses were mixed on whether Project Literacy yielded new solutions and innovations.** Three respondents agreed and two disagreed. Those who agreed had deeper relationships with Project Literacy, e.g. through direct funding, noting that their work is helping to generate evidence around previously untested innovations related to literacy. In particular, respondents cited innovations with technology related to reading as a key area of focus through their Project Literacy engagement. Those who disagreed noted that their engagement within the initiative was too early or superficial at this stage to point to specific outcomes in this area.

#### **Outcomes on Increasing Literacy Skills**

**Respondents were not able to accurately measure the number of people who increased their literacy skills.** Two respondents reported that this was because it was too early in the process to be able to measure real gains in literacy skills, while another felt that it was difficult to measure accurate gains because the outcomes directly related to their work contributed to literacy more proximally.

**Respondents spoke of general monitoring and evaluation processes to measure the number of people increasing their literacy skills.** Four respondents cited that their organization made a concerted effort to engage with monitoring and evaluation in order to measure the impact their programs had on increasing literacy skills. Two respondents specifically mentioned that they used pre/post methods to evaluate whether or not their program beneficiaries were increasing their literacy skills.

**In order for Project Literacy to increase its impact on literacy skills, respondents reported that Project Literacy could provide more financial and in-kind donations.** One respondent reported that “one of the biggest barriers to growth is funding,” going on to explain that in order to expand the scope and reach of their program, financial resources were much needed. Another respondent sought financial resources to

conduct analysis and research on their program's work in order to better understand its impact. Finally, two respondents spoke of the need for resource donations to supplement the work that programs are able to do on their own.

#### **Outcomes on Increasing Literacy Rates**

**Respondents were mixed on whether or not literacy rates were increased.** Eight respondents agreed that literacy rates increased, defined as an increase in the number of people who can read and a decrease in the number of people who are illiterate through this campaign. However, seven respondents disagreed, stating they were unable to describe improvements in literacy rates attributable directly to Project Literacy activities.

**While few respondents could point to specific effects on literacy rates, they were able to highlight other positive outcomes.** These ranged from increased awareness of the issue of illiteracy, connecting literacy to broader issues (e.g. health literacy), and raised awareness of partner activities to improve literacy.

#### **Impact on employability**

**Some respondents felt that their activities addressed areas that could hinder employability.** However, of the five respondents who noted this, only two of the five could directly attribute this to Project Literacy-funded work. In addition, while the respondents noted that they had had strong impacts related to employability, they struggled to cite specific evidence of how that has been actualized through their program other than anecdotes, e.g. "TFA loves to recruit [... our] volunteers because of all the training and experience they get. I think that tells an exciting story."

**Four respondents explicitly noted that they couldn't see any concrete employability outcomes.** This was particularly true of Project Literacy-related work. In some cases, this was because the organization did not focus on employability, such as those working with very young children. Others noted that their program activities are too early in development to point to such outcomes as this stage.

**Respondents pointed to proximal outcomes related to employability – such as progress in education and improvements in beneficiary confidence levels.** Three respondents also saw improved employability and two respondents saw improved outcomes specifically for girls and women – but this was related to their general program activities and as such is not directly attributable to Project Literacy.

### Outcomes Recommendations and Reflections

- 1. *Project Literacy needs to strike the right balance between strategic expansion of the network and making individual program participants feel more connected to the network, and able to identify with campaign activities.*** This can help to increase the reach of Project Literacy's public-facing activities to achieve greater scale in raising awareness of the importance of literacy. This also needs to be a particular focus given the number of respondents who did not see any outcomes related to Raising Awareness, which has been a large focus of PL since launch.
- 2. *Project Literacy is demonstrating some value with more engaged partners in advancing best practice – some programs are leveraging Project Literacy to refine their program model and share best practices with external audiences.*** Outcomes seem to be limited to more engaged partners, either through direct funding or longer history with Pearson, so Project Literacy will need to consider increasing targeted engagements and better awareness raising on how the initiative can advance best practice. Project Literacy will need to think about ways to both increase the targeted engagements and to better raise awareness of how the initiative as a whole can advance best practice. In addition, there didn't seem to be great awareness of new evidence being generated by innovating for new solutions activities, for example Read to Kids in India.
- 3. *Project Literacy has had minimal impact on literacy rates through partner activities. If this is a priority, Project Literacy needs to better target network partners that have existing activities in this space.*** Some programs affect reading and writing outcomes, but most note no detectable effect on these measures. If this is a priority for Project Literacy, they will want to target network partners that have existing activities in this space, or connect literacy to broader issues, such as health literacy.
- 4. *Project Literacy has had minimal impact on employability through partner activities. If this is a priority, Project Literacy needs to better target network partners that have existing activities in this space.*** Partners that focus on employability issues have a higher likelihood of achieving employability outcomes through Project Literacy, but most partners do not directly tackle employability. As such, if this is a priority for Project Literacy they will want to target network partners that have existing activities in this space.
- 5. *Despite consistent monitoring reports from partners, it is clear that they do not know the true impact of their work. If measuring impact is a priority for Project Literacy, funded partners need to invest in evaluation and impact measures.*** This reflection may be one of the more pressing to discuss, as it brings two priorities of Project Literacy into conflict. On the one hand, Project Literacy supports innovations which are often unproven, yet the initiative also values evidence of impacted.

## D. Findings on the Sustainability of Project Literacy

Looking forward, respondents described their perceptions of the sustainability of the impacts previously shared and of Project Literacy-affiliated activities beyond the life of the initiative. Respondents also spoke to the enabling factors required, and the barriers to overcome in order to sustain the activities and impact. Finally, respondents described the benefits of Project Literacy.

### Key Findings on Sustainability

- The primary benefits of Project Literacy are the megaphone it gives to the issue of illiteracy and its global convening power.
- Beneficiaries of Project Literacy will sustain, and build upon, the progress made.
- Project Literacy-affiliated activities can only be sustained as long as Pearson supports them.
- Project Literacy has not removed any barriers to literacy, and still has work to do to create conditions that enable partners to be more impactful, such as stronger relations with governments and a clearer message.

### Benefits of Project Literacy

**Respondents identified a vast array of benefits of Project Literacy ranging from its convening power on the global stage to achieving behavior change at the local level.** Below, we provide a summary of these benefits, including the number of respondents who cited each benefit:

<b>Table D.1 Frequently mentioned benefits of Project Literacy, listed by respondents in agreement</b>	<b>#</b>
Raised awareness, giving a megaphone to the issue and indirectly helping millions of people.	18
Convened like-minded organizations to share best practices and support isolated partners.	11
Uniquely situated to tackle illiteracy at many different levels, from global organizations to individual families.	5
Global reach gave partners credibility, particularly with large corporate investors.	4
Achieved behavior change within beneficiary communities.	2
Improved female literacy, leading to greater family literacy.	2
Staff were accessible, supportive, and great to work with!	2

### Sustainability of Project Literacy Activities

**Respondents did not think that Project Literacy-affiliated activities would be sustained if Pearson ceased financial support of the initiative.** The primary reason for this is that even funded partners typically only receive one year of funding, or are funded one year at a time for longer term work. This makes it very difficult to incorporate Project Literacy-style initiatives into existing programming, and increases the likelihood that the funding will simply allow for a one-off program.

**Pearson owns Project Literacy, and is currently the sole driver of the initiative.** Respondents looking forward note that Project Literacy will continue as long as Pearson funds it, but will not live on beyond Pearson's support. Other partners play a more passive role in the partnership. For the initiative to be sustained, Pearson needs to continue supporting the work, or Project Literacy needs to figure out a way to move partners beyond awareness to action-oriented participation.

### Sustainability of Impact of Project Literacy

**Optimistic respondents felt the gains of Project literacy would surely be sustained, and perhaps compounded, through the beneficiaries who acquired new skills.** These partners note that literacy skills gained are rarely lost, and in fact, small gains can beget larger gains as more doors open. Respondents

also noted that women beneficiaries, in particular, lead to greater gains as time goes on as they pass on their skills to increase family literacy.

**Pessimistic respondents were skeptical that Project Literacy had achieved impact, or that any gains made would be sustained.** These partners cite a lack of medium term goals as one reason why it will be difficult to sustain gains. These partners also worried that sustaining the positive impacts of Project Literacy will fall quickly to partners and only the strongest partner organizations will be able to provide appropriate levels of support to their beneficiaries.

#### **Removing Barriers to Sustainable Literacy**

**Respondents did not feel Project Literacy had removed any barriers to literacy.** Largely, respondents either said Project Literacy had not removed barriers or that they were unsure that barriers had been removed. Those who did describe barriers removed mentioned “increased access to books,” “increased beneficiary confidence,” and that Project Literacy activities engendered “creative ways to reach the illiterate.”

#### **Enabling Factors for Sustainability Literacy**

Enabling factors fell into two categories – those enabling factors that Project Literacy created, and those enabling factors that remain necessary for Project Literacy’s activities and gains to be sustained.

#### *Existing Enabling Factors*

**Pearson’s convening power, global reach, and vast network empowered otherwise isolated partners.** More than any other enabling factor, respondents noted that Pearson’s convening power created a strong network of literacy-minded organizations that did not exist prior to launching the program. One respondent summed up this sentiment stating, “The enabling factor is their network on the ground. It is the richness, and breadth, and depth of their membership.” The strength of this network lent a voice to the cause of combatting illiteracy, but it also provided a sense of community for hardworking, but very small, organizations that may have previously felt alone prior to joining the initiative.

**Project Literacy leadership were reported to be strong, committed, and caring.** These traits empowered partners, and provided accessible support. Respondents noted that these leaders care about them and their success, and that caring begets care and attention from other partners within the network.

**The partnership was ambitious, but probably right-sized for the enormity of the challenge.** Three respondents spoke to the size and scope of Project Literacy, and they agreed that the program was probably right-sized, but that this needed further exploration. Questions to consider in the coming months are:

- Does Pearson have enough staff focused on Project Literacy to meet the needs of the vast network?
- Is the global reach appropriate, or would Project Literacy see greater impact in a more targeted campaign, perhaps in a particular country or region?
- Do partners need additional funds to accomplish their goals? If so, does that mean we need fewer funded partners or more co-funding partners?

#### *Enabling Factors Still Needed*

**Project Literacy can further clarify its message.** Respondents that were or were not particularly involved in Project Literacy sometimes struggled to point to the overall objective of the campaign, and spoke to the challenge of speaking on the campaign’s behalf. In the words of one respondent who shared this



feeling, “I think there’s a great potential, I just don’t know what the marketing plan is or was, but I think it could have ripple effects if that strategy was...articulated, and maybe it was, but from my level, I didn’t see it play out in a really consistent message.”

**Pearson still needs to seek funding partners.** Respondents, particularly those deeply involved with Project Literacy, commented on the need for co-funding from other large donors in order to sustain the initiative. This has been a priority in the past and the urgency grows as the partnership ages, yet respondents noted that we might be at just the right time to get buy-in from funders who are now able to see some success, but also know that Pearson is committed for a couple of more years.

**Project Literacy would benefit from stronger government partnerships.** Program leaders and managers on the ground alike agreed that support from local governments, particularly in developing countries, would be crucial to achieving sustainable impacts. Pearson staff were more focused on leveraging government partners to sustain the work. Meanwhile, program managers noted the power a large organization like Pearson has to lobby governments. Smaller organizations may have a harder time being heard, and nonprofits might not be legally allowed to lobby the government and keep their nonprofit status, so they requested Pearson’s help in this regard.

**Effective partnerships require a mix of innovation and evidence-based programming.** Even respondents who shared this requirement for achieving and sustaining impact acknowledged that it may fall outside the scope of Project Literacy. Still, they note that Project Literacy has the ability to fund evidence-based programs, or large scale experimental trials to build the evidence base for promising innovations, and then help scale programs once evidence exists.

### Sustainability Recommendations and Reflections

- 1. Identifying and engaging funding partners is likely required to ensure sustainability of the campaign.** Respondents from Pearson’s leadership team and Advisory Group, as well as affiliated stakeholders noted the need to find partners who would not simply lend token support, but who would be interested in co-funding the partnership to give more durability to the long-term financial health of Project Literacy. The current halfway mark for Project Literacy may be a good time to contact potential partners to describe the accomplishments to date with the confidence that Pearson will back the initiative for at least another two and a half years.
- 2. Consider specifically messaging the sustainable vision of Project Literacy to partners.** Responses were surprisingly mixed on questions of sustainability, suggesting a lack of clarity in what the future holds. This would not require a heavy lift, but would include documenting the vision and disseminating this information broadly, so partners can speak confidently to the direction Project Literacy is headed.
- 3. Establishing commitments from government partnerships should be prioritized.** Respondents did not report any specific government partnerships in their feedback, and noted that this limits the impact any program can have. In particular, partnerships with governments in low- and middle-income countries where Project Literacy engages will be key to establishing local buy-in and sustainable funding streams outside of Pearson.
- 4. Consider evidence-based program models when seeking new partnerships.** Project Literacy’s focus on innovation may have de-prioritized partnerships with mature programs that have a proven program model. We use the word “consider” carefully here, as there are clear drawbacks to searching for evidence-based literacy programs to support. Specifically, there are not very many evidence-based programs, those that exist may be well-funded, and a pillar of Project Literacy is to go after innovative practices with the knowledge that what is out there already is not enough to solve this problem. Given those drawbacks, a potential “sweet spot” for Project Literacy might be in supporting the scaling of evidence-based programs. Scaling is notoriously difficult in the developing context, but Project Literacy has a unique set of partners that might be able to figure out how to effectively adapt these programs to new markets.
- 5. Continue leveraging Project Literacy’s unique position and dedicated staff to engage both global actors and local innovators.** Respondents described the infectious commitment, competence, and passion of the Pearson team, and described their ability as people and as an organization to enter a room of beneficiaries or United Nations diplomats with firm footing and with something to offer. This is rare, and empowers Project Literacy to stay informed and engaged at all levels. We encourage Pearson to keep the focus both global and local, as there are few organizations that are able to operate in this way, and it is much needed.

## IV. Concluding Thoughts

As we conduct our final review of this document, we are reminded of all that Project Literacy has accomplished in the last two and half years, but also of the work that remains. We commend Pearson for commissioning this Midline Evaluation, and in so doing, displaying a commitment to evidence and excellence. However, the look back is only as successful as the action it yields. We call specific attention to the suggestions shared by respondents and the reflections and recommendations of our team. We look forward to all the work that remains, and to reflecting on the progress made at end line in 2020.