

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

KEY FINDINGS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

SUBMITTED TO:
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Ready To Learn

PREPARED BY:
American Institutes for Research

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Introduction

The Ready To Learn Initiative (RTL) is a unique and innovative cooperative agreement which began in 1995 between the Department of Education and grantees from the public television community. Educational television programming developed under this initiative is designed for young children, their parents, caregivers, and educators.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting and WTTW (a public television station located in Chicago, IL) each received a 5-year award to create and deliver new educational programming based on scientifically based reading research (SBRR). The Corporation for Public Broadcasting was also awarded a separate outreach grant to support the programming.

The new RTL program shifted its focus specifically to helping children get "*ready to read.*" Past RTL grants served a broad audience that included children of all ages and income levels, but the current grant is designed to serve families who are eligible for Title I benefits.[1] Current RTL efforts will concentrate on specific communities, deploying resources to saturate each community with messages and create opportunities to develop early literacy skills. The goal of the outreach efforts is to create a "surround sound" effect that will introduce and reinforce desired reading behaviors where the audience lives, reads, and plays.

To support RTL outreach planning efforts, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) conducted an environmental scan that comprised a media audit, scholarly and trade publication literature reviews, and a message audit. The environmental scan was the first step toward understanding the marketplace in which RTL exists, including organizations focused on literacy and/or serving children entitled to Title I benefits. In July, building on the results of the environmental scan, AIR conducted a series of interviews with experts representing national organizations focused on literacy and/or serving Title I families.

In August and early September, AIR conducted a set of community key informant interviews with organizations that focus on literacy and/or serving children entitled to Title I benefits and their families within the five target markets that RTL will concentrate on in Year 1 of the new grant: Baltimore, MD; Jackson, MS; Oakland, CA; San Antonio, TX; and Toledo, OH. The insights gleaned during both sets of interviews expand our knowledge of the marketplace and inform development of an outreach plan and partnership strategy.

[1] Title I is a federally funded program that aims to help improve student achievement by providing financial assistance to schools with high numbers of students from very low-income families. There are two types of Title I programs—schoolwide and targeted assistance. A school is eligible to receive schoolwide Title I funds if 40 percent or more of its students are living in families with a total income below the official poverty level. Title I funds can be used to serve all students in a school (Title I, 2004). Schools that do not qualify to operate a schoolwide program or those that choose not to may qualify for targeted assistance in which the funding may only be used for specified children identified as having the greatest need (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The objectives of the community key informant interviews were to:

- Gain a better understanding of the local marketplace
- Become familiar with organizations operating in each community and types of literacy activities they carry out
- Understand what local organizations need and want in order to serve their constituents
- Understand these organizations' perceived benefits and barriers to engaging in partnerships
- Gauge what these organizations perceive as factors motivating parents to get involved in reading activities with their children
- Gauge where these organizations see reading activities fitting into their constituents' lives and the lives of their children
- Gauge perceptions and familiarity with RTL and the local PBS station
- Gain a better understanding of the infrastructure and dissemination mechanisms of organizations within each community

Methodology

During August and September, 43 informational interviews were conducted with representatives of various community-based organizations within RTL's five target markets for Year 1 that deliver literacy-based programming and/or work with children and families living in poverty. Interviewees included representatives of community-based organizations that could be considered RTL's prospective partners within each respective target market. (See Appendix A for a list of community-based organizations interviewed within each market.)

The interviews, conducted over the telephone, lasted 30–60 minutes. All interviewees were promised confidentiality. An open-ended topic guide was developed to conduct the interviews (see Appendix B). The use of open-ended questions permitted the participants to express their views and to elaborate on issues that they felt were most relevant and important. The open-ended structure of the interview also allowed for researcher follow-up and clarification.

It should be noted that in-depth interviews are a qualitative research technique used primarily for in-depth exploration of issues, perceptions, and attitudes. Unlike the results of traditional survey research, which are usually based on randomized sampling plans, the findings of the interviews may reflect, but are not generalizable to, the larger universe from which participants are drawn. Even if all the interviewees feel the same way, it does not mean that all of the members of the universe from which they were selected will share this feeling.

The findings that follow reflect the major themes that emerged during the interviews. Quotations from participants have been edited for clarity.

Key Findings of In-depth Interviews at the Community Level

Findings from the community-based interviews were largely consistent with the results from the key informant interviews conducted at the national level. Specifically, the community-based interview findings confirmed that: (1) Many RTL families currently receive a variety of daily services (at multiple points in the day) designed to promote literacy; (2) Building lasting relationships, trust, and rapport at the community level are the keys to effective outreach; (3) Ideal partnership among organizations considers the goals of each party involved and shares the responsibility and benefits equally; (4) Most respondents were not familiar with SBRR components.

Similar to organizations at the national level, each community-based organization has its own specific way of reaching children and their families at multiple points in their daily lives. Some organizations work directly with children and families, within centers and in their homes, while others distribute resources to others who work directly with children.

Also similar to the national interview respondents, a majority of interview participants indicated that to truly reach families, building trust with community members and taking steps to assist families in relevant, long-term ways is essential. Nearly all the interview participants said that because of their deep integration within the community, their organization's most effective outreach strategy is word of mouth.

One participant put it this way:

> *We do more than simply education…we work with the family to find out what their strengths are and where they want to be…to reach families we go to local elementary schools, canvas neighborhoods, go to local dentists and doctors—but most of it is through our families. Families remember us and by word of mouth, people come to us all of the time in this way. We also do community events…people knowing we exist brings them to us for our program.* (Baltimore, MD)

As many interview participants at the national level mentioned, the essential partner development process largely takes place in unique ways at the community level. Organizations at the community level have a strong network within the neighborhoods in which they work and are better able to effectively identify partners that share similar goals and complement one another. Most interviewees said that they believe strongly in working through partnerships, but that it is important for each party involved to clearly understand its roles and responsibilities, as well as what each brings to the table. In the words of one participant,

> *A successful partnership is one where you know there is an open door for communication. There is a sharing of services and helping each other get the word out. Respect for the client is also important. Many people want to partner with us, but we don't want to partner with those that are not really caring for the client in the long term.* (Oakland, CA)

Fewer interview participants at the community level had heard of SBRR than those interviewed at the national level. Some interviewees confused SBRR with the latest child development research concerning the positive benefits of parents and other care givers reading to children.

Typical responses to a question about awareness of SBRR included:

- *Scientifically based reading research, no I don't know what that is. My sister is a first-grade teacher so it sounds familiar. I don't know much about it."* (Oakland, CA)

- *I think I have heard of [SBRR]. I know it is out there. I'm working on my dissertation about parent involvement, and I have heard of it. I know that research shows it is important to read to children when they are young, even while the mother is still carrying the baby and to read to infants. Other than that, I don't know the specifics.* (Jackson, MS)

The participants were clear that they *do* want high-quality research-based materials that can help them augment their offerings. They were also clear that they *don't* want yet another short-term initiative that is bringing yet another short-term solution to improve their community.

Many representatives from the community-based organizations interviewed described their difficulty in finding funding to purchase and distribute high-quality materials to their constituents. These participants expressed interest in innovative materials based on the latest research and technology. Many also expressed an interest in bilingual materials that could help them access a growing immigrant population. The following requests were echoed by many participants:

- *People can't afford to buy books or resources. We are always looking for materials and resources for our program. We normally provide the budget for the program and staff, but our partners provide materials.* (Jackson, MS)

- *Anything that gets the attention of kids is useful. We live in a fast-paced world. If you don't have something with color and based on technology, then you cannot keep up. It would be helpful to have these kinds of materials.* (Toledo, OH)

- *It would help if the activities and programs were bilingual. Almost anything would be a good idea if it can help. I have taken adults in this area to the library because they said that they don't have money to buy books. The parents don't know and are not aware of free resources. Any new resources would be helpful to us.* (San Antonio, TX)

Although the interviewees expressed an interest in materials that could enhance their ability to better assist their constituents, they were clear that they are not interested in another benefactor sponsoring another short-term initiative in their community. Some constituents spoke disparagingly of those programs that come in with a quick-fix mentality and expect to solve problems without knowing the deep-rooted community challenges or the community members.

Others mentioned programs that come in for the short term, merely for evaluative purposes, that do not have the clients' best interests at heart.

These were some typical comments from interview participants:

- *One of the problems we have is that large foundations come in and have their own ideas about how to make things better. They lay this out in the community for 4 or 5 years and then they leave. It isn't coming from the people and it is frustrating to us because we work with people every day over time and gain trust. The families we work with know us...Oakland is one of the neighborhoods where people love to come and do short interventions. This is a problem. Let's fix things in the neighborhood for the long term. Nobody stays and continues. People in the community are distrustful of programs like this.* (Oakland, CA)

- *We try to be an agent of change in the community and turn the cycle of poverty around. To do this you have to improve and enhance parents' abilities with their child. We affect families longitudinally over generations. [Our organization's] children are becoming parents now and have finished high school and can provide a better life for their own children. You need to be able to work in the long term.* (San Antonio, TX)

A majority of interviewees were familiar with their local PBS station, but not with the RTL program, and a few participants indicated that their organizations work directly with their local PBS station:

- *I have heard of the Ready To Learn program but I can't tell you what it is…I think the program as you have described it would be useful. In spite of my feelings about television, it is here to stay and the best way to deal with it is to use it in a way that teaches children skills. I would support a program like that. The director of [a partner organization] has encouraged us to use [the local PBS station] as a resource. They have had a positive experience working with the station.* (Jackson, MS)

- *I have heard about the Ready To Learn program but I don't know the specifics of its components. I know there is a book distribution and literacy materials that go out. I can't think of what it consists of completely. We have given workshops with [our local PBS station] and we have heard and know about it in our community, but not Ready To Learn.* (Oakland, CA)

- *Ready To Learn, I don't recognize the name precisely. If it is part of PBS, I know about it because I am also part of [an organization] that funds [the local station]. I am more familiar with [the local station name] than the name Ready To Learn.* (Toledo, OH)

Although parents within RTL's target population want the best for their children in terms of education and literacy, they often lack time, skills, and resources to provide the assistance that is actually needed. Many interventions attempt to build parents' capacity to read with their children every day at home and elsewhere by providing training at meetings and workshops, as well as distributing books and other helpful resources.

Nearly all interview respondents said that in their experience, parents living in poverty want the best for their children. However, parents in this situation may have difficulties assisting their children because they:

- Lack time to read to or help their children
- Lack skills or knowledge to help their children
- Fear helping their children because of their own difficulties and bad memories of school
- Lack reading materials at home

In the words of interviewees:

- *Reading with their kids is hugely important to parents. Then, you may ask, if it is important, why isn't it happening? It is because children are the offspring of young parents who can't read themselves. Many parents are dropouts and should be in the 9th- or 10th-grade reading level. Some are even at the third-grade reading level. Nothing to read at home is the other problem. Many parents will say, 'I have never seen a dictionary,' or 'I don't have a dictionary in my home.' If the parents aren't comfortable reading and they have nothing to read, then literacy at home doesn't rise to the top of the list. Also, if you have a single mother and she works all day, at probably a menial job, gets dinner on the table and all the house work done, she does not have the energy to say, 'let's sit and read.' Each of us has priorities. If you are struggling to survive and put food on the table, it is difficult to prioritize reading as important.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *I think most parents want the best for their children and want them to go to college, but they are juggling a whole bunch of hats. A lot of people are intimidated because they were not so great in school themselves. The problem is actually making time for it, too. When you have to worry about how you will pay bills and get to your job and put food on the table, it is hard to fit reading in. The goal of reading is long term. It is hard to make it a priority. It is not like learning to change diapers or something that needs to be done immediately.* (Oakland, CA)

- *There are many challenges for the low-income population. Basic needs, like clothes, housing, and utilities. There are also issues of behavior and self-esteem of children in the classroom and at home. There are a lack of goals for graduating. In Texas, children have to pass an exam to go through to the third grade. Those that don't pass just stay behind. Some kids stay in the second*

grade year after year. It is not just problems with reading. These kids don't have support at home. They have problems with math skills and doing their homework. Language barriers are also a problem and many parents are not bilingual, but only speak Spanish. The schools have staff that don't speak any Spanish and parents are afraid to go into schools; they are also worried about immigration laws and don't feel comfortable there. Teen parents are also a problem. They drop out of school because they don't have the resources for daycare. (San Antonio, TX)

Many interviewees noted that in designing their programs, they attempt to address challenges faced by parents (e.g., lack of time, skills, resources). For example, most of the participants said that they explain to parents how reading can be incorporated into everyday activities and stress its importance, provide training for parents on how to read to their children, and/or provide books and other resources for parents so they have something to read at home.

These were typical of comments heard repeatedly during the interviews:

- *We help parents with a low literacy level to learn the basics that they need. We give out books that don't have words for certain families. Our teachers know the families and we have an open communication with them. We tell parents that even if they can't read, they can make up stories to go along with the pictures in the books. We also have parenting classes that assist parents to know how to help their child at each developmental level from the time the children are infants to just before they are going to kindergarten.* (Toledo, OH)

- *What we have discovered is that quite a few parents were functionally illiterate in both their native tongue and English. The idea of parents reading to their children is difficult for them. We tell parents about just talking and pointing out letters to their children… Our goal is to work with parents where they are, to teach them things that they can use within their schedule. Most children aren't read to because there are other family stressors present. We tell them things that are inside that flow already, so that reading becomes a part of that flow.* (Oakland, CA)

- *It is not a priority for these families to fit reading with their children into their lives. We want to have a new program called 'parents' night' to give tips to parents about how they can incorporate reading into their daily lives. For example, they can read off labels in the grocery store, anything in their day-to-day activities. Most of these families don't own books of their own. We don't have many funds but we try to give them at least one book a year to take home. We want to teach parents that there are other resources—library cards and things that fit in their everyday lives.* (San Antonio, TX)

According to most interviewees, the community-based organizations on average deliver a very concentrated intervention that reaches and targets a small number of families.

Overall, the interviewees noted that their programs reach a small number of children and/or families—as few as six families. The largest number of "clients" served was 1,000. Many expressed frustration in their inability to reach more families and make a greater impact in breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy within their community. Some participants mentioned the unfortunate need to scale back on programs or projects due to the decrease in or lack of funding in recent years. Typical comments were:

- *Our mission is to provide comprehensive and integrated support services…now we serve 215–230 children a year. We reach and serve the low-income community. Hence, our location is in an impoverished community.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *A major challenge that our organization faces is with our capacity. We have organizational capacity issues; we do operate efficiently, but over the last 10 years, fundraising goes into programs, and we have to pay for the overall operational costs. This isn't easy…in Mississippi we are so poor and our schools have been so poor for generations…we think it is critical to make literacy a priority, but we are only serving 100 kids and cannot help the situation as much as we would like.* (Jackson, MS)

- *Previously we had a major contract and we were doing a children's initiative; we were tutoring and coaching in elementary and middle schools. Because this funding was cut, we have narrowed our focus, and that is why we concentrate on the adults or parents now. It had a significant impact on us when the funding was cut because there was more than a million dollars in that part of the program. We would like to impact more people, but we have to be realistic.* (Baltimore, MD)

A number of interviewees objected to or expressed concern about the use of television as an educational tool. This attitude about educational TV programming was most prominent among participants who work for programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

When hearing an initial description of the RTL program, a number of participants expressed concern about using television as a means to help children improve their literacy skills. In the words of participants:

- *I am against the TV as a tool and programs outside of this that use technology. We've seen pilot projects that have ranged from cell phones to other things, but you need to be careful when introducing technology. There is no substitute for a lap and warm body. If parents aren't reading to their kids, they won't necessarily watch and do activities around TV shows either.* (Oakland, CA)

- *I love PBS, but I was appalled that [a PBS program] got more funding than [a local partner organization in the community that promotes literacy]. The television isn't as good as the one-on-one parent and child interaction while reading books. A parent cannot assess if the child is having trouble with skills using the TV, so it is not helpful. For example, let's say the child needs to learn more fine motor skills. If parents don't have the opportunity to know or understand this, then the problems will not be addressed.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *I have mixed feelings about [television-based literacy activities]. Literacy-based activities will be rather sedentary anyway, I guess, and this seems like a possible way to approach it because TV reaches into every home. But obesity in children is a problem and 46 percent of low-income children in our area are having problems with obesity. According to a professor at Stanford, one simple intervention is to decrease screen time. You are balancing the needs of a developing child. There is a tremendous amount of television, but if you could replace bad TV with good TV, it is good, but you would have to implement it carefully, keeping children's health in mind.* (Oakland, CA)

Although most participants expressed interest in technology-based materials and curricula, the use of technologies such as television programs, DVDs, computers, and interactive books, by and large, is not currently part of the community organizations' offerings.

Few of the organizations interviewed use innovative technology in their programs to assist children in improving their literacy skills. Those that do have a technology component to their program only have the capacity to reach a small number of people. Here is what one participant had to say about his/her organization:

> *We have only one program that addresses children ages 3–5. We were very fortunate to receive a donation of Discovery computers this year. The computer programs are dynamic and interactive. We received nine computers, and this year we were able to offer a kindergarten readiness program to six participants. This program prepares the child for school and encourages reading.* (San Antonio, TX)

A notable exception to this was found in Jackson, MS, with programs that use *Between the Lions* in their classrooms, a curriculum that incorporates clips from the show and donated DVD players. One interviewee explained:

> Between the Lions *comes and helps us with professional development. They give us DVDs and do assessments on the children and teachers. Our teachers are learning a lot. It is great. We have three centers. The teachers are meeting highly qualified expectations.* Between the Lions' *assessment teams chose three classrooms as models. We love working with them.* (Jackson, MS)

Interviewees from community-based organizations across all five markets responded similarly regarding the challenges that their constituents face. The respondents pointed out that poverty is almost always at the root of these challenges. In nearly all the markets, participants mentioned the following challenges: poor school systems, high illiteracy rates for adults and children, high rates of teen pregnancy, lack of affordable childcare and housing, urban flight, and high unemployment. Most participants also stated that despite the many challenges, the collaboration between government, other nonprofit organizations, and businesses is apparent and inspiring.

Many interview participants within each market expressed frustration at poor and worsening school systems and adult and child illiteracy in impoverished areas. Quite a few interviewees mentioned the tendency for wealthy and middle class parents to either send their children to private schools or to flee the city altogether to make sure their children get a quality education. Many interviewees also commented on the difficult national exams that children are required to pass but are not prepared for in the absence of a quality education. Interview participants from four separate markets echoed similar sentiments concerning the school system in their locality:

- *Folks that live in Baltimore County or City send their kids to private schools if they have money. If you pull them out of public schools, what's left—those that can't afford [private schools] and those that are from dysfunctional families; children and families with high needs are the ones entering public schools…Another problem is that the State HAS exams have become a big priority now. More money has been shifted to middle and high school students, but more and more children are entering school who are not prepared to learn. There still needs to be a focus on young children.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *One of the challenges in Jackson, and Mississippi as a whole, is leaving no child behind. Here, there is a greater opportunity to fail. More people are getting left behind. The school population is increasingly poor and minority. There are fewer resources for the schools, and they are in worse shape. There are more opportunities to succeed, but also to fall behind. More children are increasingly left in the dust.* (Jackson, MS)

- *Oakland is a highly diverse city and also very poor economically. Our school district has been taken over by the State, and the school board does not have a lot of power right now. Schools are fairly segregated. Often in the schools we serve, there is not one white kid in the whole school. Reading scores are not good for poor kids. In the hills, where the wealthy live, scores are good, but not in the flat lands where low-income families live.* (Oakland, CA)

- *In San Antonio, we work with school districts. One of the problems parents have is in setting up their children for success. There is standardized testing. Parents struggle with that test and the school system. The test is something some agree with and some don't, but whatever you think about it, it is a reality that parents have to deal with. I have worked closely with the immigrant population. There are a lot of Mexican immigrants. I know about this culture, and there is a huge language barrier between kids and their parents. Children*

speak English and their parents cannot. We as service providers and schools face problems with language. (San Antonio, TX)

Nearly all interview participants mentioned crime, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and overall poverty as enormous challenges that, combined, make it difficult for the families that they serve to improve their circumstances. Participants across the five markets mentioned the flight of businesses to the suburbs as a major reason for unemployment in their market. This is how typical interview respondents from each market described the challenges faced by their constituents:

- *One of the challenges in Baltimore is that the families we see are dealing with many problems. Not only are they dealing with schools that are struggling, but on top of that there is a lot of gang violence and poverty. There is substandard housing, no health and dental care, and high unemployment. There has been a long-standing effort to get the drug trade under control, but this is still a problem. We may improve test scores, but this is only solving a small part of the problem. If a child has no food to eat, and has unemployed parents or a single parent, we have solved only 10 percent of the problem. We want to make a difference in the lives of children and their families, as well as the future generation to come, but we only control one lever of many levers.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *East Oakland is poor, but west Oakland has the most low-income families. There are many single moms who lack resources and do not have access to daycare. There are many families on welfare and families with many children. The neighborhood where our program is located is heavily populated by gangs, although these gangs are respectful of the school in the area. There are drug dealers on corners, and arrests are made often related to the drug problem. There is prostitution and theft. Kids are aware of the neighborhood and know what to stay away from.* (Oakland, CA)

- *Jackson is bittersweet. I love it here because it isn't a large city so there are a lot of subdivisions. But there is the tragedy of a tremendous crime rate. This has to do with the education level and socioeconomic status. People don't have jobs. Part of the reason is that people are not literate. The cost of living here is less than Washington, DC, for example, but it is still a challenge for people who live here to find affordable housing.* (Jackson, MS)

- *Right now Toledo is in an economically depressed situation. It is a blue collar area and dependent on factories and skilled labor. The problem is that jobs are moving to the suburbs. In the urban center, housing has gone up and you can't buy a first home anymore because it is too expensive. Parents are struggling to make ends meet and often have two or three part-time jobs. Impoverished is an understatement when describing the children that we work with.* (Toledo, OH)

- *I don't know how families do it. There is a high percentage of teen moms, and they tend to have bigger families without a steady income. These moms drop-out of school and are very mobile. There are programs where they can get 3 months of free rent. They take the 3 months and then they have to move somewhere else for another 3 months. In San Antonio, you need to finish high school to get a job. There is a lot of minimum wage work, but there is a lot of competition. People are undereducated, and the cycle of poverty continues.* (San Antonio, TX)

While interview participants from each market expressed their frustration with the many challenges that continue to plague children and families within their locality, most also seemed to express gratitude for the collaboration of the various stakeholders that are able to have a positive impact. Responses from these two participants are typical across all markets:

- *I am responsible for offices in Baltimore, [Washington] DC, and in other counties, and of all of those, Baltimore has been the most welcoming of our program. In Baltimore, there is a really great collaboration between the Title I office and the public school system and other nonprofits. There is a real partnership and people are really trying hard to make the most of the available money and provide services to help children. Corporations and others are also in line with the Title I office and public schools, as well as several foundations…The alignment is wonderful in Baltimore.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *San Antonio is wonderful to live in. The quality of life is better than in other large cities. We operate as a small city. Relationships are important here. We have a strong United Way here and a great mayor. I give a lot of credit to the City of San Antonio for opening its doors and providing a climate that easily promotes collaboration. There is also a philanthropic business community. There is a lot of collaboration, and it is a cooperative environment to work in.* (San Antonio, TX)

Each target community's population is ethnically, racially, and historically diverse in its own way, which has an impact on the issues and challenges that each community faces. Based on the responses from interview participants, the mobility and transience of the population also seem to differ from market to market.

Although there are many similarities in responses from the interview participants across all markets, each market does have its own unique qualities. For example, in Jackson, MS, and San Antonio, TX, interview participants emphasized the political context and history of institutional racism that impacts their markets today. In Jackson, MS, schools and businesses continue to be impacted by the segregation and widening economic gap between impoverished African Americans and wealthier whites. One Jackson-based interview respondent explained:

> *The population of Jackson under the 2000 census was about 70 percent African American and 30 percent white. Most of the people that we serve are low- to moderate-income African Americans. Of the children that we serve, 98 percent qualify for free and reduced-price meals at school. In 1989–90, 79 percent of our*

> *school system was African American; now it is 96 percent African American. Issues of race and racism are still prominent. There have been some positive changes, but there is still a class and racial divide.* (Jackson, MS)

In San Antonio, on the other hand, there is a large Latino and Hispanic population that has faced and still faces economic, social, and linguistic discrimination. The following was a common sentiment among many participants:

> *There are multiple reasons for the way things are in San Antonio with the Hispanic population. It has to do with language, economics, discrimination and prejudice, and history. It used to be against the law to speak Spanish in this State, soon after Texas was annexed to the United States. The State basically said 'your heritage isn't valuable' and that people should assimilate. There is an unequal allocation of resources. When you combine lack of resources, impoverished neighborhoods, and a historical preference for having white students go to college and non-white students going to vocational school, it is understandable why there are problems. Vocational education was almost mandated in the city's history for Hispanics. This still happens today, even in my own extended family.* (San Antonio, TX)

In Oakland, CA, there is a longstanding presence of community diversity on many levels. Interview participants in Oakland made it clear that people are quite used to diversity in the city—from multiple countries and regions of the world. As one interview participant in Oakland explained:

> *Oakland is multicultural and multilingual. Our staff is multilingual. They speak about 10 languages including: Southeast Asian languages, some African languages, Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, and others. We also serve a lot of family types and structures. There are grandparents as caregivers, gay men and lesbians raising kids, children with special needs, and those with various socioeconomic differences.* (Oakland, CA)

In addition to its long-standing diversity, many Oakland-based interviewees mentioned the particularly difficult housing crisis that has resulted from the widening gap between the rich and the poor within the city. As one participant from Oakland emphasized:

> *There is a lot of poverty that has been ingrained for many years in Oakland. Now it is worse because housing costs are so high, and it is hard to live in this area. A lot of neighborhoods are yuppified now and are pushing those in poverty out. A lot of poor families have to share housing with other families to afford living there.* (Oakland, CA)

Unlike Oakland, CA, in Baltimore, MD, and Toledo, OH, diversity is fairly new within each market, which presents new challenges. Quite a few interview participants from Baltimore mentioned the emerging Latino and Hispanic population in recent years in their city, which was traditionally mostly African American and white. As one respondent reflected:

> *Our target population has changed in the last several years. Our focus now is on those families who are new to this country but have a limited English proficiency. The Hispanic population has grown tremendously in the last 10 years. Parenting is second for these low-income parents, and survival is their main focus. Some of them have horrendous backgrounds and are political refugees. We try to instill in them that to capture the American dream, you have to provide a stable home environment for your children. The future is the children.* (Baltimore, MD)

In Toledo, there has also been a change in the population makeup. According to Toledo-based interviewees, there are several ethnically diverse groups that are growing in number. This diversity is fairly new to the city, which was traditionally mostly African American and white. One participant expressed his/her view on Toledo's diversity as follows:

> *We aren't like New York in terms of diversity, but we are diverse. In our program, we serve a diversity of families. There are white non-Hispanics; about 30 percent African Americans, 10 percent Hispanics or recent immigrants from Mexico or Central America, and maybe 1 percent Russians and Romanians, who are not a large portion of the population but have big families. There is a Muslim community also and one large mosque here that is regional for all the Midwest. Five percent of our participants are Muslim. There are also many bi- or multiracial families. Detroit isn't far, only 50 miles north of us. As a result, we have an interesting mix of people.* (Toledo, OH)

While there have been recent changes in the composition of Baltimore and Toledo, according to many interviewees, these are both cities where people prefer to maintain the same community structure and stay in the same neighborhood for many years, even generations, without moving.

Views typical of most Baltimore and Toledo participants were:

- *Parents don't leave their neighborhoods in Baltimore. Families living a 20 minute-drive from the inner harbor, and they have never been there. Imagine a 25- or 30-year-old parent has never been to the harbor. People are born in their neighborhoods, shop in their neighborhoods, and ultimately go to the undertaker in their neighborhoods. Even our own program staff don't like visiting another part of the city.* (Baltimore, MD)

- *Toledo has strong roots and a lot of traditions. It is the kind of place that families live there and stay there. Maybe this is because of the river and where it is located in the country. There are a lot of hard-working families in Toledo…It is a diverse community…folks from all socioeconomic*

backgrounds. There are a number of senior citizens who have lived here for a long time. (Toledo, OH)

Unlike Baltimore and Toledo, most interviewees in Jackson, MS, pointed to the transience and constant mobility of people between the city and suburbs and between neighborhoods within the city. According to several Jackson-based interview participants, the city has received a large influx of Hurricane Katrina victims from other parts of Mississippi, which has led to this mobility. As one interviewee from Jackson explained:

Jackson, as with any city, there are suburbs. We are growing, especially with Katrina hitting the coast. A lot of people from New Orleans and the coast are coming here. It is a strong community and it is so suburban. A lot of people live in the Northeast section. So many people commute and travel. All of that feels like Jackson. It feels like it is one area…I think that one of the challenges in Jackson is participation in programs. It is hard to get participation. We don't charge a lot of money for our programs, but it is really hard to get people involved. Otherwise, Jackson is a great place to live. Small enough that you are not overwhelmed. (Jackson, MS)

Recommendations

- Utilize existing infrastructure, dissemination channels, and community-based organizations to deliver RTL messages and materials.
- Develop quality SBRR-based materials and program modules that augment and deepen existing curricula and offerings of prospective RTL partners.
- Offer community-based organizations new and innovative technology that will allow them to reach out to RTL families with diverse, engaging materials across multiple platforms and settings.
- Understanding the competing demands for time and attention in many RTL families and seeking to "meet them where they already are," develop materials that can be used both inside and outside the home, and with or without parental interaction.
- Because demographics matter more than geography, RTL outreach efforts can feasibly be designed to be scalable and implemented locally with only minor adaptations within each market.

APPENDIX A

Organizations Interviewed (by target market)

Baltimore Organizations

- Advocates for Children and Youth
- Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY) of Baltimore
- Baltimore Reads
- Even Start, Baltimore
- Ready at Five Partnership
- SCHOOL READINESS w/in United Way Central MD (and Success by 6)
- Union Baptist Head Start, Baltimore
- BELL-Mid-Atlantic, (Baltimore office)
- Families on the Reading Edge, St. Francis Academy Community Center

Jackson Organizations

- The Barksdale Reading Institute
- Communities in Schools, Jackson
- Communities in Schools, Mississippi Delta
- City of Jackson Early Childhood Development Program
- America Reads, Mississippi
- Mississippi Forum on Children and Families
- Operation Shoestring, Inc.

Oakland Organizations

- Bananas, Inc.
- Connections for Children/Childcare Literacy Project
- Girls Inc. of Alameda County, GIRLStart

- Jewish Coalition for Literacy, Oakland
- East Bay Children's Book Project
- Oakland Parents Literacy Project
- Mimi & Peter Haas Fund
- Raising a Reader
- Oakland Ready To Learn
- San Mateo County Health Services Agency

San Antonio Organizations

- AVANCE, San Antonio
- Boys and Girls Club of San Antonio
- Communities in Schools of San Antonio
- Community Family Resource and Learning Division and the Young Explorers Program
- Even Start Family Literacy Program of San Antonio
- Family Services Association, San Antonio
- Reach Out and Read, San Antonio
- San Antonio Youth Literacy (SAYL)
- National Jewish Coalition for Literacy, San Antonio

Toledo Organizations

- ABC Family Arts Lab, Toledo
- Collaborative Learning and Instructional Pre-school Project (CLIPP)
- Reach Out and Read, Toledo
- East Toledo Family Center
- Lucas County Head Start, Toledo
- Ohio Reads
- Toledo Day Nursery

- Lucas County Early Childhood Initiative

APPENDIX B

Interviews With Local Community Organizations in Five RTL Markets

Conduct 5–10 interviews per market with organizations focused on serving families entitled to Title I benefits and/or conduct literacy activities targeting high-poverty children from ages 2 to 8.

Interview Objectives:

1. Gain a better understanding of the local marketplace.

2. Become familiar with organizations operating in each community and types of literacy activities they carry out.

3. Understand the needs and wants of local organizations in serving their constituents.

4. Understand these organizations' perceived benefits and barriers to engaging in partnerships.

5. Gauge what these organizations perceive as factors motivating parents to get involved in reading activities with their children.

6. Gauge where these organizations see reading activities fit into their lives and the lives of their children.

7. Gauge perceptions/familiarity with Ready To Learn and the local PBS station.

Recruitment Script:

Hello, my name is _____. I'm calling from American Institutes for Research, a nonprofit organization supporting the communication efforts of many Federal agencies, particularly those related to health and educational issues.

Currently, we are working on a grant from the Department of Education focusing on early literacy skills among children ages 2 to 8 who live in low-income areas. Because we consider your organization to be an expert in the community on this topic, (literacy activities/low-income populations, etc.), we would like to learn more from you about the community and the work that your organization does within the community.

In particular, we would like to talk to you about your organization's involvement with high poverty children and/or improving literacy, and specific activities and outreach efforts you conduct in your community. Do you think that you would be the appropriate person to continue this discussion with or is there someone else in your organization that you would recommend that we speak with? (SCHEDULER NOTE: If they ask who we are looking to speak with, suggest a communications person, person most knowledgeable about outreach activities, or perhaps the executive director if he/she is most knowledgeable).

If they are the right person: Would you be willing to lend your assistance by having a 30-minute phone conversation with one of our researchers, at your convenience?

- *If YES,* proceed with scheduling: What day and time might be convenient for you? The interviews will last about 30 minutes and all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

- *If NO*, get the contact information for the suggested person and follow up with them.

Topic Guide

Hello, my name is _____. I'm calling from American Institutes for Research. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak to us. As the person who scheduled the interview mentioned, AIR is a nonprofit organization supporting communication efforts of many Federal agencies, particularly related to health and educational issues. Currently, we are working on a grant from the Department of Education focused on improving early literacy skills among children ages 2 to 8 who live in low-income areas. As your organization is an expert in XXXX (literacy activities/low income populations, etc.), we would like to speak with you to learn more about your community and the work that you do within the community. This shouldn't take more than 30 minutes and all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

I. Organization and Community

1. Could you please tell me briefly about your organization? (Mission, goals, constituents, main areas of focus/what it's known for in the community, size, etc.)

2. How long have you been working in your community? (INTERVIEWER NOTE: Specify which RTL market this organization serves in your notes.)

3. Can you tell me a little bit about your community? What are some adjectives that you would use to describe your community?

4. What are some key challenges that your community faces?

5. Tell me a bit about your organization's role in the community?

6. How would you describe the people that your organization serves? How/where do these people fit within your community?

7. Do you have different stakeholder groups? If so, who are they and how are they prioritized or categorized?

8. What are some key challenges that your organization faces?

9. If you had a magic wand, how would you solve the problems of your constituents? Your community? Your organization? What needs to happen to help resolve these issues?

10. **IF APPLICABLE:** How would you characterize the literacy community in your community? (INTERVIEWER NOTE: Specify which market is being discussed in your notes.) Cohesive? Do like-minded organizations work together or is everyone out there conducting their own individual efforts?

11. What are some of the big issues surrounding literacy in your community?

II. Outreach

1. What outreach activities do you conduct in your community? (INTERVIEWER NOTE: Probe the following—How do you reach your audiences? [e.g., low-income families/those entitled to Title I benefits, etc.] How do you get them to participate in your activities? How do you promote yourself to the community?)

2. Which ones seem to be particularly successful? Why? Which ones don't work? Why?

3. Have you ever heard of scientifically based reading research or SBRR? What do you think about it?

4. IF NOT: Scientifically based reading research (SBRR) refers to reading practices that have been tested and proven effective with children who have reading difficulties. It has five key components: phonemic awareness (the ability to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words); phonics (the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language); fluency (the capacity to read text accurately and quickly, including oral reading skills); vocabulary (the words students must know to communicate effectively); and comprehension (the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read).

5. Does your organization develop and/or produce your own reading instruction materials? Where are you getting the resources? Are they SBRR-based?

6. Do you look for other materials, etc., to augment your offerings? Do you use materials from other organizations? If so, what (e.g., curricula, books, etc.)?

7. In your opinion, what other organizations in your community are really good at doing outreach to low-income families? What do they do?

III. Working With Children Entitled to Title I Benefits and Their Families *(if applicable)*

1. From your experience of working with low-income families, where does reading fit into their daily lives? How important is their child's literacy level to these parents?

2. Why do you think a low-income parent would get involved in a child's education? And what can an organization do to get parents involved in their child's education?

3. What are some ways that we can make reading more relevant to their lives?

4. What do you think are particular challenges of working with low-income families?

IV. Partnerships, PBS, and Ready To Learn

1. Do you currently partner with anyone re: early childhood literacy? Who are they?

2. Why did you choose to partner with these organizations?

3. Have you ever worked with your local PBS station? On what project?

4. *IF RTL is mentioned:* How would you describe the RTL program? How would you describe your experience of working with a PBS station?

5. How visible do you think the station is within the community? Consumers vs. organizations?

6. Do you believe it enhances your organization's offerings? In what ways? Do you consider this a successful partnership? Why? Why not?

7. *IF RTL is not mentioned:* Have you ever heard of the Ready To Learn program?
   IF YES: How would you describe the program?
   IF NO: The Ready To Learn program targets children ages 2 to 8 entitled to Title I benefits and their caregivers. The program's goal is to improve children's literacy skills using innovative television programming grounded in scientifically based reading research. The TV shows will be aired on PBS and each show will have educational materials (e.g., books, console games, Web sites, and other activities) that will support their shows.

8. Now that you've heard the initial description of this program, what do you think? In general, what do you think about using public television shows and curricula around those shows to promote early childhood literacy?

9. In general, what do you look for in a partner? In your opinion, what is a successful partnership?

Thank You