



THE GEORGE GUND FOUNDATION



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Three Leading Foundations Launch Program to Improve Literacy in Greater Cleveland

*Hundreds of Local Organizations Come Together to Centralize Efforts
and Launch Awareness Campaign*

(CLEVELAND) – Sept. 28, 2005 – Three of Cleveland’s largest foundations announced plans today to launch a collaborative effort to raise the level of literacy in Greater Cleveland. The Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation and The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation together have committed \$700,000 to establish the Greater Cleveland Literacy Collaborative. This new entity will work to ensure that all children and adults in Greater Cleveland reach their highest potential for employment, self-sufficiency and lifelong-learning.

The three foundations convened more than 300 individuals from 250 local organizations over the past 14 months to study issues related to literacy in the community and steps that could be taken to improve the current situation.

“Literacy is more than just reading,” Ann Mullin, senior program officer at The George Gund Foundation said. “It’s the set of skills needed to function effectively in society and to achieve one’s goals. Our research indicates that nearly half of Cuyahoga County residents lack necessary literacy skills. For these community members, navigating a bus route, understanding prescription drug instructions, calculating the cost of menu items or understanding work benefits are anything but routine.”

The group created a comprehensive literacy action plan and charged The Literacy Collaborative with implementation. The plan outlines five strategic areas of focus:

- Provide an information clearinghouse for the community.
- Establish evaluation and quality assurance standards.

- Ensure that training, curriculum development, and technical assistance are available to providers.
- Identify and secure public and private funding for literacy.
- Launch a public awareness campaign on literacy.

“Up until this point, literacy has not been a major community priority,” Bill Hiller, executive director of The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, said. “Our goal is to help businesses, non-profit organizations, public officials and the community understand the importance of literacy and to work in a coordinated way to improve these skills.”

While The Literacy Collaborative will be responsible for all of the focus areas, it will function primarily as a convener and coordinator, contracting with community organizations and partners to perform the work.

“The Literacy Collaborative will seek to build upon strengths that already exist in the community and step in only where there is a recognized gap,” John Mitterholzer, program officer at The Cleveland Foundation, said. “The organization will be a true collaborative of groups working towards one goal – improving literacy.”

A central part of The Literacy Collaborative's work involves launching a large public awareness campaign in spring of 2006 to raise the profile of literacy in the community and inform the public about the many services available to improve individual skills.

By centralizing functions and combining efforts, The Literacy Collaborative will allow service providers to concentrate on what they do best. It will also provide program support and financial resources to these organizations. This independent entity will act on behalf of the community and reach beyond traditional service providers and connect more meaningfully with public, private, and non-profit organizations to achieve literacy goals. The Literacy Collaborative will provide oversight and overall strategic coordination currently not being fulfilled by individual providers.

The Greater Cleveland Literacy Collaborative

The Greater Cleveland Literacy Collaborative is a joint initiative of The Cleveland, George Gund and Martha Holden Jennings Foundations to centralize efforts to improve literacy levels among children, youth and adults in Greater Cleveland. The organization provides information and referrals, funding assistance, evaluation and accountability, training and development, and public awareness efforts for literacy.

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** Note: In March 2006, the official name of the group was changed to The Literacy Cooperative.