

Draft Workplan - Researching the Michigan Literacy Ecosystem

February 3, 2026

Project team: John Chrastka (EveryLibrary Institute), Scott Garrison (MCLS), Ellie Franklin, Sofia Frumkin, and Madeline Brookman (UMSI)

Other stakeholders: Michigan Academic Library Association (MiALA), Michigan Association of School Librarians (MASL), Michigan Library Association (MLA)

Libraries can be ‘core literacy service providers’ or ‘complementary support systems to literacy service providers’ at the same time across multiple ages, demographics, geographies, and partnerships. Regardless of the mode (core or complement), Michigan libraries of all types are infrastructure within the literacy ecosystem, not standalone programs. We are not writing a literature review for academics. You are assembling evidence so lawmakers can confidently say yes to our proposals.

Our shared project is for:

- UMSI students to research and create an annotated bibliography...
- that EveryLibrary Institute will use to create one or more policy briefs the library community in Michigan can use to influence lawmakers...
- with financial support for research synthesis and drafting from MCLS (and other stakeholders listed above as possible).

1. Create a “Michigan Literacy Profile.”

The Michigan Literacy Profile is a picture of literacy needs, gaps, and opportunities across the lifespan of residents and across communities, grounded in Michigan-specific data and national research with clear policy implications. The profile should begin to point to answers to five questions:

1. Who in Michigan is struggling with which forms of literacy?
2. Where are the gaps by geography, race, income, age, or disability?
3. What systems of support already touch these populations?
4. Where are libraries already active but under-resourced or under-authorized? (The active libraries may be in Michigan, or we may be inspired by out-of-state examples.)
5. What impacts happen and outcomes change when libraries are properly funded?

Michigan Literacy Baseline Research Questions

- What are Michigan’s current literacy rates by age?
- How do outcomes vary by region (urban/rural/tribal)?
- Where is Michigan above or below the national averages?

Lines of Inquiry

- Early childhood literacy (Pre-K readiness, third-grade reading)
- Adult literacy and basic skills
- Digital literacy and broadband access
- English language proficiency
- Disability-related literacy access
- Incarcerated and re-entry populations

Key Michigan data sources may be:

- Michigan Department of Education
- Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP)
- Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI)
- Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity
- State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)
- Census ACS
- National Assessment of Adult Literacy (state-level)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Please look for percentages, trends, disparities, geographic indicators, and “cost-of-inaction” indicators.

2. Look at Michigan Library and Literacy Domains.

Policymakers may not know or understand the roles that public libraries, school libraries, academic libraries, and state library resources have in the provision of literacy services. We need to update their awareness and knowledge while disrupting their heuristics frameworks that tend to equate literacy service impacts with K-12 or adult reading scores, primarily.

Our brief(s) will be focused on four “literacy domains”, each with Michigan relevance:

1. Foundational & Reading Literacy
2. Digital & Information Literacy
3. Workforce & Economic Literacy
4. Health & Civic Literacy

These literacy domains impact individuals and groups across distinct life stages, each with unique needs:

1. Early childhood (0–5)
2. Elementary (6–10)
3. Adolescents (11–18)
4. Postsecondary students
5. Working-age adults
6. Older adults

The research line of inquiry should help with casemaking across all four domains and answer three questions:

- What domain outcomes are linked to literacy rates?
- Do incumbent domain systems succeed or fail in reaching people?
- What happens when access to domain expertise is uneven?

We should look for information, studies, and research about the role of effective literacy services in personal and community transition points and look at the ‘core v. complementary’ role of libraries in those transitions.

3. Name the Library Contributions and Capabilities.

When it comes to literacy services, policymakers need to be affirmed in their baseline view that “libraries = books,” but then moved into new awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the breadth and depth of library capabilities to deliver and support literacy services beyond access to the collection. The brief(s) will need to include some landscape storytelling about baseline services as well as exemplar services, either in Michigan or from outside.

Public Libraries

- Early literacy programs
- Summer learning
- Adult education & ESL
- Digital skills & workforce support
- Health information navigation

School Libraries

- Reading achievement correlations
- Information literacy
- Equity of access
- Student engagement and graduation

Academic Libraries

- Student persistence and completion
- First-generation student support
- Research literacy
- Workforce pipelines

Library of Michigan (State Library)

- Resource sharing
- Statewide databases (mel.org)
- Professional development
- Broadband and digital equity coordination

We want to answer the question of what libraries are doing now that should be replicated in many more libraries or scaled up across libraries, and what we are doing now (either in MI or somewhere else) that prevents problems from occurring or deepening for people. Are there good stories to tell about the following library activities (core or complement) that would help us argue for new funding?

4. Understand Current Policy Priorities of Elected Officials and Stakeholders.

The brief(s) is/are intended to inform elected officials and policymakers about the capabilities of Michigan Libraries to address problems and provide solutions around the delivery and effectiveness of literacy programs, either as a core provider or complement to the ecosystem. We need to understand the current priorities of current office holders and stakeholders about each of the literacy domains discussed above in order to map the brief(s) to their issues.

We need to understand what the priorities of the elected officials are in order to connect the dots for them about libraries' interests and capabilities. Our main question is "How do Michigan's elected leaders, agencies, and key stakeholders currently define and plan for literacy across the lifespan" in order to eventually map how libraries of all types support or strengthen those efforts.

We need to examine, score, and interpret the positions and plans issued by stakeholders and elected officials for certain populations, demographics, and geographies, including examining policy priorities and plans from:

- State executive leadership
- Legislative actors
- State agencies
- Boards, commissions, and councils
- Legislative committees
- Influential stakeholder organizations

Look for their priorities related to literacy skill-building, aligned with target populations' desired outcomes or metrics, across delivery mechanisms (schools, employers, community orgs, etc.) and the funding sources or constraints they identify. We should expect them to name K-12 and early learning, postsecondary and adult education, workforce and economic mobility, justice-impacted populations, health and well-being, and civic life.

###