

A Community of Learners



EVALUATION OF THE WE ARE NEW YORK PROGRAM



BY



FOR



A Community of Learners

EVALUATION OF THE WE ARE NEW YORK PROGRAM

Helene Jennings

Gingi Pica

Joseph Galanek

Spencer Schaff

Nathali Arias

April 2018



icf.com

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	01
Methods	05
Participants	10
Instructional Quality	16
Learner Outcomes	22
Implementation and Scalability	29
Findings	32
Recommendations	36

Ethnographies

Margarita	04
Mahmoud and Simin	09
Yasmin	15
Andrés	21
Gabriel	28
Akmetzhan	31
Frida	35



Message from Commissioner Bitta Mostofi



Dear friends,

We are thrilled to share the first-ever evaluation of the We Speak NYC program. We Speak NYC, formerly We Are New York, is the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs' free English language program. Through We Speak NYC we are creating an equitable and accessible English language learning platform for students to empower immigrant New Yorkers through both language learning and support in navigating the City's immense resources. We do this by partnering with libraries, community and faith-based organizations, and schools to offer free English classes across the five boroughs. Our videos and educational materials raise key issues affecting Limited English Proficient New Yorkers, such as workers' rights, mental health, immigration legal services and emergency preparedness. As you will learn through this evaluation, educators and learners in all corners of New York City are using our program.

This independent evaluation shows the effectiveness of We Speak NYC's volunteer-led model and innovative educational materials in enabling students to learn and use English in their everyday lives. We know from the surveys conducted that 85 percent of We Speak students demonstrated an increased vocabulary after just 20 hours of instruction. The same evaluation also showed that learners increased their ability to use the correct word in a sentence, highlighting the program's effectiveness not only in vocabulary acquisition, but also in practical application.

This report comes at a pivotal moment for the We Speak NYC program. Over the last year, the de Blasio Administration has invested in producing new content including a second season of our Emmy award-winning video series, complementary educational materials like workbooks and civic focused comics, an ad campaign, and an upcoming interactive website. These updated educational tools and new online learning platform will support existing classroom-based English language programs by providing additional resources for learners to practice English and for teachers to integrate empowering immigrant stories and civic lessons into their lesson plans. We are proud of the community built through our programs and the insight our students gain about their city by incorporating information about workforce preparedness, workers' and immigrant rights, mental health, social services, early childhood education, senior services, and more.

We are immensely excited about the program's growth and are eager to share our findings with you as we continue building on We Speak NYC's successes to empower our City's English language learners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Mostofi'.

Bitta Mostofi
Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Executive Summary

More than 1.8 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency. Traditional classrooms providing English language instruction meet only 3 percent of the need. We Are New York (WANY) seeks to address the needs of others through an alternative, community-based experience with volunteer facilitators and an emphasis on conversation groups to practice English, meet new people, and empower the participants. The program provides civic-focused instruction through videos, print education materials, and free community classes in all five boroughs. The first season's award-winning videos highlight education, health, emergency preparedness, and domestic violence themes. The second season, renamed **We Speak NYC**, is launching seven new videos that focus on issues such as workforce development, workers' rights, mental health, elder care, and social services.

ICF, a research and evaluation professional services firm, was contracted by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) to conduct an evaluation of the program to assess its instructional quality, improvements made by learners in English language acquisition and accessing City services, and the components that affect immigrant inclusion and civic engagement. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers observed and gathered data at nine different community settings over the course of a year. They interviewed learners, facilitators, and program coordinators; conducted focus groups; administered an assessment to measure learning gains; and collected ethnographic stories from a diverse and representative set of participants.

Learners were motivated to improve their English language skills, which was their main reason for enrolling and staying in the program. They desired a class where they could practice English, socialize or meet new people, and learn at their own pace. They felt that the structure of the classes and conversational emphasis were effective for learning and the content was relevant to their daily lives. They also demonstrated enthusiasm for the video episodes and study guides. WANY provided a space for learners to practice, build confidence, and be reassured of their civic rights and that they belong.

Volunteer facilitators serve as guides or instructors in the classroom. They come from diverse backgrounds, and include students pursuing an undergraduate degree and professionals established in nonprofit organizations. Nearly all had previous experience volunteering, often in ESOL programs. Although they had varied experience in facilitation, the required two three-hour trainings provided by MOIA helped orient them to the program materials and pedagogy. They reported relying heavily on the materials given to them during their initial training to guide their own teaching styles. All facilitators who were interviewed expressed a desire to support immigrant populations in New York City. Many were first-generation immigrants or second-generation Americans.

Courses were generally divided into two-hour sessions over 10 weeks, with a different video episode presented each week. A range of features led to successful classes that fostered a comfortable learning environment and encouraged students to practice English. Instructional quality was supported by thoughtful design of the classroom materials, picture and vocabulary activities, and study guides developed for each episode. The classroom environment created an encouraging and nonjudgmental atmosphere between learners and facilitators that promoted learners' confidence. Other elements contributed to this supportive environment: small class size, established classroom ground rules, encouragement of using only English in the classroom, opportunities to share new words and questions, and use of the study guide as part of the class structure.

A pre/post assessment of increased understanding of English and acquisition of vocabulary developed by the team measured tangible gains for learners over the course of the semester. Additionally, interviews and focus groups provided myriad examples of learners having the confidence to use their English skills in a store, bank, doctor's office, or their child's school. Learners reported that City services that have no translation services available were easier to use as their confidence in speaking English improved. Specifically they noted that they found increased access to transportation, public libraries, and health care. The program also introduced them to new City resources they otherwise might not have found, and many participants discussed the value of NYC 311 to enable them to get help with "almost anything."

Learners' increased ease in speaking English enables them to spread their language facility to their home community. They reported sharing information about each week's topic and about availability of classes with family and friends. Some described how they serve as translators for others in their community, assisting with calls to a landlord or a pharmacy. Those from diverse communities, where many different languages are spoken, now feel comfortable communicating in English with their neighbors.

The researchers also examined the factors that affect the capacity to implement the community-based programs and those that have implications for expanding the program. Critical to the program model are facilitator commitment, rich resources (such as workbooks and videos) that support the curriculum, and the fact that the classes are free. In order to scale up the offerings, the study highlighted the importance of coordination in expanding the number of classes and partner sites, the need for appropriate and flexible space to accommodate learning, continued facilitator training and skill development, and recognition of the varying levels of English proficiency among those who want to take community-based conversation classes.

The project team developed recommendations designed to guide the program in the future, both to strengthen the program and to support its expansion. The evaluation was conducted during a time of transition to the We Speak NYC initiative. The initiative focuses on accommodating learners at different levels of English, adding new topics to the videos, and expanding resources such as high-quality lesson plans, online interactivity, and increasing the number of partnering sites. The recommendations include the following: Consider new ways to promote sustainability and scalability, strengthen administrative support, conduct ongoing evaluation of the program, expand facilitator trainings and enhance the training content, build a facilitator community, focus on learner retention, act on learner suggestions, plan for additional outreach efforts, and use the opportunity to brand the new program.

Introduction

More than 1.8 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency. Traditional classrooms that provide English language instruction meet only about 3 percent of the need. We Are New York (WANY) provides an alternative experience that is community-based with volunteer facilitators and a focus on conversation groups to practice English, meet new people, empower the participants, and learn from each other.



We Speak NYC (formerly We Are New York) is the City's English language learning program that provides civic-focused instruction through videos, print education materials, and free community classes in all five boroughs. We Speak videos and materials highlight City services and have been used extensively in both formal and informal English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms and for self-study by English language learners. The first season of We Speak videos highlights such issues as education, health, emergency preparedness, and domestic violence, and won two New York Emmy awards. The second season, with seven new videos releasing in 2018, will focus on issues such as workforce development, workers' rights, mental health, elder care, and social services.

We Speak videos are tools to facilitate language learning and civic engagement and are written with both English language teachers and learners in mind. Immigrants learning English have found the videos especially helpful because the production values (e.g., actors speaking clearly and slowly directly into the camera, repetition of key vocabulary, and subtitles) make the content accessible in ways unlike any other English language TV show. Viewers want to watch the show because they can understand the English; the storyline is filled with topics that are relevant to their everyday lives; and the cast reflects the demographics of the City's immigrant population. The working class immigrant heroes of We Speak contend with asthma and diabetes, find ways to support their children's education and prevent teenagers from dropping out, and figure out the banking system.

We Speak educational materials focus on community problem-solving skills and access to government resources. Each of the Season One videos are accompanied by a 36-page full-color workbook containing storyboards and exercises for intermediate learners to practice English at home and in the classroom, a short reader for high beginners to practice reading skills, and multilingual

magazines providing in-depth information about City services that are highlighted in the videos. Season Two videos will include the workbooks and the readers. In addition, the videos will be accompanied by comic books, pop-out civic maps, and other tools for use in the classroom. The program also provides ready-to-use curricula for English language teachers that can be used with students at different levels of learning.

We Speak is also exploring ways to use technology effectively to provide readily accessible language tools for English learners. In summer 2018, the program will launch an **interactive web platform** catered to English learners and offer online exercises and materials to facilitate additional language learning at home and on the road.

We Speak also expands the City's efforts to help new immigrants learn English by recruiting volunteers to facilitate high-beginner and intermediate level English conversation classes using We Speak videos in libraries and other community-based sites.

Conversation groups emphasize English for empowerment by focusing on language needed to access resources, advocate for one's family, and organize with neighbors to pursue common goals. Current groups run three cycles (summer, fall, and spring), once a week for two hours, for 10 weeks. With the introduction of new videos and educational materials, We Speak also plans to launch additional tiered classes and workshops about City services.

This Report

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) and the NYC Mayor's Fund contracted with ICF, a research and consulting firm with offices in New York City, to conduct an evaluation of the We Speak program, specifically appraising learners' acquisition of English, their civic engagement and increased ability to access City services, factors contributing to instructional quality, program implementation, the capacity of partner sites, and what is needed to scale services. When the evaluation began, the program was still called by its former name, We Are New York (WANY). In this report, we refer to the program as WANY.

WANY by the numbers*

- Over 450 conversation groups
- Classes in all five boroughs
- Over 9,000 learners engaged
- Over 400 volunteers trained
- Over 12,000 hours of community service provided by volunteer facilitators
- Over 115 partner sites hosting WANY classes

*Since June 2015 re-lunch through fall 2017 session.

The report presents the evaluation questions, methods, outcomes, and learner experiences that constitute ICF's evaluation of three semesters of WANY (spring, summer, and fall 2017). Data were gathered from two types of participants: WANY participants, or learners, and WANY volunteer facilitators, or facilitators. Throughout the report, we also present ethnographic narratives from WANY learners (identified by pseudonyms) in order to provide a richer understanding of why they came to the United States, their experiences living in New York City, and their experiences attending WANY classes. These narratives offer a rich understanding of the experiences and goals of the individuals who benefit from the services WANY offers and how they use English in their work, with their family, and in their community. These narratives also provide perspectives from WANY learners on what changes they would like to see in WANY classes and what program features they think most assist them in learning English. The study focused on the existing WANY program, not the revised curriculum, We Speak NYC, which is currently in development. However, some of the recommendations reflect the direction that the We Speak NYC program is taking and provide suggestions about how it can grow, and how it can be improved and sustained.



M

MARGARITA:

A better future in the U.S. with improved English skills.

Margarita is in her 30s and moved from Mexico to the U.S. 11 years ago. She is looking for a “better future” for herself and her children, who now number three. She thought they would have a better education in the U.S. than in Mexico. Margarita has experienced challenges while living in New York. She had employment “waiting for her” when she arrived 11 years ago. However, after taking leave for her second daughter’s birth, she did not return to work.

Margarita feels comfortable in New York, and is especially pleased with the schools and social services for her children. She has found that English is “very difficult to learn.” Margarita comes to the East Harlem site for its educational events and day care. One day, the site coordinator let her know that there were also free English classes offered, so she decided to attend WANY courses. Margarita explains that she had been to other English classes, but “the conversational nature of WANY classes made it easy to feel comfortable and try to practice speaking English.” Talking in class with others about topics in the workbooks is easy because everyone is at a

similar English-speaking level. Although she thinks all the WANY topics so far have been useful and enjoyable, the classes that focused on parent-teacher conferences were especially helpful. The WANY class and materials on parent-teacher conferences “helped me better understand expectations of parent conferences and learn phrases that I can ask my daughters’ teachers.” She feels that WANY classes assist in using City services, particularly ones that are reliable. She thinks that if classes were expanded to include even more services, she would seek them out.

She describes the videos as most helpful to her learning English and finds the subtitles very beneficial: “The videos are easy to follow and have useful content.” She only practices English in her home and casually uses it when she is out shopping. Recently her daughters’ pediatrician office lost its Spanish-speaking nurse. So Margarita applied the English she learned to ask about dates and times for appointments, even though the English she uses is “basic.”

Margarita wants to improve her English so that she can help her daughters with their homework: “Sometimes they request help with their school assignments and I would like to be able to help them and understand what they’re asking about.”

“The classes are not easy ... because nothing in life is ... but this class is the most relevant of the English classes I’ve been to.”

Methods

We used a mixed-methods design that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods to fully capture classroom and instructional processes that lead to learner outcomes and the factors that contribute to program outcomes. For learner outcomes, we used a nested mixed-methods approach that primarily focused on qualitative techniques to guide the project, while embedding quantitative methods within the design. We gathered data from participants and facilitators at a variety of settings where WANY is implemented across New York City's five boroughs.



Evaluation Questions

The WANY evaluation was guided by the following questions:

- What factors are identified by facilitators and learners as contributing to instructional quality for WANY?
- What improvements occur in English acquisition for learners during the 10-week WANY course?
- How are students' perceptions of and ability to access City and government services impacted by the WANY program?
- What program elements affect immigrant inclusion and civic and service learning?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, and best practices for WANY program implementation among immigrant communities?
- How does the WANY program affect the capacity of partner sites to provide language services to the community?
- What technical and administrative assistance is needed for the WANY program to scale service?

Use of Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods are best used in program evaluation when the aims are to explore and identify program participants' experiences and perspectives, uncover and identify complex programmatic processes, and obtain rich narrative data from participants regarding their lived experiences within specific social

Ethnographies

Interviewers gathered stories from learners that reflect the hardships of immigrating to the U.S., including deaths in the family, unemployment, divorce, experiences of isolation and loneliness, and concerns for safety.

These experiences are combined with narratives of achievement, an orientation toward a positive future, an emphasis on the positive supports gained from family and community, and a desire for civic participation in New York City.

Pre/post assessment limitations

- Some learners helped each other respond to the assessment.
- Learners thought the assessment was a homework assignment.
- Learners confused the instrument with a previously administered WANY/MOIA survey.
- Learners were anxious and felt as if they were taking a test.
- The pre/post assessment could not always be conducted with the same students.

and cultural environments. To achieve this understanding, we utilized in-depth individual interviews with 27 learners, eight focus groups with 41 learners, and in-depth interviews with 17 WANY facilitators and program coordinators. We applied observational methods within classroom settings to identify how WANY classes work “in real time” within specific communities; 20 sessions were observed in total. This deep, systematic engagement with WANY learners, facilitators, and program leaders via observational methods contributed to our rich understanding of what WANY is and what WANY does among immigrant communities. Additionally, an ethnographic narrative approach allowed us to delve deeper into experiences of 13 individuals.

Because the WANY program had never been evaluated, qualitative methods were an effective approach to capture the complexity of its real-time activities. To effectively assess WANY activities, we also used concepts from adult education and literacy research to ask WANY facilitators and participants about specific activities that contribute to effective instruction and a positive classroom atmosphere that facilitates learning. These included, for example, facilitators using a variety of instructional approaches or a horizontal classroom management approach that allowed students to facilitate learning for their peers. We used observations and interviews to uncover and unpack the “black box” of WANY activities that lead to learning and civic inclusion, as well as to assess whether WANY activities aligned with recommended and effective instructional and classroom management activities.

Use of Quantitative Methods

The ICF evaluators sought to establish some quantitative measures of learning in the sites and classes they visited. Program leaders were also interested in the possibility of developing an assessment that partner sites might use, so the instrument for measuring learners’ growth from the start to the end of a 10-week session became a pilot study of what was feasible in terms of implementation and what new useful information might be conveyed.

We developed a quantitative pre/post instrument to assess learner outcomes. This pre/post instrument borrowed particular assessment and learning tools from WANY class workbooks to formally assess learner outcomes, such as sentence completion and word recognition (vocabulary). The pre/post assessment also asked students to self-assess their English language skills using a 10-point scale. For example, learners were asked about their confidence in using English or how well they are able to communicate in English. Those responses were used to measure change over time.

A total of 105 learners completed the pre assessment and 64 completed the post assessment. Although there were some limitations in administering the pre/post assessment, this testing gave some insights into the world in which participants are practicing their English skills and a rough measure of the areas of change that they experienced over time. Additionally, the pilot enabled us to review the pros and cons of designing and offering an assessment to be used in future classes.

Sites

The WANY program is offered in a variety of settings, including community- and faith-based organizations, public schools, and across the City's three public library systems (New York, Queens, and Brooklyn). As part of the evaluation, a total of nine sites in four boroughs were visited throughout New York City. Data were gathered beginning in April 2017 until December 2017, from the spring, summer, and fall WANY sessions. The sites visited included four community-based organizations (CBOs), one Pathways to Graduation site, two public libraries, one adult learning center, and one universal pre-kindergarten. Each site had a unique makeup of learners, facilitators, availability of classes, and involvement in the community.

The style and frequency in which WANY was offered differed across locations. Some sites offered WANY as a morning or evening class and offered the curriculum in a series of 10 sessions. Other community partners offered the program as one of a series of ESOL classes. Other sites, for example the New York Public Library, offered ongoing WANY sessions as a twice-weekly drop-in class. The English proficiency level varied by site, with the Library and State University of New York (SUNY) sites having more learners at the intermediate level; at other sites a greater proportion were at the beginner level. WANY classes were held in a variety of spaces, including children's classrooms, empty rooms with chairs in a circle, and computer rooms with laptops and SMART Boards.

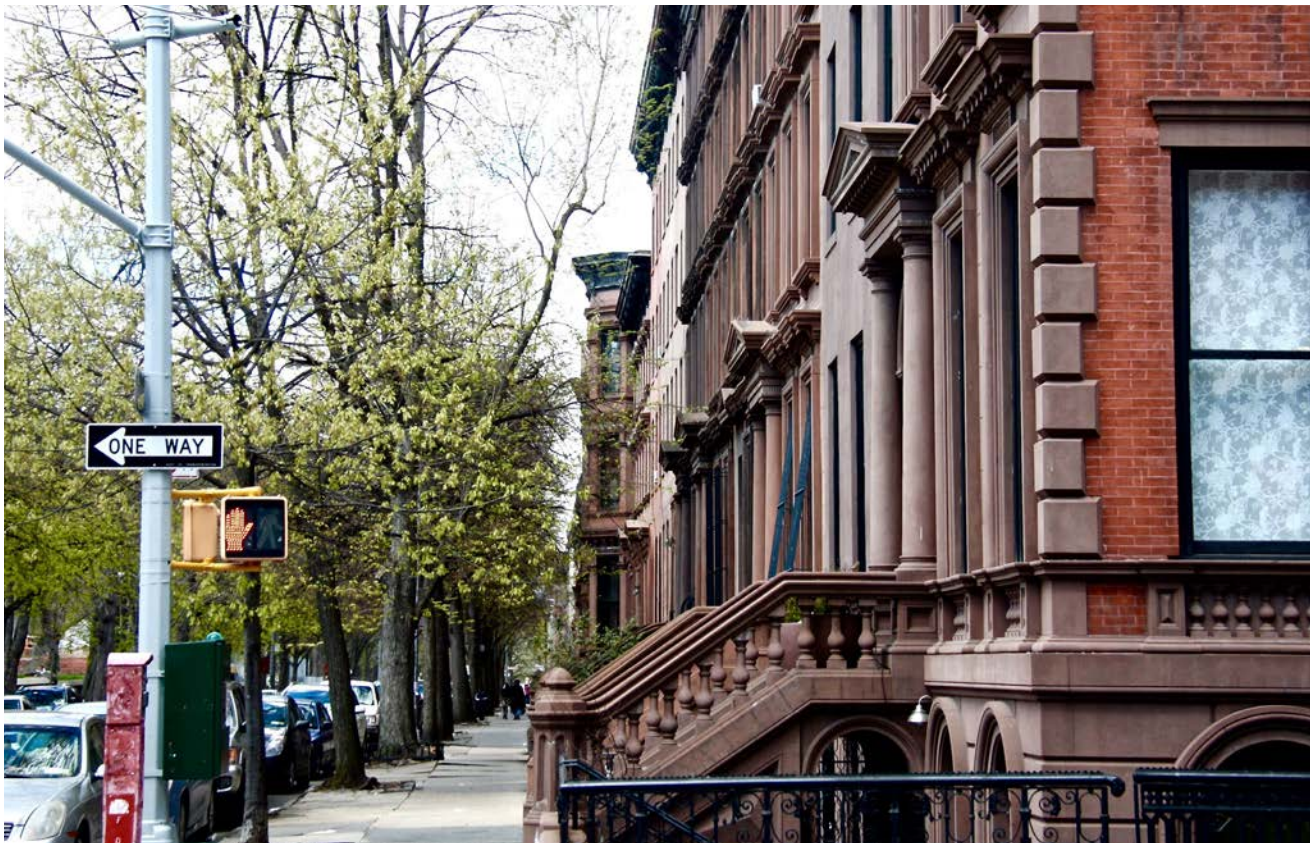
The ethnic backgrounds of learners varied by location. Learners at a CBO in Brooklyn were all Spanish speakers from different countries throughout Latin America, while a CBO in Manhattan had learners from Albania, Columbia, Ecuador, Iran, Italy, Mexico, Thailand, and Venezuela who did not share a common language. During interviews, learners often expressed how much they enjoyed attending class with learners from different backgrounds because they were able to learn about different cultures and meet new people.

Sites participating in program evaluation

- **Hope Gardens Community Center,** Brooklyn
- **Mercy Center,** Bronx
- **Hartley House,** Manhattan
- **Queens Public Library, Jeanne Elmezzi Adult Learning Center,** Queens
- **St. Agnes New York Public Library,** Manhattan
- **Jamaica Learning Center, Pathways to Graduation,** Queens
- **SUNY Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center**
- **East Harlem Bilingual Head Start, Universal Pre-Kindergarten,** Manhattan
- **Woodside on the Move,** Queens

At many of the sites, learners seemed very familiar with the organizations that held WANY classes and were attending multiple classes or had attended a class there previously. Sites generally offered other classes in addition to WANY and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), including computer, family skills, various exercise, and citizenship classes. Some sites seemed to have strong community ties, and learners were very familiar with the range of services they offered. At these sites, staff often greeted learners by name and engaged in small talk when they arrived for class.

Facilitators at each site had varying levels of experience with WANY, teaching, and ESOL. Some facilitators were entirely new to WANY, and others had taught multiple sessions. Facilitators at a library site had previous training and experience teaching ESOL classes, which was reflected in the different types of activities and techniques they used in the classroom. Other facilitators were financial analysts or retirees with no teaching experience but with an interest in working with the immigrant community in New York. Facilitators had different styles of classroom management. Some preferred more structured classrooms and required students to raise their hand to participate, while others opted for a more relaxed style and encouraged open conversations. At the Pathways to Graduation site, the Department of Education teacher led the class and the WANY facilitator assisted.



MS

MAHMOUD AND SIMIN:

“The more English we understand, the more we like living in New York City”

Mahmoud and Simin are an Iranian couple in their 60s who just moved with their son to New York City a year ago. They have been in the U.S. for five years, previously living in Chicago and Dallas. Their son moved to the U.S. for college and stayed. He is the only relative they have in this country. Mahmoud and Simin live in midtown Manhattan and like their neighborhood. They particularly enjoy the diversity of cultures, especially the availability of a wide variety of foods from Korea, Vietnam, and France.

When attending high school in Iran, Mahmoud and Simin studied English a little. When they first moved to Chicago they took third- and fourth-level English classes at a local college, but they didn't improve their language skills because they didn't speak English outside of class. Although they speak Farsi at home, they speak English when they go shopping or are working. Mahmoud has worked for 10 months at a pharmacy stocking shelves on the night shift, and enjoys interacting with customers and his co-workers. WANY classes have really helped him with his job and to feel more comfortable speaking with customers and the manager.

“The subjects are all very good; we learn words to help with going to the hospital or shopping.”

Mahmoud and Simin learned about WANY classes through other programs and services offered at the center they go to for their classes. For example, they took a citizenship class at the site, as well as a ceramics class, and regularly attend Bingo there as well. They love coming to the WANY class because “everyone is so nice,” and the facilitator “makes everyone feel safe to talk.” The couple also remark that “the videos are easy to understand and after the videos you get to practice the new words, which is helpful.” Their favorite episodes are “Love and Money,” “Stay in School,” and “No Smoking.”

Learning English has made them more comfortable going to the store or bank, talking with their neighbors, and even making friends with Spanish speakers at Bingo games. “We use our IDNYC to do free things, like movies at MoMA.” In the summer of 2017, Mahmoud and Simin took part in a citizenship ceremony, noting, “We are so happy to be U.S. citizens. America is the best country. There is so much freedom ... especially freedom for women.” Mahmoud and Simin confirm that the more English they understand the more they enjoy living in New York because they can talk to more people: “People in New York City are so nice, we love living here.”

Participants



This section describes the background and perspectives of two types of participants: learners and facilitators.

Learners

Data were gathered from learners from 31 countries. Learners from participating sites reported that improving English conversation skills was their main motivation for participating in WANY, and an overwhelming majority believed that WANY materials and content were beneficial to their endeavor.

Content applicability and a comfortable learning environment were the main reasons that learners identified WANY as successful and why they remained in the program. Interviews found that many learners commonly felt too intimidated to practice English outside of WANY classes. They reported speaking their native language in their homes because of cultural norms, and otherwise were likely to work in settings with other people who also spoke their native language. As a result, WANY classes were often the only places they felt comfortable and safe enough to practice and learn English that was beneficial to them as immigrants in New York City as they develop their English skills.

Learners described that their motivations for joining WANY were predominantly to take a class where they could practice English, to socialize or meet new people, and to learn at their own pace.



Where do WANY learners in our study come from?

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Algeria
- Argentina
- Bangladesh
- Brazil
- Burkina Faso
- Chile
- China
- Colombia
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Guinea
- Haiti
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Italy
- Korea
- Japan
- Kazakhstan
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Peru
- Puerto Rico
- Togo
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- Venezuela
- Yemen



Learners valued the WANY class as it fostered a comfortable learning environment that helped them feel more confident when practicing speaking English. Some learners reported that they felt pressured by the increasingly tense political environment to learn English, and some expressed different levels of vulnerabilities resulting from being unable to use English to protect their job security, make independent health decisions, or speak up on behalf of their families' interests. In interviews, several subjects described how intimidating it can be to try to speak English with non-immigrants, and how they often felt others thought they were less intelligent because of their English proficiency. WANY provides a space for learners to practice, build confidence, and reassure them of their civic rights and that they do belong.

Learners reported that the structure of their WANY classes was effective and beneficial to their learning. Regardless of learners' English proficiency, subjects in interviews and focus groups demonstrated enthusiasm for WANY episodes and study guides. All learners expressed that the WANY class structure and the emphasis on conversation helped them feel comfortable and overcome shyness and discomfort when speaking English in the classroom. Learners in focus groups often expressed frustration with prior English classes that they felt did not teach them relevant content; WANY taught them phrases that were applicable to their everyday lives. They described areas where English is most critical as they live and work in New York:

- Learning interview skills and employment rights
- Finding social services and support for parents of children with disabilities
- Pursuing further education as an adult in New York City
- Finding reliable legal services
- Learning about nutrition for different ages

Many learners preferred receiving physical copies of content because they could work on activities at their own pace or share the content with family members. In discussing how the program could better serve them, learners often reported wanting more than one class per week, needing a lower or higher level of English, and desiring morning and evening classes. Learners indicated that they became aware of WANY in a variety of ways. Some learners reported they discovered WANY classes from a flier, while others discovered the program by word-of-mouth or at the suggestion of someone who had previously participated. Another method of discovering WANY was from site coordinators who promoted the program.

Facilitators

Facilitators are from diverse backgrounds, including students pursuing an undergraduate degree and professionals established in nonprofit management, finance, and education. Most facilitators have from one to five years of volunteering experience in adult education and decided to volunteer for WANY because it aligned with their experience and interests. The majority of the facilitators interviewed were women (10 of 14), as were the majority of learners surveyed. Additionally, three site coordinators were interviewed who had insight into both facilitation and program coordination for WANY. The following findings are other common background characteristics of WANY facilitators.

Who are WANY facilitators?

- Former volunteers
- Interested in supporting immigrants
- Many have experience teaching ESOL

"I feel that language education is another means of empowering people. Giving them this information really can change their life. I found WANY to be very empowering and it's fantastic that we have this program in New York." – Facilitator

- **Nearly all WANY facilitators had previous experience volunteering.** Most facilitators had already volunteered, taught, or tutored with an ESOL program, and one had a previous career in nonprofit work aimed at assisting migrant populations. Among facilitators interviewed, over half had at least one year of ESOL volunteer teaching experience prior to their first term facilitating, and one-fifth were certified ESOL teachers.
- **Half of WANY facilitators had obtained a bachelor's degree.** Among facilitators interviewed, half had graduated from college while the other half were working on their bachelor's degree. One-fifth were working on their master's degree.
- **WANY facilitators had varied facilitation experience.** Over one-third of those interviewed reported that volunteering with WANY was their first time facilitating a class of students. Regardless of previous volunteer or teaching experiences, many first-time WANY volunteers reported already asking for, or feeling that they could benefit from, additional support from MOIA.

TRAINING

Volunteer facilitators are required to participate in two three-hour mandatory trainings offered by MOIA. The first training must be completed prior to being assigned to a site, and the second takes place about halfway through the facilitator's WANY class. The initial training introduces volunteers to the WANY program and pedagogy, and provides a brief overview of the student population and introductory exercises in the curriculum. A follow-up training is intended to review the goals of WANY, discuss facilitation techniques, and answer facilitators' questions. Volunteer facilitators guide learners through the process of watching and discussing the video



Objectives of WANY volunteer facilitator training

Initial training

- Overview of WANY pedagogy
- Work with immigrant populations
- Review of “Introductions” exercise
- Role-play practice

Follow-up training

- Review goals of conversation groups
- Discuss facilitation strategies, challenges and strengths, questions
- WANY aims to help participants use English and “ENTER” the doors to achieve their personal goals:
 - E – Encourage, encourage, encourage
 - N – No wrong answers
 - T – Take your time
 - E – Everyone participates
 - R – Rehearsal for real life

stories, reinforcing the vocabulary used in the episode, discussing the challenges presented, and learning about solutions in the community.

MOIA maintains quality assurance through weekly facilitator check-in calls, bi-weekly site check-ins, use of two facilitators per classroom wherever possible, and observation of 30 percent of WANY classes in each cycle.



FACILITATOR MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

Facilitators had a variety of reasons for volunteering with WANY. All of those interviewed reported the desire to support immigrant populations in New York City. Some noted that they volunteered as a facilitator for WANY because it allowed them to teach English without an ESOL license, which requires a fee and a time commitment to obtain. Some motivations expressed by WANY facilitators include familiarity with the immigrant experience as a first-generation immigrant or as a second-generation American and a desire to apply that familiarity to assist immigrants. Other motivations mentioned were recommendations from a friend or previous WANY facilitator based on their interest in working with immigrant populations, outreach from a CBO, and a general desire to be more active in their local community.

Based on interview responses, facilitators largely believed that the civic focus to adult language education that WANY offers is instrumental to empowering New York City immigrants. Facilitators noted that the WANY curriculum focuses on life skills that immigrants need in New York. Almost all of the facilitators and learners indicated that the topics featured in the episodes, especially on health care, nutrition, and education, were relevant to the immigrant experience and informative. Nearly all facilitators reported that WANY enhanced learners' confidence at all English levels.

"WANY classes are life skills-focused, with a strong focus on communicative activities. [Other programs] want them to get reading and writing. As much as I would love for them all to go to college and get their high school equivalency, the majority just want to be able to communicate with their kids' teachers and go to the doctor, do a job interview. ... WANY integrates really well into it."



Y

YASMIN: Using “No Smoking” to help family members

Yasmin had arrived in the U.S. six months earlier from Egypt. She lives with her son who attends Queens College, as well as with her twin sister and family who have been in New York for 10 years. Yasmin’s husband is an engineer who remained in Egypt. Initially Yasmin’s time in New York City was difficult and she wanted to return to Egypt: “When you’re younger it’s easier to live somewhere new and to be comfortable. But when you’re older it’s harder to change your life. For my son, it’s easier for him.” She wasn’t used to snow and ice, and the icy streets stopped her from going out from her apartment to go shopping: “I was always worried I was going to fall.”

Yasmin shares that she eventually learned to like living in the city: “It’s really good. They let us study English and computers for free, and transportation is not expensive.” Yasmin isn’t working in New York now, although she had worked in Egypt in business administration as a secretary, doing computer work and filing. She is currently sending out her résumé, and her sister has directed her to employers who need Arabic speakers. She hopes to get a job as a teacher’s aide for special education students.

Sometimes Yasmin speaks English with neighbors on the phone. “In stores and in the pharmacy I have to speak English.” She learned about WANY from her sister, who saw the fliers for the free classes and gave Yasmin the address. She feels very comfortable in class. She has studied English in Egypt, but it was British English, and she finds learning American English easier. She remembers some English words she previously learned. She likes that she can sit with others in the class and “we can help each other.”

Yasmin thinks that the WANY class she attends is good, but she prefers to look at the day’s lesson with a dictionary before class. “I went to the library and got an English-Arabic dictionary to help me with the difficult words.” Her favorite video was “Stop Smoking.” Through that episode she learned about being healthy and that smoking can be dangerous. She has passed along to cousins how you can call 311 for assistance and other ways to stop the smoking habit. Yasmin studies English at least four times a week, and her sister remarked, “Why are you working so hard, are you taking an exam?” Because Yasmin is still looking for work, and is not as active as she was in Egypt, she enjoys keeping busy by studying and attending classes.

Instructional Quality

The evaluation sought to assess the factors in the program that contributed to the instructional quality of WANY. Several classroom observations conducted at each site, as well as learner and facilitator interviews, illuminated the range of elements that led to successful classes that fostered a comfortable learning environment and encouraged students to practice English. Facilitators had two opportunities for training in how to facilitate WANY sessions: 1) mandatory pre-service instruction to orient them to the WANY model, activities, lesson plans, and resources to support learning, and 2) follow-up training to strengthen facilitation skills. The observations and interviews revealed the ways that facilitators used these trainings, additional activities that some facilitators introduced, and areas where they would like additional support in facilitation skills and materials.



Implementation of WANY Activities and Materials

Nearly all of the facilitators structured their WANY classes using classroom approaches learned from initial WANY facilitator trainings. The training and wealth of WANY materials were overwhelmingly reported as strengths to both the facilitation experience and learners' educational progress. Facilitators reported relying heavily on the materials given to them during their initial training to guide their own teaching styles. This structuring, based on their trainings and materials, resulted in a uniformity in WANY class structures across observed sites, with only a few facilitators adding their own activities or content.

Most learners and facilitators reported that WANY episodes were accessible, helpful, and relevant to everyday life for an immigrant in New York. The 10 **Season One** episodes are:

- The Storm
- Welcome Parents
- Stay in School
- Love and Money
- New Life Café
- Asthma: The Soap Opera
- No Smoking
- The Wedding
- Stop Domestic Violence
- The Hospital

In addition to English conversation practice, facilitators noted that the WANY curriculum featured topics that helped participants better engage with their life in New York. Almost all of the facilitators and learners indicated that topics featured in episodes, especially on health care, nutrition and education, were both relevant to the immigrant experience and informative.

The two-hour sessions featured many activities that built upon the topic of the week. Both learners and facilitators offered opinions about how these program elements enriched their learning. This feedback is summarized in the table below.

WANY activity	Strengths and benefits identified by learners and facilitators
Introduction and episode-related conversation practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions, often used as ice-breakers, were frequently reported as influential in making learners feel more comfortable in class. • Over two-thirds of learners identified conversation practice as one of the most helpful WANY activities.
WANY episodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners reported that the pace of the videos helped expand their overall English comprehension and vocabulary and refine their pronunciation and speaking ability. • Facilitators identified the videos as promoting civic rights and City services but that additional explanation was needed to better engage with the beginner-level learners. • Participants overwhelmingly indicated that the video topics provided relevant, useful information to their everyday lives in New York.
Important Words and Phrases vocabulary lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both facilitators and learners reported that the lists of “Important Words and Phrases” helped them expand vocabulary and pronunciation. • Some learners commented that the listed words helped them learn how to ask for help for services in locations such as a hospital or a bank.
WANY episode-related picture activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners reported that the picture activity for each episode helped with their pronunciation, enabled them to feel more comfortable switching between English and their native language, and encouraged them to communicate ideas and opinions with people they otherwise might not be exposed to. • Both facilitators and learners felt that the picture activity enabled learners to build spoken and written sentences in English.
WANY episode-related study guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants indicated that WANY study guides (workbooks) provided a set of additional activities that were motivating and engaging when used both in and out of the classroom. • Learners reported that translations of important words to their native languages facilitated their learning. • Facilitators noted that the workbooks helped them manage their class by providing them with a framework of activities that they could use and tailor to fit their style of classroom facilitation. • Both facilitators and learners observed that they enjoyed the variety of activities in the study guide and would like more study guides and activities. • Learners enjoyed taking the workbook home and reading it on their own and sharing it with family and friends. • Facilitators believed study guides helped keep learners engaged during the week until the next WANY class.

Classroom Activities

A critical aspect of the WANY program is to provide an opportunity for learners to confidently practice and expand their English speaking skills. WANY facilitators utilized a combination of small and large group activities to engage learners and to improve learning outcomes. Learners' preferences on small or large group activities differed, but most appreciated the variety. Facilitators and learners noted different benefits and preferences.

Small Group	Large Group
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less intimidating to beginner-level learners• Allows for more intimate learning setting and conversation practice <p>Learner preference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learners felt it was easier to engage with the facilitator if the class had many students	<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generates more ideas and opinions in English• Easier for facilitators to maintain focus and motivation on learners, especially if the class is made up of beginners <p>Learner preference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learners could hear more spoken English and learn more about others in their class

Some facilitators added their own ideas to their classes. Most report that they tailored topics to learners' backgrounds. They modified the WANY vocabulary to be consistent with their learners' cultural backgrounds and to maintain content relevance and learners' engagement. For example, facilitators with older learners reported emphasizing vocabulary on health care and civic engagement, while those with younger students noted those learners were more interested in topics related to education, employment, and banking. Providing examples of content that is appropriate to certain learner demographics in facilitator trainings may assist sites with learner retention and engagement. One facilitator was observed separating learners in a larger WANY class by color-coded groups with nametags on a weekly basis. This allowed learners to engage with different groups and to overcome their fear of speaking. Facilitators with previous experience with ESOL or teaching backgrounds developed their own activities to supplement the WANY curriculum. For example, one volunteer collected menus from local restaurants to use in role playing, where the facilitator is the waiter and the learners are the patrons who practice ordering different foods from the menus.

WANY group activity: Mingle

"Mingle" is an activity learners play during the introductions as a transition to WANY materials. Every time facilitators say "mingle," learners are instructed to get up from their seat and speak to another classmate for a few minutes. After a few rounds of mingling, the learners return to their original seats and introduce one of the people they mingled with, as well as what they discussed. Learners noted that this activity was very helpful because introducing someone else helped improve their understanding of spoken English.

Classroom Environment

Facilitators and learners described that creating an encouraging and nonjudgmental atmosphere between learners and facilitators was important to enabling learners' confidence. Students were often observed encouraging one another to try to answer questions in English, and facilitators used positive reinforcement to try to engage lower-level English learners. Most learners reported that they often practiced WANY vocabulary in their homes, but otherwise mainly spoke their own native languages in their homes and communities. The following factors helped create a supportive learning environment.



- **Small class size.** Learners reported smaller class sizes and small group activities gave everyone an opportunity to practice.
- **Established classroom ground rules.** Facilitators implemented ground rules in the classroom, including restricting the use of phones or side conversations in the classroom so that learners were focused on the class and engaged with their peers.
- **Encouraging learners to use English in the classroom.** Encouraging learners to use English whenever possible was seen as especially useful when managing classes with a lower range of intermediate-level learners.

- **Learner opportunities to write down and share questions with the class.**

Many facilitators encouraged learners to write down words or phrases that they might not have understood from the WANY episodes. More experienced ESOL facilitators were more likely to use this approach to differentiate activities for varied levels of English in the same class.

- **Incorporation of the WANY study guide as part of the class structure.** Most learners positively responded to using the study guide throughout the class to help them practice and learn English. Many learners reported that they preferred taking hard copies of study guides home with them to do the reading and writing exercises as homework, as it allowed them to continue practicing beyond the classroom.

- **Classroom setting.** Classroom facilities, such as the availability of desks and round tables, affected whether classes implemented small or large group activities. Most WANY classes were conducted in auditoriums, formal classrooms, and spare offices in community centers. Nearly all of the observed sites had facilities with a whiteboard, a television or projector, speakers, writing supplies for all learners, and WANY materials provided to them by MOIA. Observers found that most WANY classes were well-stocked with necessary classroom instructional tools. However, in some locations facilitators struggled to secure enough tables or seats, or to consistently maintain their space's availability at the initially promoted classroom times.



A

ANDRÉS:

“You have to learn the language.
New York has opportunity for all of us”

Andrés is from Ecuador and has been living in New York for three months. He had previously visited New York, and after finishing his tourism degree in Ecuador decided to use his green card to “do more for my career.” He lives with a cousin on Staten Island, but misses the rest of his family in Ecuador. He gets to practice English with his cousin’s family, who were born here. He has an interim job with a company that fixes air conditioners. He feels comfortable in New York but emphasizes, “You have to learn the language. It’s very important.” He explains, “I understand a lot and communicate some, but there are specific words for work I don’t know and I think it’s a problem sometimes.” Andrés remains optimistic, however, stating, “New York has opportunity for all of us.” He finds that New Yorkers are helpful.

Andrés learned about WANY classes through the wife of a friend of his stepbrother. He attends English classes every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and focuses particularly on grammar and reading. He says learning English is “easy, but a little bit hard also.” He finds WANY classes easy because there are a lot of opportunities to practice with English speakers. However, they also are hard because his vocabulary is limited: “Some people don’t speak Spanish, so I have to speak English to them.” When asked about possible improvements in WANY classes, Andrés thinks that the class should be divided by English-speaking ability. He thinks taking WANY classes is very important, but he also feels they are too basic for his needs: “Not everyone speaks at the same level. The class should be divided into groups where higher level speakers are together and lower level speakers are together.” He also suggests more attention to pronunciation via interactive techniques: “I think we need more interactive activities, and more correction of my pronunciation. If the other students can’t pronounce words either, it makes it hard to learn.” Nevertheless, “the class is helping me a lot because there is no other way to learn English than to practice.” Andrés plans to continue to study English and learn more so he can obtain his master’s degree. He also wants to get his citizenship, another reason to continue to study English.

Andrés did not know that interpretation services were available in hospitals, but after he saw “The Hospital” video, “I went to the hospital with my Dad. I didn’t know what to do but then in this class we learned about how you can go to the hospital and ask for an interpreter.”

Learner Outcomes

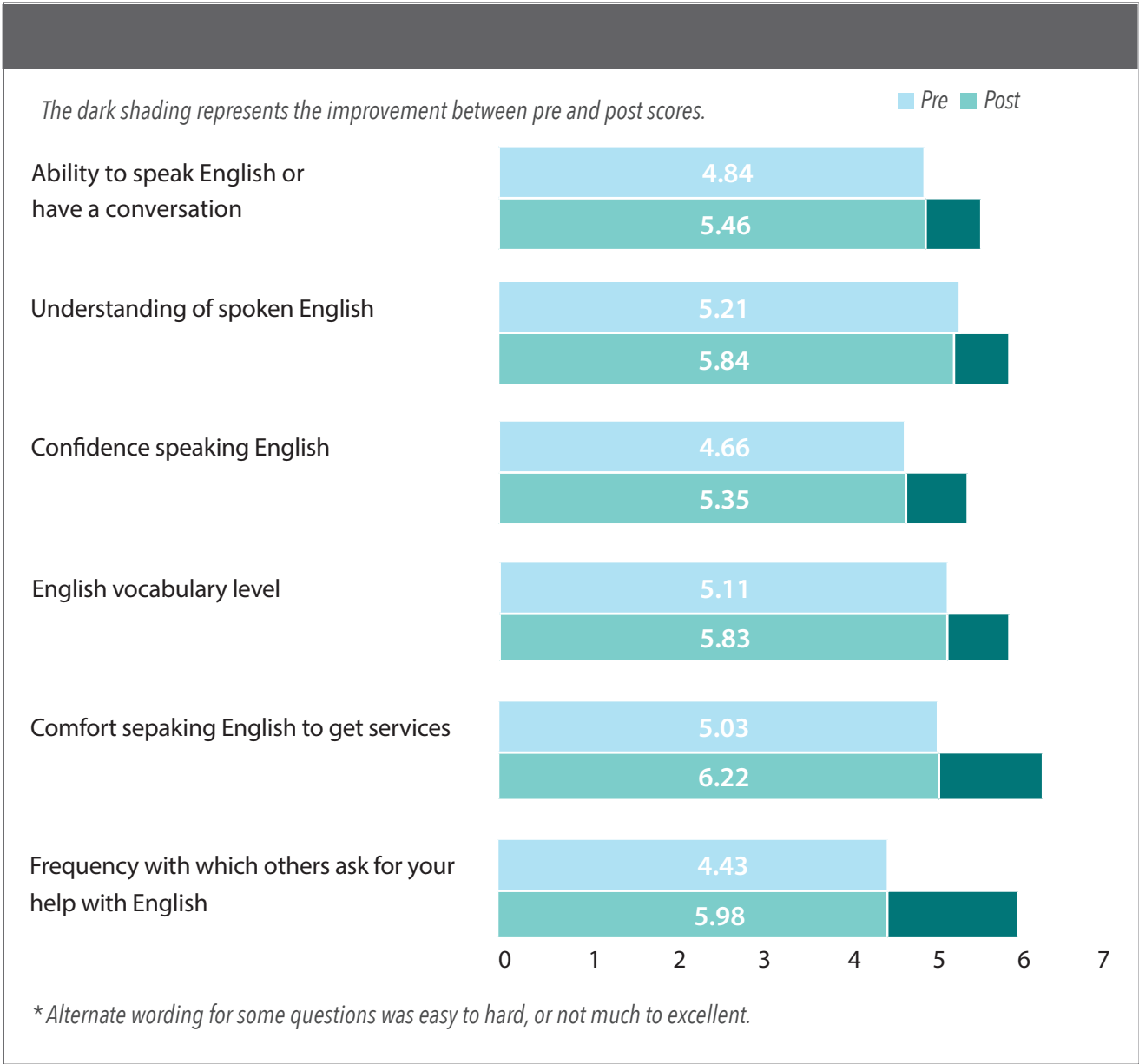


The evaluation gathered information on how learners progressed as they participated in the WANY program. Learners were assessed on their acquisition of English language vocabulary, confidence using English, use of English in their communities, and increased awareness of and use of City services.

Improvements in English

The WANY curriculum focuses on learning everyday vocabulary, understanding spoken English, increasing one's confidence with speaking English, and using English to get necessary services or to help others. A pre/post instrument was developed using the content and objectives of the WANY program to assess how learners grew over time and the extent that they improved in these critical areas. One section of the instrument included a self-assessment which allowed a comparison of one's own rating of skill levels in the use of English from the start of the class with the end of the class. Other sections collected information on learners' familiarity with English vocabulary in terms of knowing what a word means and being able to select the correct word for sentence completion. The piloting of this instrument provided some quantitative data on learner outcomes after the 10-week class and a basis for recommending what measures facilitators might use in the future to assess learners' starting points and gains made during the course of the WANY class (as discussed in the "Recommendations" section).





Health _____
helps you pay health care.

- a. Doctor
- b. Directions
- c. Insurance
- d. Time

Correct response:

Pre - 73% Post - 87%

Net gain -14 percentage points

In identifying words that they know in the pre/post assessment, the vast majority of students (85 percent) indicated that at the start of the class they knew only six of the 15 words covered in the series and 11 words at the end of the series. Learners became more familiar with vocabulary from the WANY episodes. Learners were less familiar with words that describe concepts that may be discussed more openly in the U.S., such as “domestic violence” and “abuse,” or that are more closely tied to the New York City school system, such as “guidance counselor.” Learners were more familiar with basic words of everyday living that may be considered more universal.

Learners were asked to participate in a sentence-completion activity at the beginning and the end of the 10 sessions of WANY. Learners increased their ability to use the correct word in the sentence on all seven items in the assessment. Below is an example of a sentence-completion activity for which the percentage of students selecting the correct response increased by 14 percentage points.

“There have been times that my husband has needed me to go with him to the doctor. He has relied on me for basic interpretation and support. I’ve shared new phrases with my husband. When we have materials to take home, I show them to him.”

Increases in Learner Confidence

In interviews and focus groups, the evaluators heard examples of increased confidence. The majority of interviewees indicated that they are more confident speaking English since participating in WANY classes, which provided opportunities to engage in regular conversation practice. Many learners said having the opportunity to speak English with people who speak slowly reduced their anxiety and nervousness and created a comfortable environment for them to practice. Learners described situations in their daily lives in which they felt more comfortable speaking English, including going to the store, the doctor’s office, the bank, or their child’s school.

The stories that learners related illustrate that providing the environment in which to practice English and learn new words in their WANY class improves their confidence in speaking English outside of the classroom.

“It’s helped me lose the fear of speaking English and mispronunciation. Now I know how to ask basic questions such as ‘How are you? Are you lost?’ And to speak in basic English to different people and understand when people are talking.”

Perceptions and Use of City Services

The evaluation sought to understand how learners applied the WANY curriculum to their understanding and use of essential City services. Learners reported that City services that have no translation services available, such as transportation, were easier to use as their confidence in speaking English improved. While learners had varying levels of experience with and use of City services, all learners were familiar with at least one City service and expressed that WANY introduced them to new City resources they otherwise might not have found.

Several City services that they rely on were identified as ones where they feel they have increased access now that their English is improved.

Words commonly known (by more than 88% of learners)

- Nurse
- Smoking
- Medicine
- Graduate
- Emergency

Words less commonly known (by fewer than 66% of learners)

- Abuse
- Domestic violence
- Waiter
- Fee

"I love the library, it's wonderful. I don't have a library card but want to get one and take other classes at the library like a computer class."

"When I watched this video, [Stay in School] I saw myself in the video. Sometimes when I come to school I don't understand anything and want to stop going, but you have to stay in school and keep going."

- **Transportation.** The majority of learners stated that the City service they feel most confident using is public transportation as many learners use it on a daily basis.
- **Public libraries.** Many learners also reported they were confident accessing services at the library. Learners identified the library as very easy to use and people at the library as very kind and helpful. Some learners said their children go to the library to get help with schoolwork and they accompany them. Learners use the library to gain an understanding of the City and to acquire a variety of new skills. There are books to read, maps of the public transportation system, and a range of classes available for adults, such as knitting, painting, and computer classes.
- **Health care.** While many learners reported accessing health care, they noted that navigating health care services can be challenging without the presence of translation services. One learner recalled a time she had gone to a doctor in a lot of pain, but wound up leaving and going to the emergency room because no staff spoke her language and she was unable to communicate what was bothering her to the doctor.

In interviews, learners often discussed what they learned about services by linking the information to a specific WANY video. Learners frequently referred to a situation in an episode, specified the name of a character, and explained why that particular situation was useful or what information was important to them. Depending on age, gender, and time spent in New York City, different learners found different topics more useful than others. When discussing WANY episodes, learners often mentioned that they enjoyed the videos because the actors are immigrants who look and speak like them — they speak slowly and are easy to understand.

For the majority of learners, the City service they discussed most in their WANY classes was 311. Many mentioned that they had never actually used 311, but were aware that they can use it to get help with “almost anything.” Learners shared examples of when they used 311, including to make an appointment for the City’s municipal ID Card, IDNYC, or when a family member used it to get help with accessing health insurance.

A number of WANY episodes stood out to the interview subjects as meaningful to their lives and providing them with new information about City services and navigating around New York. Learners’ responses to questions about City services highlight that WANY’s focus on common, day-to-day services that are essential to life in New York is relatable to most learners.

NYC 311 provides the public with easy access to all New York City government services and information. Translation to over 175 languages is available to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Utility of WANY Episodes

- Learners with children found the **“Welcome Parents”** episode to be useful. They learned new vocabulary words and phrases to help them at school functions such as parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, the WANY content taught learners that, as parents or caregivers, they have the right to request an interpreter when communicating with their child’s school.
- **“The Hospital”** was another episode frequently mentioned by learners. Many learners said that prior to this WANY episode, they were unsure about their ability to access health care, especially if they were undocumented. Language barriers often existed for learners and many expressed needing a translator when seeing a doctor. After viewing this episode, they learned that they have the right to request an interpreter and would now feel more comfortable seeking medical care.
- Other learners discussed how **“Love and Money”** taught them that banks are safe to use and how money in banks is protected by an independent agency of the federal government.
- **“The Wedding”** helped learners understand the differences among the five boroughs and how important that understanding is when asking for directions in New York City.

When discussing the importance of learning about essential City services, learners would often suggest the addition of topics that were not a part of the current WANY curriculum, including the following:

- Professional development, employment assistance, and interviewing skills
- Workers’ and migrants’ rights
- Guidance for interacting with police
- How to access legal help, social workers, and other social services
- Health insurance options in New York City, information about paying for health care, and how to schedule doctor’s appointments
- Housing assistance programs
- Services for children with special needs

Use of English in Their Communities

Information collected in interviews and focus groups with learners highlights that participating in WANY generally improves learners’ confidence speaking English in their communities by providing them with a space to practice English with other English language learners. They carry back this experience to their home

communities. Their increased ease in speaking English enables them to spread their language facility to their home community.

- **Sharing information with communities that speak the learner's native language.** While many learners reported living in communities that predominately speak their native language, they expressed that they are able to use more English in their communities after participating in WANY. Learners also shared that they frequently tell family and friends how to access WANY classes. This helps explain why many learners said they learned about WANY from a friend or family member who had previously taken the class.

Some learners said that when they go home, they share that week's WANY episode and related online activities with family members who are too busy to take an English class.

- **Practicing English language skills.** Some learners shared that improving their English is particularly important because they often serve as translators for family and friends. They are frequently asked to assist others in accomplishing tasks such as calling a landlord, speaking with someone at the pharmacy, or translating at the doctor's office. One learner talked about how her friends frequently come over to her apartment so she can make phone calls for them or ask her to go to a store with her so she can help them return an item.

Learners from diverse communities where many different languages are spoken described feeling comfortable communicating in English with neighbors after having taken a WANY class, whereas before they were more timid.



G

GABRIEL:

Improving English skills to increase employment opportunities

Gabriel is in his late 50s and came to the U.S. from Peru about nine years ago after he and his family won a lottery at the U.S. embassy in Peru to emigrate. Gabriel, his wife, and two boys in their early teens came to the U.S. "looking for a better future." In Peru, Gabriel had worked as an IT specialist and had the opportunity to learn basic English as part of his job. Although he had an excellent job in Peru, he felt the economy was "not strong" and that his job was not secure. Gabriel moved to New York City alone at first. Once he secured housing, his wife and sons followed. Gabriel found it most difficult to adjust to the weather, the pace of the city, and the unfamiliar foods. Gabriel and his family experienced a profound loss two years after moving to the U.S. when a fire claimed the life of his older son. Gabriel works in construction now, where work is variable. Previously, many construction workers spoke only Spanish, and several jobs have not required him to speak English. Now, he and his fellow workers are engaging more and more with English speakers as part of their work.

Gabriel and his wife both attend WANY classes. His wife learned about WANY classes from a staff member at the unemployment office after she lost her job. Gabriel feels very comfortable in WANY courses and notes that his English skills are steadily advancing. He takes other classes at the program site to assist with vocabulary and comprehension. WANY has helped Gabriel and his wife with their pronunciation and comprehension. They used to be too intimidated to start conversations in English, but now feel more comfortable expressing themselves at least at a basic level in English.

"By studying English, I want to understand better. I want to explain myself better and, most of all, find myself in a better place."

Gabriel would like WANY classes to be split into varied English levels for learners of different skill levels; with multiple levels, learners could graduate into higher levels of WANY classes. For Gabriel and his wife, the best part of WANY classes are the videos. The dialogue helps him better interpret and understand English rather than through his previous experiences of reading text and then completing translations. He points out that use of photographs in WANY classes is very effective and helped him and his wife learn to "think" in English. As a father, he appreciated learning specifically about schooling and parent-teacher conferences and the importance of staying in school. The episode "Stay in School" helped him and his wife increase their confidence and learn how best to express themselves in English with their son's teachers. Gabriel also hopes to be able to use English to get a better job.

Implementation and Scalability

Interviews with facilitators and site coordinators highlighted the ways in which program design and resources supported implementation of classes at diverse sites across the city. Some factors positively affect the capacity to implement the community-based program and others have implications for expanding the program — at least for some community partners. The factors include facilitator experience, training and support, materials, free service to the community, curriculum, and class length.



- **Facilitator commitment.** Trained facilitators with ESOL experience have enhanced the capacity of partner sites when they identify new volunteers who are interested in working with immigrants in their communities. This increase in staffing allows sites to expand their offering of classes. Personal interests and commitment allow organizations to meet the demand for English conversation classes. For example, an engaged and well-liked facilitator at a CBO site in the Bronx was hired for a paid position as an ESOL teacher but also continued to work as a facilitator of WANY classes.
- **Free classes.** Organizations appreciated having the ability to offer a free English class to their communities as the site would incur costs when offering other ESOL classes (e.g., hiring staff, providing and reproducing materials and teaching aids). Providing WANY classes allowed the site to use available funds to support other initiatives for immigrants in their area.
- **WANY materials.** Having access to an online curriculum as well as teaching and learner materials (e.g., workbooks and videos) was a benefit to volunteers and learners, as well as to the sites. Sites could rely on the well-developed curriculum and did not have to supplement with other materials; the study guides and lesson plans allowed volunteer facilitators (and not necessarily professional teachers) to lead the classes. These materials also supported learner recruitment since many students shared their WANY materials with their family and friends and thus indirectly increased awareness of the availability of the program.

As the WANY program expands and transitions to its new brand, We Speak NYC, the program will seek to reach more individuals and community partners that serve immigrants in the City. Participants discussed technical and administrative factors that can impact the scalability of the WANY program and will need to be taken into account as the program grows. Those factors are outlined on the next page.

- **Improved coordination.** Improved coordination of sites offering WANY classes can support expansion of the program. The number of facilitators varied by site. In some instances, sites expected to have two facilitators for a class but only had one. Many felt it was critical to ensure the commitment of two facilitators for the duration of the session. As the program seeks to expand to new community partners, it is even more important to have clarity on the time and location of classes. Two sites reported that the class time shifted midway through the sessions. This affected learner retention as students dropped out of the class because it no longer worked with their schedules.
- **Space that accommodates learning.** Continued availability of space that supports small and larger group activities as well as video projection is important for sites. One of the benefits of the program is the flexibility to modify the activities based on the learners in attendance. Having available and flexible space supports this aspect of the program.
- **Facilitator training and skill development.** Site coordinators and facilitators mentioned their interest in and need for follow-up training to support implementation of the program. Suggestions included expanding on the skills that facilitators are being trained on, offering a “booster” on existing techniques, and creating a peer network of WANY facilitators. Offering additional training opportunities can also serve to improve training efficacy, engagement with learners, and additional supports related to working with immigrant populations. Developing the skills of facilitators offers sites an additional resource for the immigrants they serve. The facilitators can further reinforce the community organization’s interest and commitment to the population and help develop trust such that individuals feel comfortable seeking other services as well. Some facilitators noted that trainings should be offered at times that are accessible to facilitators who work other jobs (e.g., after 5 p.m. or on weekends) to increase volunteer participation. Classroom observations indicated that not all facilitators were comfortable managing groups of homogenous classes and struggled to maintain focus or topic relevance for learners. Specifically, classrooms with a predominant ethnic group or native language struggled to ensure that mainly English was spoken in the classroom. Furthermore, some facilitators with predominantly older learners or younger learners in their classes grappled with maintaining relevancy of content for their students.
- **Different levels of WANY classes.** The evaluators found that WANY classes had learners with varying English levels. Although the community-based conversation classes are meant for high-beginner and intermediate learners, some sites opened up the class to learners at varying levels of English proficiency. Training facilitators and guiding sites in assessing a student’s starting level will support the provision of WANY for different English levels — beginner, intermediate, and advanced — and will help sites respond to the differing needs of immigrants in their communities by offering more tailored learning experiences.

A

AKMETZHAN:

"I improve my English. I will work, I will have a good job. This is my dream"

Akmetzhan has been in the U.S. for nearly two years. He lives in Brighton Beach, where "everyone speaks Russian in cafes and supermarkets." He moved there because he thought it was better for him as a native Russian speaker, since his "English was not good." He felt that if he needed advice, he could speak to other Russian speakers in the community. He speaks Russian exclusively when he is at home. Akmetzhan now wants to leave Brighton Beach, and he feels that he needs to improve his English to make the move.

Akmetzhan worked as a butcher in Kazakhstan. He had always dreamed of coming to New York to "build his life and future in this city." He observes that "my country is very different. It was hard for me to stay there." Although he likes living in New York, he has found it hard to live here without his family. He speaks with his family on the phone quite often. He provides home health care in Brooklyn for elderly patients who speak Russian. In his free time, Akmetzhan likes to go into Manhattan and explore. He notes the beautiful places and views in Central Park, and he loves to walk and explore

on Roosevelt Island. With IDNYC, many museums are free; his favorite museum is the Museum of Modern Art.

"Here it's better for my life. I've been improving my English which helps."

"We watch videos about our lives - our lives as immigrants. I know what I can do in different situations like emergencies so the class helps me."

Akmetzhan learned about WANY through friends and practices English with them, but they find it challenging to use more than simple phrases. Akmetzhan also tries to improve his English by watching movies and YouTube videos. He reflects that "sometimes I don't want to speak in English because I think I'm speaking incorrectly. I think about grammar, I think maybe it's wrong so I am afraid to speak English sometimes." After class sessions, he feels better because he listens to his classmates and learns from them. He also reports confidence in his ability to share what he has learned, for example, about attending a free medical clinic: "If I have some problems, I can call 311 for advice; for emergency, I can call 911. Now I know I can go to the hospital and get medicine." Akmetzhan feels welcome in the WANY program, and also feels that New York City is welcoming to immigrants: "There are a lot of programs for immigrants, support from 311. People help you if you need it. If I need help, I can ask for a translator. I think the City thinks about all

Findings



The evaluation findings highlight a number of strengths of the WANY program as well as opportunities to increase the program's success, including the following:

- WANY demonstrates success in offering free English conversation classes to partner sites serving communities with high concentrations of immigrants. WANY has been effectively implemented in a variety of community organizations that serve immigrants due to the flexibility of the program's curriculum and implementation guidelines. WANY classes emphasize English conversation in addition to information about practical New York City services and how to navigate them.
- Both small and large group activities were identified as having benefits to learners depending on the size of the class and the learner's English level. In their training, facilitators practice activities with both small and large groups, and the flexibility of the WANY curriculum promotes a variety of activities that facilitators implement as appropriate. Across sites, facilitators and learners characterized WANY classes as safe environments where learners felt comfortable and were encouraged to practice English. The videos were especially helpful as they reinforced for learners that there is nothing wrong with speaking slowly or with an accent. Overall, learners appreciated the opportunity to practice their English during WANY sessions.
- The program's learners and trained facilitators value the various components in WANY's curriculum. The program's introduction and session-specific vocabulary activities, and 10-session novella episodes were most highly regarded by both learners and facilitators.

- Immigrant learners benefit from WANY's focus on conversation, role plays, and discussions of City services. Following participation in the program, learners reported increased confidence in their English-speaking skills, were empowered to share their skills and knowledge of services with members of their community, and felt more comfortable using English to access New York City services.
- Learners were exposed to a variety of City services while participating in WANY. Most learners reported using services related to 311, public transportation, the library, health care and the school system. Learners also credited the videos with helping increase their awareness of City services and how to access and best use them. Learners appreciated that WANY focuses on services that are practical for immigrants new to New York City.
- Facilitators leveraged their diverse backgrounds and instructional skills to teach English language learners. Facilitators' participation also reinforced their commitment to service and volunteering with underserved and immigrant communities, contributing to their buy-in and endorsement of the WANY program. The program also helped some facilitators develop long-standing relationships with learners and organizations in the community.
- WANY classes could benefit from additional promotion in order to increase program reach, sustain the program at its current sites, and identify new sites for implementation.
- A majority of observed classes had substantially more beginner-level English learners than intermediate-level English learners. Nearly all of the facilitators were unaware of the existence of the WANY teacher's guide for low-level learners. Based on observations and responses during interviews, facilitators would benefit from MOIA providing more lesson plans and resources tailored to beginner-level learners.
- The existing WANY curriculum includes topics that many immigrant New Yorkers face while living in the City, as well as services that can support them in addressing problems. However, given the interest in the program and the reality that many WANY learners are repeat learners, the curriculum could be expanded to address additional areas of interest such as higher education and employment, including job-seeking skills. The learners provided numerous suggestions of additional topics of that they would like to see. The current political climate has affected New York's immigrant communities and created an environment that leaves many individuals who are undocumented feeling uncertain. It would be appropriate to include a relevant topic on immigration issues and resources to provide accurate information regarding the current challenges immigrants face in the United States and how individuals and their communities can navigate these issues.

- Identifying retention strategies would support the sustainability of the WANY program. Some sites experienced significant learner attrition over the course of the 10 sessions. Retention of participants in adult education programs is a common problem given other demands on their time. There may even be more reduced learner commitment to regular attendance at a no-fee program supported by volunteers.
- Volunteers are critical to the success of WANY. While many volunteers have strong backgrounds in teaching, ESOL, or working with immigrant communities, newer facilitators lack some experience that can support their implementation of the program. Having two facilitators for a WANY class is one way to have on-the-job-training by pairing a new, less experienced person with one with a teaching background. Especially as the program is being expanded, ways to strengthen classroom facilitation skills for new facilitators should be addressed. Various forms of additional and focused training are addressed in the following “Recommendations” section. Some facilitators expressed an interest in having more follow-up trainings, and most said they were not included in communications about the current trainings.
- While some facilities had the physical capacity for WANY classes, some facilitators struggled to secure enough tables or seats, or consistently maintain the availability of their spaces at the initially promoted classroom times. Changes in class times were often disruptive and were said to affect retention. This situation was primarily due to facilitators’ reliance on site coordinators to assist with operations-related issues and the absence of a centralized reporting system that learners could also access in order to monitor schedule changes or cancellations.



**F**

FRIDA: Volunteer of the Year

"At my age, or even five years ago, I never thought I would be speaking with politicians in the City. But at my age, I'm doing that! I'm working for the community and helping people. I can help young and old people by speaking in English. WANY has helped because [learning] the vocabulary and grammar has helped me do this."

Frida, a mother and grandmother, is an Ecuadorian in her mid-60s and has been in the U.S. for over 30 years. She moved to New York with friends to obtain a technical degree to study cosmetology. She recalls, "The next day after I arrived, I landed a job in a high-end restaurant" and decided not to return to school. Frida had already studied British English in Ecuador. After marriage and a divorce, she began volunteering at the Sunnyside center, which helped her "maintain my mental well-being" and also engage with the community. Her volunteer work there was varied, and included providing translation services, political organizing, and voter registration. She also took on an advocacy role, engaging with local politicians for the benefit of Sunnyside residents. Frida was named volunteer of the year at Sunnyside, and her volunteer work has been featured in the local news.

"My hope for the future is that I would like to be a leader. A leader is the person who can explain to people what to do, ask what problems they have, and then go to the City or to the mayor, and speak for them. That's my aspiration. I need English to be a leader."

Frida learned about the WANY classes through a flier for free English classes. She credits WANY classes and her opportunities to speak with Sunnyside center staff with increasing her confidence in English speaking and writing as well as her advocacy capabilities. She has learned political phrases and has "refreshed" her political vocabulary, enabling her to write letters and speeches for City and local officials. The topics in the WANY classes that she particularly likes are health and politics, the two areas of great interest in her life. Frida attributes WANY classes to helping her better express her emotions and meaningfully describe her symptoms of pain: "If I go to see my doctor and the doctor is American, I understand better. I can express myself better." What she learned in the "No Smoking" class prompted her to share the smoking cessation and awareness content with her daughter and granddaughter. Frida thinks that there should be more content about politics and migrants. She would like more classes to be offered per week and recommends separate classes for different levels of English skills. Looking to the future, she adds, "I want to continue to learn more English vocabulary to help my community" and eventually to write a children's book in English.

Recommendations



The evaluation was conducted during a time of transition for the WANY program. Some of the recommended changes or enhancements are already underway. The We Speak NYC expansion focuses on accommodating learners at different levels of English, adding new topics in the videos, expanding resources such as high-quality lesson plans, providing online interactivity, and increasing the number of partnering sites. Some recommendations are also contingent on increased funding, which cannot be ensured. Based on our findings from this evaluation, ICF recommends the following:

- **Consider new ways to promote sustainability and scalability.** The Mayor's Office has indicated a strong and long-term commitment to this program and to addressing the needs of English language learners and immigrants in New York. MOIA has engaged higher education institutions, community organizations, and government agencies as partners in the past. These partners are natural stakeholders to promote the expanded We Speak NYC program. Additionally, community partners can encourage sustainability through outreach to their constituencies and dissemination of information and print materials about the classes in their offices. The City services that are promoted in the episodes can also help nurture and scale up the program. One of the services that participants felt was particularly helpful to learn about in the videos was hospital services. Local hospitals and clinics can help scale up the program by providing information on the nature and availability of conversation classes as well as by showing We Speak NYC videos in their waiting areas as a way to support their immigrant patients.

Other employment and social service agencies should be brought on board as well. Facilitators can also help scale up the program by sharing information about the program with peers interested in working with immigrant populations and in communities that might benefit from participating in the program.

- **Strengthen administrative support.** Maintaining strong communications among the facilitators, MOIA, and site coordinators did not always occur. For example, some facilitators reported confusion about class logistics, such as changing schedules and location, and were not clear on how to confirm the correct information. MOIA should consider ways to support regular communications to a network of volunteers and community organizations using online blogs or group chat features that allow for increased communications. This will be especially important if the program grows as envisioned with the second season. Additional staff is likely to be required for bringing new community organizations on board, recruiting and training facilitators, maintaining the interactive website, and being responsive to the questions and demands of an expanded clientele.
- **Conduct ongoing evaluations.** A pre/post student assessment form was piloted as part of this evaluation. A similar brief evaluation form can be offered to sites and facilitators as a way to 1) establish a baseline of participants' language levels as the semester begins and 2) measure satisfaction and language acquisition during the class. These data can be used to help site coordinators assess learner reaction to class experiences to improve or maintain the learners' levels of satisfaction at their site. A facilitator feedback survey can provide input to MOIA on how the program can be improved to better meet the needs of program volunteers. Especially with the development of an interactive website, the possibilities for building in automated tracking of learner behavior will assist MOIA in learning more about the immigrants who are using the We Speak NYC program. The program will be able to track the number of unique users, the number of times they visit/revisit the site, the amount of time spent on each topic, materials downloaded, and the completion rates of any interactive features on the site. In addition, the use of cellphones for learner or facilitator communication and feedback through texts and surveys are other avenues to continue monitoring and evaluating program quality and performance.

- **Expand facilitator trainings.** Offering trainings in a variety of modalities can support sustainability and flexibility for facilitators. Implementing online facilitator trainings through the We Speak NYC sites can support continued facilitator learning. Offering follow-up trainings via conference calls or webinars can also facilitate technical assistance for facilitators. Video footage showing best practices for facilitators would provide a good model, especially for new facilitators. Enabling peer-to-peer learning networks can support learners through development of a community to share ideas about facilitation that aided them the most, as well as challenges to learning. An online learning community or social media page/blog and regular conference calls with MOIA trainers are ways to facilitate communication.
- **Build a facilitator community.** One facilitator suggested developing an online page where facilitators could connect to one another, regularly share concerns on a facilitator forum, and share concrete examples of activities they were using in their classrooms. This suggestion reflects facilitator interest in regular communication and guidance, which could help improve facilitators' capacity, sustain learners' interest, and reduce burden and reliance on site coordinators and local staff.
- **Enhance the training content.** Based on facilitator interviews and evaluator observations, workshops and trainings should provide more information and resources about adult learning principles, as well as guidance on working with classrooms of learners who speak the same native language. Classroom observations indicated that some facilitators struggled to maintain only English in the classroom. This was primarily observed in classrooms where the majority of learners shared a native language and cultural background. Similarly, facilitators need more skills in dealing with predominantly older or younger learners as they seek to maintain relevancy of content for their learners.
- **Focus on learner retention.** Learner retention was challenging for many sites. MOIA should consider an interactive website that can support communication initiatives for learners and facilitators. The site could maintain a list of active We Speak NYC classes and schedules to help learners find classes that meet their needs. The site could increase buy-in from local stakeholders and other community organizations.



- **Listen to and act on learner suggestions.** In interviews, the learners themselves provided recommendations for expanding topics to be covered in episodes and for City service resources. Offer “We Speak NYC Approved” resources or guidelines for finding reliable health, well-being, and social service resources that are immigrant-friendly; continue including translations of important words and phrases as vocabulary expands; incorporate a wider variety of interactive activities to help with engagement and motivation; and create an interactive study guide online to support English learning outside of class.
- **Take advantage of opportunities to brand the new program.** Learners and facilitators noted that the WANY brand was unremarkable. MOIA has a new opportunity to promote the We Speak NYC brand with help from alumni learners and facilitators, and past and current sites, as well as by enlisting others with marketing expertise.
- **Plan for additional outreach efforts.** The new second season of We Speak NYC and the inclusion of materials for learners of various language abilities presents MOIA with a challenge of reaching out to meet additional needs of underserved communities and community sites with existing staff. How can more sites be brought on board without more funding? In essence, MOIA should enlist more agents of dissemination and outreach. Alumni, learners, site coordinators, and facilitators could help by continuing to share information about the program. Materials in various media would help in information sharing. City services, such as health clinics, social services centers, and employment offices should have a stake in promoting the program to their clientele. Additionally, MOIA should develop a strategic plan of outreach with existing resources. Analysis of immigrant groups, CBOs, and current successful implementation of the program will reveal underserved communities that should be the Office’s next targets.

NYC
Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs

