

IN THE NEWS



Philly is partnering with a global app competition to increase adult literacy skills

Generocity | Albert Hong | July 26, 2017

Generocity

Literacy is something to be celebrated and appreciated in Philadelphia, by nonprofits and professors alike.

But more often than not, the focus is placed on the illiteracy rate among Philadelphians who lack basic English reading skills. According to a 2015 report, there are around 36 million people in the U.S. who fit in this category.

It's clearly a national problem, and that's why it was a big step for the city of Philadelphia to formally announce yesterday that it would be one of three U.S. cities (the other two being Los Angeles and Dallas) that will help launch a 15-month field testing phase for eight mobile apps made by teams around the world to increase the literacy skills of adults with a third-grade reading level of English or below.

The eight apps were selected as semifinalists from 109 teams from 15 countries, who competed for a pool of \$7 million as part of the Adult Literacy XPRIZE competition,

sponsored by the Barbara Bush Foundation and Dollar General Foundation.

The eight apps were selected as semifinalists from 109 teams from 15 countries, who competed for a pool of \$7 million as part of the Adult Literacy XPRIZE competition, sponsored by the Barbara Bush Foundation and Dollar General Foundation.

The apps include functions like internet-free lessons and personalized coaching, and several of them feature video games and music to help the learning process feel more accessible

How does Philly play a part in all of this?

For one, a partnership between the City of Philadelphia's Office of Adult Education (OAE) and XPRIZE will help connect 3,500 adults in Philadelphia — native English speakers or English language learners — to try out one of the eight randomly assigned apps. As our sister site Technical.ly Philly mentioned, Philly is the only city out of the three participating where local government is directly involved in the field testing phase.

IN THE NEWS

“A lot of people in the world look down to people in adult education,” Diane Inverso, director of the OAE, told Technical.ly Philly.

“They’re thought of as slackers, and because of that stigma and the lack of funding it’s not a field that sees a lot of innovation.”

In addition to the city, local philanthropic organizations William Penn Foundation and the Barra Foundation have made contributions to help offset the \$1 million in costs associated with the field testing phase in Philly, according to the press release.

After about a year of field testing with consistent use of the apps by the participants, in addition to monthly surveys throughout, post-tests will be administered to those participants to figure out which apps led to the highest gains in literacy. Judges will use these results to determine five finalists by May 2018, with final winners being determined by early 2019 — one of whom will win a \$3 million grand prize, among other high-stakes prizes.

But it doesn’t end there: After the main competition, cities across the U.S. will get to compete for a \$1 million prize by having the greatest percentage of its adult learners download and use any of the five finalists’ apps.

For now, we’ll have to wait and see if tech can really be used to bring about social change throughout the city. If you’re interested in learning more about this opportunity, call 866-566-5179.