



English in Action was founded in 1960 by Marion Reith, and became an ESU program in 1976.

In 1976, EiA became part of the English-Speaking Union, where it has flourished.

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At this time, we have approximately 405 volunteer tutors and 450 students. These conversation partners are assigned to groups, or units. Each of these units is led by a volunteer unit director, and in some cases, an assistant unit director, as well (also volunteer).

Places of operation:

In addition to the ESU headquarters at 144 East 39th Street, we have units at these locations:

Brotherhood Synagogue
St. Bartholomew's Church
All Souls Church
Temple Emanu-El
New York University
Central Synagogue
St. Ignatius Loyola Church
Fourth Universalist Society
Marble Collegiate Church
JCC

Units and Tutors demographics:

At this time, we have 25 units. Nine of the current units were added over the past ten years. Three additional units that were added during that time are no longer meeting.

Current # of tutors: 405

We don't collect data on age or profession, but approximately half the tutors are retirees, and they come from a huge range of professions.

The earliest start date for a tutor currently in the program is 1985. That's 33 years of volunteer service as an EiA tutor!

Eight current tutors started in the 1990s.

Nearly half of the current tutors started in 2016 or later.

Partnerships

HIAS: oldest refugee resettlement organization in the world

The Linking Communities Project (tlcrefugees.org)

CWS (Church World Service) (cwsglobal.org)

US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (<http://refugees.org/>)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (www.lirs.org)

Welcoming America (www.welcomingamerica.org) creating “welcoming communities”

New York Immigration Coalition (<http://www.thenyic.org>) promotes immigrant civic engagement through education and training and language access

Refugee Council USA (<http://www.rcusa.org/>)

Center for Applied Linguistics (<http://www.cal.org>) Resource links: <http://www.cal.org/resource-center/links>

Iamanimmigrant.com. Stories and PR section. #IStandWithImmigrants

Partner Hosts:

Brotherhood Synagogue

St. Bartholomew’s Church

All Souls Church

Temple Emanu-El

New York University

Central Synagogue

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Competitors

- International Center <http://www.newintlceneter.org/> - a project of Catholic Charities Community Services
- Riverside <https://www.riversidelanguage.org/other-student-services/>
- NYPL <https://www.nypl.org/events/classes/calendar?keyword=%22english+conversation%22&target%5B%5D=ad&city%5B%5D=bx&city%5B%5D=man&city%5B%5D=si&location=&topic=&audience=&series=>
- Neighbors Link www.Neighborslink.org - focus on Westchester, NY
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- New Women New Yorkers www.nywomenimmigrants.org/
- www.Conversationexchange.com free online exchange of speaking partners
- www.Tandem.net exchange language app
- Commercial language services such as Kaplan, Berlitz, colleges and universities – they offer structure classes rather than conversations.

English in Action: How It All Began

Marion Reith founded English in Action in 1960. Early in life, she developed a keen interest in different cultures and world peace. This interest was first sparked by a family trip that took her around the world in 1913 and 1914. Reith graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1918. Then she attended the Union Institute of Zurich in Switzerland. She became active in the field of Jungian psychology. After founding EiA in 1960 and working for nearly twenty years as the program manager and later as a Unit Director, Reith retired in 1977 and moved back to California. After her retirement, she continued to tutor Japanese and Vietnamese students. She remained interested in EiA and kept in contact with the New York office until her death at the age of ninety-one on December 21, 1987.

Here is her description of the founding of English in Action:

So often I am asked, "How did English in Action begin?" It began when I left my home in California for a visit to New York City in 1960. While there, I volunteered my services to my friend, Ruth Prukaple, Director of the Midtown International Center. Ruth had a call from one of the consulates, asking for help. They had a Thai student named Ladiwan who had come to get his Masters degree in Business Administration and was staying at the embassy. Ladiwan was getting very discouraged. He felt that he would never learn English and he wanted to go home. What could Ruth suggest? She suggested that he come and see me, which he did on January 26, 1960.

He knew only about fifty English words, but that wasn't enough to really speak English. We both jumped into trying to communicate with each other. We used our hands, our faces, and our gestures, and it was quite exciting. It was fun for him and fun for me, and he came to see me three times a week.

At our second meeting, a very distinguished looking gentleman from Argentina introduced himself and said, "I wish I, too, could talk with you for an hour." My answer was, "Why not?" He was here with his wife, who was doing library research, and he was studying advanced English. He told me that he hated to return to his country without ever having had an opportunity to discuss Latin American relations with a single North American. I then had two students, a beginner and someone advanced.

When one of the volunteers saw what a good time we were having, she said, "Please, get me a student. I would love to have time to really get acquainted with someone from another country."

Many new international students began to come for this one-on-one conversation practice program and volunteers signed up just as fast. When it was time for me to return home to California, I had fifty matched pairs.

I realized that I had inadvertently created an exciting English language program. I decided to stay in New York to help this program grow. It's gratifying to see how EiA has grown since its first birthday in 1960.