

Texas Workforce Commission

WIOA COMBINED STATE PLAN

APPENDIX 1

Adult Education and Literacy State Plan

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Introduction

The state's plan for service integration is supported by a close collaboration and alignment of programs among the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) system, Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and Board contractors, and other system partners. Senate Bill (SB) 307, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013), addressed the importance of accelerated models for adult education and employment and training services leading to improved employment outcomes for under-skilled populations. The enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014 reinforced this direction.

In 2015, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) convened 10 regional meetings to provide a forum for Boards and AEL providers and stakeholders. The forum served to identify gaps and generate solutions in support of regional system integration efforts. Based on input received in these meetings, a detailed plan of action was developed that is expected to drive system integration forward.

In accordance with the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), TWC, through its grant recipients, implements several services that assist adults:

- to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency;
- to complete a secondary school education and transition to postsecondary education and training through career pathways;
- who are immigrants and English-language learners (ELLs) to improve their English skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension, and mathematics skills, leading to employment or advancement in employment, as well as knowledge of the United States' system of government and concepts of individual freedom and responsible citizenship;
- who are parents or caregivers to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children, and lead to sustainable improvements in the economic opportunities for their families;
- to access support services that improve the student proficiency necessary to function effectively in adult life, including areas of employment, further education, or employment-related training; and
- to expand their options for services from multiple partners in the community, thereby supporting adults in reaching personal goals and objectives.

Additionally, TWC, through its grant recipients, provides adults with sufficient basic education to enable them to:

- acquire the basic education skills necessary for literate functioning;
- participate in job training and retraining;
- obtain and retain employment; and
- continue their education at least to the completion of secondary school and preparation for postsecondary education.

Under TWC's oversight, AEL programs provide the following essential components:

1. Adult basic education (ABE);
2. Programs for adult ELLs;

3. Adult secondary education, including programs leading to a high school equivalency certificate or a high school diploma;
4. Instructional services to improve the student proficiencies necessary to function effectively in adult life, including accessing further education, employment-related training, or employment;
5. Assessment and guidance services related to items 1–4; and
6. Collaboration with multiple partners in the community to expand the services available to adult learners, prevent duplication of services, and enable partners to provide added value to participants through service alignment.

TWC is committed to making long-term investments that enhance the capacity of providers to implement research-based models, including programs that support concurrent education and workforce training and distance learning, and services that result in employment advancement for students. To these ends, TWC promotes innovative career pathway programs and opportunities for students to gain incremental marketable skills and reach their goals. The use of innovative strategies, often leveraging interagency collaborations, allows programs to generate positive employment and workforce training outcomes, while simultaneously serving more students at a range of functional levels.

TWC encourages activities that uphold the following priorities:

- Expand integration with Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices (i.e., one-stop centers);
- Establish or expand partnerships with community colleges and other training organizations that create greater opportunities for adult learners to transition to postsecondary education and workforce training programs; and
- Develop innovative strategies to meet the needs of adult learners based on local resources, including strategies that:
 - enhance and support, and use educational delivery mechanisms that facilitate the immediate delivery of services to students; or
 - facilitate the progress of students from standard AEL programs toward a service-delivery activity that results in employment, a training certificate or certification, or college degree.

Under federal provisions, AEFLA funds may be used for programs for out-of-school individuals who are at least 16 years of age and:

- function at lower than a secondary school completion level;
- lack a secondary school credential; or
- are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

The Texas Education Code, however, limits the provision of federal funds for AEL services to primarily (although not entirely) individuals at least 18 years of age. For this reason, the U.S. Department of Education allocates funds to Texas based on the relative proportion of the Texas population age 18 and over without a secondary degree (or its equivalent) and not enrolled in secondary school. State AEL funds, therefore, target programs for out-of-school individuals who are beyond compulsory school-attendance age—18 in Texas—and:

- function at lower than a secondary school completion level;
- lack a secondary school credential; or

- are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

Family Literacy Services

TWC AEL grant recipients provide, within the context of administering AEL programs, training opportunities for parents on how to be the primary teachers for their children and full partners in their children's educations. Practices in family literacy include, but are not limited to:

- the incorporation of parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency for the family; and
- instruction to help parents partner with their children and school personnel in the development of children's High School Personal Graduation Plans, as required by Texas Education Code §28.02121. See also House Bill 5, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013) (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/83R/billtext/pdf/HB00005F.pdf#navpanes=0>).

English Literacy Acquisition Programs

TWC's AEL grant recipients offer instructional services for students placed at English Language Arts (ELA) levels under the National Reporting System (NRS). Instructional services for ELA students include proven or evidence-based instructional techniques and learning strategies that support oral skills development for ELLs.

TWC AEL grant recipients will also provide integrated English literacy and civics education instruction through a contextualized ELA program of study that incorporates the following components:

- **Civics** education instruction emphasizes the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and U.S. history and government to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to become active and informed parents, workers, and community members; and
- **Integrated Education and Training (IET)** provides training opportunities for individuals in combination with ELA instruction.

Several AEL grant recipients, as part of their grant-required career pathways program, have begun exploring options for providing ELA instruction to individuals with degrees or credentials from outside the United States. TWC has supported this model and will continue to do so through additional training and guidance.

TWC will support the development and implementation of IET models for English Literacy and Civics (ELC) students through activities currently authorized under AEL multiyear provider contracts, active through the end of Program Year 2016 (PY' 16), as well as through the expansion of Accelerate Texas, the state's IET program funded with AEL State Leadership funds. IET and ELC will be fully implemented by July 1, 2016.

Activities Defined under WIOA

TWC grant recipients currently contracted through the end of 2016 are implementing the following activities required under WIOA as a required component of their contracts. Thus, no additional planning is required to ensure that these activities are in place by July 1, 2016:

- Adult education activities;
- Literacy activities;
- Career pathways programs, including workplace literacy activities and IET activities—additional funds have been identified in State Leadership funding to continue to support the development of these models;
- English-language acquisition activities;
- Family literacy activities; and
- Employment and training awareness, readiness, and transition opportunities for students— IET and ELC, implemented by July 1, 2016, through the expansion of efforts developed in PY' 15–16.

Alignment of Standards

Texas Adult Education Content Standards and Benchmarks (AEL Standards) for ABE and Adult Secondary Education and ELA students were first implemented statewide in 2007. TWC is currently implementing a complete revision of the AEL Standards to align with the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards and the state-mandated Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum standards for public schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(1)).

This revision includes aligning rigorous content standards that specify what learners should know and be able to do in the areas of reading and language arts, mathematics, and English-language acquisition. The revision also takes into consideration alignment with other standards, including high school equivalency, enrollment in nonremedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions, and the occupational and industry skill standards and certifications widely used and recognized by business and industry.

Funding

Texas aligned AEL and workforce development systems in 2013. The alignment required statewide deployment of models to develop the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education programs and obtain and advance in employment. Successful models have included IET, career pathways, distance learning, and college and workforce preparation activities. Texas also aligned service-delivery options for individuals with disabilities and other special needs. AEL statewide service-delivery contracts are compliant with WIOA requirements under performance, workforce system, and rehabilitative services alignment and programmatic integration.

Texas funded new local provider grants for all services, including ELC, up to five years beginning in PY' 14–15, and current contracts will be in place through PY' 16–17; thus, TWC will not be conducting a grant competition in PY' 15–16.

As outlined in the PY' 13 plan, TWC conducted procurement for all services in spring 2014 and awarded contracts beginning July 1, 2014. AEFLA §232 requires that eligible providers desiring a grant or contract submit an application containing required information and assurances, including a description of:

- how funds awarded will be spent; and
- any cooperative arrangements the eligible provider has with other agencies, institutions, or organizations for the delivery of AEL services.

Contracts awarded to AEL grant recipients were limited to two years, with the option of three one-year renewals at the discretion of TWC's three-member Commission (Commission), taking into account performance and other factors. Renewals for years three, four, and five are not automatic, and will be based on meeting or exceeding performance and expenditure benchmarks, or other factors as determined by the Commission. At the completion of the five-year maximum contract term, TWC will conduct a new competitive statewide procurement. All contracts, including those that have been in effect for less than the maximum five-year contract term, must be competitively procured during subsequent statewide procurements.

Of the funding Texas receives to administer AEL services, 82.5 percent must be used to provide AEL services as stipulated in AEFLA §231. Of the 82.5 percent, up to 10 percent is allowed for corrections education and education for other institutionalized adults.

Federal AEL funds may be used for programs for out-of-school individuals who are at least 16 years of age and:

- function at less than a secondary school completion level;
- lack a secondary school credential; or
- are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

State AEL funds are for programs for out-of-school individuals who are beyond compulsory school-attendance age and:

- function at less than a secondary school completion level;
- lack a secondary school credential; or
- are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

Eligible Providers – Local Provisions

Eligible providers for a grant or contract under TWC include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Local education agency;
2. Community-based organization or faith-based organization;
3. Volunteer literacy organization;
4. Institution of higher education;

5. Public or private nonprofit agency;
6. Library;
7. Public housing authority;
8. Nonprofit institution that has the ability to provide literacy services to eligible individuals;
9. Consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above; and
10. A partnership between an employer and any of the entities described above.

TWC intends all potential grantees have direct and equitable access to AEL funding opportunities as evidenced in its 2014 Request for Proposals (RFP) competition for AEL providers. Notice of availability of awards was distributed via e-mail distribution lists of current providers and new stakeholders collected over 11 months. Availability of awards was also advertised on the AEL website as well as in Texas Electronic State Business Daily, the Texas Comptroller's website, which houses announcements and details of all open procurement in Texas.

Corrections Education and Other Institutions – State Provisions

TWC's AEL grant recipients use funds, as allowable, to provide educational programs for criminal offenders in correctional institutions and other institutionalized individuals. Academic programs include the following:

- Basic education;
- Special education programs as determined by the Texas Education Agency;
- English literacy programs; and
- Secondary school credit programs.

Integrated Education and Training

TWC grant recipients currently contracted through the end of 2016 are implementing the following WIOA-mandated activities as a required component of their contracts; thus, no additional planning is necessary to ensure that these activities are in place by July 1, 2016:

- Career pathways programs, including workplace literacy activities and IET activities—additional funding has been identified from State Leadership funds, as outlined in this plan, to continue to support the development of these models.

Funding – State Distribution Matching Requirement

TWC's General Administration rule §800.68(c) provides that at least 80 percent of the state general revenue matching funds appropriated for the AEL program will be allocated by the Commission to the local workforce development areas (workforce areas) by the established federal formula.

The amount allocated is based on each workforce area's relative proportion of number of individuals aged 18 and older without a secondary degree and not enrolled in school. An equal base amount of 1 percent (2.8 percent in the aggregate) is applied, as set forth in §800.68(c).

Description of Permissible Activities

The Commission will continue to use a strategic approach to designate State Leadership funds to *develop and enhance* system services and performance.

Funds made available under AEFLA §223 for State Leadership activities will continue to support local program implementation and continuous improvement, innovation, and integration and alignment of services with the workforce system, employers, and postsecondary education and training. State Leadership-funded activities are critical to system enhancement and capacity building to support the transformation of AEL services into a fully integrated component of the workforce system in Texas.

The Commission designates AEL State Leadership projects based on system performance, strategic direction, and feedback from TWC staff and the needs identified by system stakeholders. The Commission designated State Leadership projects in public meetings in late spring of 2015.

Since the 2013 transition of the AEL program to TWC, the Commission has deliberately used State Leadership funds to support activities that strategically position the statewide system not only for continuous improvement across program outcomes but for innovation in new directions related to full system integration and postsecondary education outcomes. Current projects outline the areas of innovation and performance improvement for which the Commission has designated State Leadership funds and signal the types of anticipated projects that will be continued or designated for PY' 16–17. These projects include:

- Integration and alignment of services to support **alignment of AEL activities with other core programs in the workforce system** and links to employers and community-based organizations through workforce integration events, ongoing technical assistance efforts, and sharing of best practices already developed across the state;
- A variety of professional development efforts including:
 - the establishment and operation of **statewide high-quality professional development centers**, the examination and evaluation of local providers, and resource support to improve AEL services; and
 - investment to support local involvement in increasing student success through **locally designated professional development efforts** and the review and continuous improvement of those efforts;
- The **development and dissemination of instructional programmatic practices** to support eligible providers in reading, writing, mathematics, career pathways, and distance learning;
- **Monitoring and evaluation of, and commensurate technical assistance** to, improvement in adult education;
- The continued *development of content and models for IET career pathways*, and other postsecondary transition models and workplace projects with employers building on past successes through the Accelerate Texas Model, started by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2009 and co-opted by TWC in 2014;
- Distance learning and *technology development, deployment, and support* to continue and enhance the development and implementation of technology applications, including

increased distance learning and professional development training to improve system efficiencies;

- **Standards revision and alignment** with state educational, and college and career readiness indicators; and
- Other strategic investments to support the management and delivery of services and drive performance and local leadership in program management.

TWC will continue its robust monitoring process as outlined in this plan.

Additionally, the Commission may designate other activities of statewide significance that promote the purpose of WIOA for PY' 16–17, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Assistance to local providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve WIOA's objectives, and in measuring the progress of those programs in achieving the objectives, including meeting state performance;
- Promotion of workplace AEL activities;
- Continued development and dissemination of curriculum frameworks;
- Alignment of content standards and assessments in reading and language arts, mathematics, and English-language acquisition with other state standards, including high school equivalency, college and career readiness, enrollment in nonremedial, for-credit courses at postsecondary educational institutions, and occupational and industry skill standards and certification;
- Outreach, develop, and pilot strategies for improving teacher quality and retention; and
- Development and implementation of programs and services to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities or limited English-language proficiency.

Funding – Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education

TWC AEL grant recipients provide a contextualized ELA program of study that incorporates:

- **Civics** education instruction to help students become active and informed parents, workers, and community members;
- **IET** to train students for the workplace in combination with ELA instruction; and
- **Advanced ELA instruction** to train individuals with degrees or credentials from outside the United States.

Assessment – Providers of AEL and State Leadership–funded Services

Ongoing Program Monitoring and Oversight

Evaluation of local provider services is a key priority for the AEL program. TWC staff has worked to develop a strategic evaluation and monitoring process that draws from best practices developed across TWC's divisions.

The evaluation of local providers is a multiphased process that uses timely data gathered from the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) to measure program performance against contract deliverables as well as state and federal performance targets. TEAMS is Texas'

state-of-the-art, web-enabled system that maintains student-level data, including demographic, assessment, and outcome data, as well as class, site, program, and provider information. TEAMS users can analyze class, site, or program information through use of standard reports generated at the user level. TEAMS provides a wide range of information about adult education, including snapshots of student and program performance, personnel qualifications, and staff development activities.

AEL programs are required to validate their data monthly and submit quarterly Data Sign-off Reports through TEAMS. The Data Sign-off Report requires programs to describe areas of strength as well as concern. Programs also are required to submit monthly expenditure reports in TWC's Cash Draw and Expenditure Reporting (CDER) system and quarterly narrative reports using a predetermined template that requests information on specific TWC objectives and overall program objectives.

AEL contract deliverables reflect TWC's commitment to strong performance and accountability. These deliverables include a combination of program and financial accountability and encourage programs to exhibit strong planning through the development of project plans, continuous improvement plans, and standard operating procedures.

AEL program staff meets monthly, at a minimum, to evaluate the overall health of each program, which is measured against contract deliverables; progress toward federal education functioning level gain measures; state performance measures; and expenditures. Program staff discusses trends in data and issues of particular concern, and develops support plans to address those issues. Because services are aligned to workforce areas, staff can see where specific issues are isolated throughout the state. This provides a structure under which staff can engage TWC's Professional Development Center to address concerns.

If a program does not show improvement after being placed on a support plan, TWC places it on a Technical Assistance Plan (TAP). TAPs use a timeline of deliverables to improve and support program function. TAP actions may include additional targeted professional development support, one-on-one training in specific areas of weakness or concern, and technical assistance visits by TWC staff to meet and address particular issues. Members must meet specific benchmarks for a period of four consecutive months in order to have a TAP lifted. Programs that consistently fail to meet contract deliverables once placed on a TAP are placed on a Corrective Action Plan. Programs that fail to meet objectives beyond this point are subject to sanctions and deobligation of program funds.

Subrecipient Monitoring

TWC's Subrecipient Monitoring (SRM) department will conduct on-site reviews of 29 percent (10 programs) of AEL grant recipients over the first two years of service under new contracts and a desk review of 57 percent (20 programs). Risk is determined based on an analysis of factors, including size of grant award amount, timeliness of data entry, "newness" of the program or key program staff, and expenditure amounts.

In the second year of new contracts, SRM will conduct on-site reviews of the programs deemed high risk and not reviewed in year one.

While on-site, SRM reviews expenditures and records management (including eligibility documentation) and conducts staff interviews to confirm that internal processes for participant intake, screening, and placement comply with TWC's AEL policy. SRM identifies records in TEAMS to compare with on-site records, including student test scores, student attendance records, and staff professional development hours.

SRM hosts a preplanning meeting with TWC AEL staff to discuss any potential issues prior to the on-site visit. This gives SRM the opportunity to ask questions about specific items of interest uncovered in the risk assessment. It also provides SRM with any technical assistance items that have been discussed and reviewed with the grant recipient by AEL staff, including performance. The process ensures that SRM gains an accurate review of program activity and any ongoing issues.

SRM also conducts a preplanning conference call to help grant recipients prepare and assemble necessary documentation preceding each on-site review. During the visit, program staff is interviewed about program processes. At the conclusion of the interview, SRM conducts an exit interview, in which staff reviews any findings, which are later distributed in an official report. Grant recipients have the opportunity to dispute any findings.

Deobligation of Funds

TWC is keenly focused on performance to ensure that funds are used effectively to serve customers and produce positive results. Contracted performance benchmarks and performance standards highlight TWC's expectation that grantees will maintain or exceed performance standards through effective service delivery and innovation. TWC rule §800.78 allows funds to be deobligated, including voluntarily, if they are not being used effectively and at expected levels to serve individuals needing AEL services; however, TWC staff works diligently with grantees to provide technical support and assistance in developing strategies to ensure that funds are used to serve customers efficiently and effectively, thereby mitigating risks.

Under current budgetary conditions—as in the past—the need for AEL services exceeds Texas' available resources, and no workforce area is funded to fully meet its needs. TWC expects that AEL grant recipients will identify, and coordinate with, all available organizations and programs in their workforce areas to expand and leverage deliverable services beyond those provided solely through AEL funding.

Self-Evaluation and Monitoring of Local Programs

As part of their deliverables, all TWC grant recipients (sole providers and lead grant recipients for consortia of providers) are required to:

- submit a plan outlining their process for monitoring performance and expenditures;
- use TEAMS to regularly monitor program performance across all providers; and
- develop a yearly continuous improvement plan (CIP).

Programs use the CIP as an opportunity to analyze their performance, determine the cause of areas of weakness, and develop strategies for improvement in the coming year. Programs are

required to tie their professional development activities to this plan to ensure adequate training and support for program improvements.

TWC AEL staff also holds regular conference calls and biyearly meetings for program members to share challenges as well as best practices. These forums build on what is working in the field and provide peer-mentoring opportunities.

Additionally, programs are required to regularly solicit student evaluations to assess satisfaction with curricula, instructors, and institutions.