

Fiscal Years 2021–2026 AEL Strategic Plan

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GOALS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR TEXAS ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY FISCAL YEARS 2021–2026

Executive Summary

In this 2021–2026 Strategic Plan for Adult Education and Literacy, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) outlines the guiding principles and vision for adult education and literacy (AEL) over the next five years with a focus on the Texas workforce customer’s experience. When the AEL program transferred from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to TWC with Senate Bill (SB) 307, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013), the legislature required TWC to create a statewide AEL strategic plan and to provide progress reports of the goals and objectives outlined in the plan every even-numbered year. This second statewide AEL strategic plan enhances the four original goals outlined in the [previous strategic plan](#) and updates the corresponding objectives for each to support TWC’s mission:

“To promote and support a workforce system that creates value and offers employers, families, individuals, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.”

AEL’s placement in Texas, specifically in TWC, provides great opportunities for leveraging state and local workforce and educational resources. TWC is in a unique position from that of workforce development agencies in other states, as it oversees the six core programs authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014: Adult and Dislocated Worker, Youth, AEL, Employment Service, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). At a federal level, WIOA requires system integration among these core programs, and in Texas, TWC provides the statewide mechanism for ensuring seamless customer delivery to carry out a “One Workforce” system, a vision promoted by the US Department of Labor (DOL) for all workforce systems. This One Workforce vision, reflected in the [Texas Workforce Consolidated 2021–2025 Strategic Plan](#), calls for increased integration of services, statewide partnerships and collaboration, and use of accurate data to improve workforce services for customers.

TWC’s emphasis on remaining flexible to adapt to the workforce customer’s needs drives its innovations in service delivery and is the reason that Texas AEL was able to quickly respond to the needs of its adult students during the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020. TWC’s pre-pandemic investments in remote and distance learning initiatives for AEL—making Texas AEL a national model for other states during the pandemic—provided programs with a foundational understanding of the types of technologies that keep students and instructors engaged and connected. Providing access to AEL services through technology to meet customers’ demands will continue to be a priority for TWC.

In the next five years, Texas AEL will continue to find new ways to support students as they navigate barriers to education and employment, giving them an opportunity to achieve the economic prosperity that every Texan deserves. In order to be responsive and accountable to the AEL student, Texas AEL will continue to serve its customers—including the student, instructor, and program administrator—by working with its partners in TWC and other agencies, including its Tri-Agency partners (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and TEA), and by creating new collaborations.

TWC will provide progress reports on this strategic plan to the governor, legislature, and Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) in December 2022, December 2024, and December 2026.

Vision

To deliver education, workforce, and postsecondary education and training outcomes for students through innovative service delivery and partnerships that result in statewide alignments, efficiencies, and accountability

Mission

To promote and support a responsive and accountable system that creates value and supports local solutions to addressing the educational and workforce development needs of AEL students, businesses, and community stakeholders

AEL Strategy (General Appropriations Act Strategy 1.1.9)

To support increases in employment, postsecondary education and training transition, skills, and secondary school credential attainment through demonstrated approaches that integrate workforce system services and leverage local and state partnerships

Overview of Texas AEL Goals

Goal 1: Increase Outcomes

Increase workforce, secondary, and postsecondary education and training outcomes to support increases in education and work-related outcomes through enhanced delivery and service integration.

Goal 2: Address Demand with Increased Access

Address demand for AEL in Texas by implementing strategies that increase and streamline access for current and future students.

Goal 3: Enhance Customer Experience with Increased Coordination

Enhance the workforce customer's experience through increased coordination and integration among state and local system stakeholders.

Goal 4: Improve Program Effectiveness

Improve AEL program effectiveness, which includes program accountability and fiscal integrity, and provide tools to communicate the AEL program impact to AEL stakeholders.

Strategic Plan Alignments and Considerations

The following policies, plans, reports, and legislation were considered in the development of this strategic plan.

Federal Policy and Guidance

- [Technical Assistance Guide for Performance Accountability under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, NRS for Adult Education \(March 2021\)](#). The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education expands measurable skill gain (MSG) options (that is, accountability measures for measuring successful progress) for AEL participants in workplace literacy and integrated education and training (IET) programs.
- [Training and Employment Notice, Advancing the One Workforce Vision and Strategy \(January 4, 2021\)](#). DOL promotes the One Workforce vision to create an integrated workforce system that is centered on the customer experience.

Statewide Strategic Plans and Reports

[Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan FY 2016–FY 2023](#)

The TWIC strategic plan provides the workforce vision for Texas through which workforce system partners, including TWC, and stakeholders should collaborate and leverage resources with one another to improve workforce outcomes. The AEL strategic plan goals support each of TWIC’s four goal areas as follows:

- Goal Area 1: Focus on Employers
- Goal Area 2: Engage in Partnerships
- Goal Area 3: Align System Elements
- Goal Area 4: Improve and Integrate Programs

[Texas Workforce Consolidated 2021–2025 Strategic Plan](#)

The TWC strategic plan outlines six goals to support TWC’s mission. AEL efforts directly support the following TWC goals described in that plan:

- Goal 1: Support a workforce system that allows employers and workers to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.
- Goal 3: Prepare individuals for employment by supporting education and training that equips them with in-demand skills as identified by employers.
- Goal 5: Foster systems that enhance early education, support strong families, advance the growth of the at-risk workforce to accelerate their employment opportunities, and help support personal and family stability.

[Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative](#)

The Texas Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative is charged with developing key strategies to prepare and upskill a Texas workforce. Current work by Texas AEL and actionable items outlined in this plan support the following Tri-Agency strategies:

- Strategy 1.1: Identify students’ most efficient paths to attaining high-value credentials.
- Strategy 1.2: Strengthen and streamline collaboration among key education and workforce system stakeholders who are developing pathways at the regional level.
- Strategy 1.3: Expand opportunities for work-based learning experiences.
- Strategy 2.1: Ensure students and families have the support, tools, and resources needed to achieve education and career success.
- Strategy 2.2: Expand access to effective college and career advising.
- Strategy 2.3: Reduce financial barriers in education.
- Strategy 3.1: Align statewide education and workforce systems with statewide priorities and goals.

Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Committee

The Texas AEL Advisory Committee—comprised of education, nonprofit, employer, and Board representatives—makes annual recommendations to TWC’s three-member Commission (Commission) on how to further enhance the AEL system. The Advisory Committee’s 2019 and 2020 annual reports and quarterly meetings requested that the Commission consider the following when expanding AEL in Texas:

- Increasing employer engagement with AEL programs
- Launching a statewide AEL marketing campaign to create public awareness about AEL
- Creating more service delivery options for special populations such as justice-involved and internationally trained professionals
- Promoting collaborations with faith-based and nonprofit organizations
- Providing increased access to AEL through technology

Additionally, the Advisory Committee held two workgroups in spring 2021 to discuss recommendations in the development of this strategic plan.

87th Texas Legislative Session, Regular Session (2021)

The following is a summary of legislation enacted by the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021) for the 2022–2023 biennium.

- **Rider 28, Adult Education:** This rider in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) of the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021), modifies existing rider language, adding digital literacy to the list of training provided by AEL programs. The rider states, “Priority shall be given to adult literacy programs and may be given to adult literacy programs that include training in financial literacy, digital literacy, and occupational foundation skills in the expenditure of adult education funds appropriated above.”
- **Rider 29, Statewide Strategic Plan for Adult Basic Education:** This rider requires TWC, in consultation with TWIC, to develop the statewide strategic plan for AEL in Texas and requires that TWC report on the progress of this plan to TWIC, the governor, and the Legislative Budget Board in December of every even-numbered year. As

required by the legislature, TWC submitted the [final progress report](#) for the [Strategic Plan for Adult Education and Literacy for the Fiscal Year of 2015–2020](#) in December 2020 to the required parties. This Fiscal Year 2021–2026 AEL Strategic Plan fulfills the requirement outlined in Rider 29.

- **Rider 46, Federal and State Funds for Digital Inclusion:** This rider requires TWC to permit digital skill building, which includes device access and support in digital skills in all workforce development grant programs.
- **House Bill (HB) 1525,** 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021): This bill continues the high school equivalency subsidy program, first passed under HB 3 of the 86th Legislature, Regular Session (2019), and requires that TEA transfer funds to TWC for the purpose of administering this program.
- **HB 1247,** 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021): This bill requires that TWC, along with its Tri-Agency partners, TEA and THECB, develop a statewide work-based learning strategic framework.
- **HB 3767,** 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021): This bill establishes a Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative to create interagency agreements for data-sharing, use agency resources to support career education and training programs, and further enhance workforce development in the state.

Goal 1: Increase Outcomes

Increase workforce, secondary, and postsecondary education and training outcomes to support increases in education and work-related outcomes through enhanced delivery and service integration.

Objective 1: Expand capacity to reach new customers with barriers to employment through enhanced outreach and recruitment.

- Action Item 1: Implement an initiative to develop outreach and follow-up services for populations that require additional supports, such as, but not limited to, justice-involved individuals, adult learners with disabilities, and internationally trained professionals.
 - Action Item 2: Collaborate with state organizations and agencies to promote AEL as an educational resource for Texans seeking to obtain enhanced literacy and basic education skills.
 - Action Item 3: Implement an initiative to support cross-training among staff members in AEL programs, Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), and Workforce Solutions Offices to develop integrated intake models and increase referrals and service coordination, based on identified best practices and stakeholder input.
 - Action Item 4: Facilitate the development of targeted outreach campaigns for potential AEL customers in Workforce Solutions Offices, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, libraries, and other community institutions.
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Objective 2: Increase postsecondary education and training enrollments and support completions.

- Action Item 1: Promote cross-referrals of low-level developmental education students into AEL programs that support college readiness at no-cost or low-cost, advancing the 60x30TX higher education strategic plan's goal of manageable student debt.
- Action Item 2: Provide platforms for Tri-Agency partners to share and communicate policies on portability of credits across institutions of higher education, furthering the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative to support efficient and flexible pathways for workforce customers.
- Action Item 3: Provide enhanced career and college navigation assistance to current, former, and future AEL students entering, returning, and participating in postsecondary education and training to support student retention.
- Action Item 4: Continue to promote development of alternate options for entry into postsecondary education or training programs for students who have not completed high school or obtained a high school equivalent, such as with Ability-to-Benefit program models.

Objective 3: Enhance AEL curriculum, standards, and skill assessment options to boost employability and college readiness of AEL students.

- Action Item 1: Promote the inclusion of digital literacy in all AEL programs, as required by Rider 46 of the GAA, 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021), with digital literacy resources for instructional staff and students.
- Action Item 2: Facilitate collaboration between AEL programs and employers/employer associations to develop employer-based needs assessments and other applicable resources to enhance work-readiness skills of AEL students.
- Action Item 3: Provide curriculum resources for AEL programs to develop work-based learning strategies and frameworks that include employability skills.
- Action Item 4: Support the incorporation, expansion, and articulation of portable postsecondary education and training credentials and industry-based certifications to develop career pathway ladders.

Objective 4: Enhance student retention supports to increase program completions.

- Action Item 1: Provide professional development and best practices on creating comprehensive assessment models that include goal-setting and individualized learning plans for AEL students.
- Action Item 2: Inform and guide AEL programs on using federal AEL funds and leveraging community and partner resources to access support services, such as transportation, child care, and other applicable services or incentives, to ensure program completion.
- Action Item 3: Enhance student ambassador roles in AEL programs to promote AEL services and provide peer-to-peer support to potential, returning, and enrolled AEL students.

Goal 2: Address Demand with Increased Access

Address demand for AEL services in Texas by implementing strategies that increase and streamline access for current and future students.

Objective 1: Enhance student-service models with immediate and responsive AEL program options.

- Action Item 1: Increase transition models for students preparing to enter into postsecondary education and training or employment, such as pre-apprenticeship, college-ready, and summer bridge programs.
- Action Item 2: Promote library partnerships with AEL programs to provide access to technology, such as computers, and classroom settings for AEL services, including orientation, testing, and instruction.

Objective 2: Advance a statewide service delivery approach to better serve AEL students.

- Action Item 1: Evaluate policy and practices that may limit the AEL services available to a student within a certain geographic area.
- Action Item 2: Explore development of memoranda of understanding between or among AEL programs to leverage available services and to create more customized education and training plans for the student.
- Action Item 3: Continue enhancements of the statewide data management information system, allowing multiple AEL programs to serve a student with greater coordination and transparency.

Objective 3: Increase employer, business community, and community-based organization roles in AEL.

- Action Item 1: Promote engagement with businesses through workforce business development units and business–employer associations to develop models that incorporate occupation-specific skills and work-readiness requirements into AEL services.
- Action Item 2: Implement technical assistance and support work-based initiatives between AEL providers and employers, building capacity for workplace models that focus on employee retention and create pipelines for skilled workers.
- Action Item 3: Expand service capacity and the diversity of program offerings through organizational alliances with community- and faith-based organizations, as well as other organizations not funded through TWC, that augment AEL efforts through leveraged funding and volunteerism.
- Action Item 4: Encourage AEL partnerships with employers who hire adult learners with additional barriers to employment. Examples include second-chance employers who hire formerly incarcerated individuals or those who participate in TWC’s We Hire Ability program.
- Action Item 5: Further enhance opportunities for cross-referrals between nonprofit literacy organizations and AEL programs throughout the state to optimize services for low literacy second language learners and for internationally trained professionals with advanced degrees and education from native countries.

Objective 4: Increase student access to digital technology, including broadband connections and distance learning applications.

- Action Item 1: Promote collaborations with workforce system partners and libraries to assist students with limited or no access to digital devices and/or broadband.
- Action Item 2: Coordinate with local and state authorities on strategies to provide digital access to justice-involved individuals participating in AEL activities while incarcerated.
- Action Item 3: Increase efforts to connect students in rural areas with limited or no broadband service with community partners that offer these services.
- Action Item 4: Continue to implement distance education initiatives that:
 - support local providers’ adoptions of distance learning applications;
 - further develop the statewide inventory of distance learning programs and blended learning models; and
 - grow and maintain a distance learning resource platform.

Objective 5: Support retention and development of adult educators to address AEL demand for rigorous instruction.

- Action Item 1: Implement an initiative to support the development or provision of adult education certifications to increase the number of AEL instructors and to further enhance the quality of adult-centered instruction occurring in AEL programs.
- Action Item 2: Promote the hiring of full-time AEL instructors in local programs and facilitate best practice sharing among programs on instructor retention methods.
- Action Item 3: Explore internship opportunities for future adult educators with existing TWC programs.

Goal 3: Enhance Customer Experience with Increased Coordination

Enhance the workforce customer's experience through increased coordination and integration among state and local system stakeholders.

Objective 1: Align TWC AEL workforce development service policies to support the One Workforce vision and enhance the workforce customer experience.

- Action Item 1: Promote coenrollment and referral efforts with Boards, particularly when serving customers receiving Titles I and IV services who require AEL supports to attain education or career goals.
 - Action Item 2: Develop joint TWC policy for WIOA Titles I, II, and IV programs to support coenrollment models and referrals to and from AEL when applicable or necessary.
 - Action Item 3: Create statewide AEL branding and outreach resources for local AEL programs to use for both recruitment in their respective communities and coordination with stakeholders.
 - Action Item 4: Implement a case management staffing support initiative to support an integrated intake and follow-up system, as described by DOL's One Workforce vision.
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Objective 2: Support development of career pathway ladders with AEL and its workforce system partners.

- Action Item 1: Convene regional workforce integration events to identify and align resources, create efficiencies, and close gaps across TWC AEL, other adult education organizations, and workforce development stakeholders.
 - Action Item 2: Facilitate opportunities for Board, VR, AEL, and workforce stakeholders to develop and/or implement strategic frameworks to support career pathways.
 - Action Item 3: Distribute career pathway resources to AEL providers and workforce partners to promote occupational advancement for basic skills deficient students into middle-skilled occupations.
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Objective 3: Strengthen coordination and alignment with THECB.

- Action Item 1: Support 60x30TX goals and coordinate with THECB to ensure that policies, programs, and guidance across integrated AEL and career and technology training programs are well coordinated and aligned.
- Action Item 2: Increase and support engagement with postsecondary education and training institutions, partners, the Texas Association of Community Colleges, and the THECB to fully integrate AEL within Texas postsecondary education and training systems and support the overarching goals of 60x30TX.

- Action Item 3: Share information with the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative—gathered through surveys, focus groups, and other methods from AEL programs—on ways to support 60x30TX goals and Tri-Agency priorities.
- Action Item 4: Continue technical assistance efforts to promote adoption of integrated education and training career pathway models across AEL as well as credit and noncredit career and technical education programs.
- Action Item 5: Explore micro-credential opportunities in collaboration with THECB and incorporate them, as appropriate, into AEL policies and integrated education and training models.

Objective 4: Strengthen coordination and alignment with TEA.

- Action Item 1: Continue to coordinate AEL efforts to serve high school non-completers using related TEA policies and data, including further refinements to high school equivalency preparation and testing processes.
- Action Item 2: Cross-promote TEA and THECB guidance on college readiness assessments to reduce testing burdens for students.
- Action Item 3: Promote use of the high school equivalency voucher program, as passed by the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021), to support expansion of the program.

Goal 4: Improve Program Effectiveness

Improve AEL program effectiveness, which includes program accountability and fiscal integrity, and provide tools to communicate the AEL program impact to AEL stakeholders.

Objective 1: Develop uniform data collection methods that enhance performance reporting and inform progress in meeting program goals and objectives.

- Action Item 1: Support coordinated data collection with AEL and Board-administered programs by issuing joint policies and technical assistance on performance accountability under WIOA.
- Action Item 2: Require AEL programs to implement standard operating procedures for collecting post-exit outcomes of students.
- Action Item 3: Support follow-up and post-exit tracking of students who have exited the AEL program to obtain accurate performance outcome data as well as refer students to other workforce services, as appropriate.

Objective 2: Develop data collection and analysis methods to address multifaceted service delivery structures and diverse customer populations and to ensure accurate and accountable data collection, management, and security.

- Action Item 1: Identify gaps in data collection, including data that may be collected by other entities.
- Action Item 2: Implement professional development trainings on analyzing data in the statewide data management information system or data warehouse to help local programs identify solutions to challenges such as instructional gaps and student retention.
- Action Item 3: Enhance the statewide data management information system and data warehouse dashboards to provide timely reports that help identify the effectiveness of strategies intended to aid student outcomes related to instructional gains, credentials, and employment.
- Action Item 4: Align professional development activities to statewide needs, as identified through data analysis, in order to meet goals and objectives laid out in statewide plans.
- Action Item 5: Conduct in-depth professional development options and trainings on performance accountability and quality assurance to build local programs' ability to analyze local needs.

Objective 3: Increase the quality, accuracy, and speed of data sharing across agencies to support the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative.

- Action Item 1: Explore and implement strategies related to employment and postsecondary education match results in coordination with TWC's Division of Operational Insight and partner agencies.

- Action Item 2: Enhance TWC processes in timely data-sharing and reporting of noncredit or short-term credentials in the statewide AEL data management information system.
- Action Item 3: Support TWC efforts in working with the Tri-Agency partners to address data collection and a centralized data repository as required under HB 3767, 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021).

Objective 4: Promote the value of AEL through evaluation and research opportunities.

- Action Item 1: Develop a report on costs and impacts of undereducated residents and the benefits of a better-educated workforce.
- Action Item 2: Increase opportunities to gain support from employers, economic development organizations, and employer organizations through a statewide campaign to increase AEL visibility as an economic- and community-development tool.