

Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Progress Report

Fiscal Year 2024





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BACKGROUND

The General Appropriations Act, Rider 31, 88th Texas Legislature, requires the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to develop a statewide strategic plan for its Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Program and to report on the implementation and progress of this plan in December of every even numbered year.

TWC developed its first statewide AEL strategic plan for 2015–2020 and a second plan for 2021–2026.¹ Following publication of this report, TWC will begin work with the [AEL Advisory Committee](#) to develop a new strategic plan designed to continue the successes of the program for its current and future students.

*“Each year more than 70,000 Texans enroll in adult education programs to help increase their earning potential in the Texas workforce,”
–TWC Chairman Bryan Daniel*

AEL PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The outcomes shared in this report reflect TWC’s progress in meeting the goals and objectives of its [Adult Education and Literacy \(AEL\) Strategic Plan 2021–2026](#):

Goal 1: Increase Outcomes

Goal 2: Address Demand with Increased Access

Goal 3: Enhance Customer Experience with Increased Coordination

Goal 4: Improve Program Effectiveness

The AEL program plays a vital role in strengthening Texas’ workforce by equipping adults with the essential skills needed for employment, postsecondary education, and career advancement. The multiple achievements and initiatives for fiscal years 2022–2024 follow.

1. [Texas Labor Code, Chapter 315](#)

Key Achievements Demonstrate Program Effectiveness

- **Exceeding Federal Standards:** The AEL program met or exceeded all federally mandated performance targets, demonstrating its commitment to accountability and high-quality service delivery.
- **Significant Academic Gains:** Rigorous pre- and post-testing revealed that over 90% of AEL students demonstrated substantial improvements in their English and math proficiency, highlighting the program’s effectiveness in enhancing foundational skills.
- **Expanding Career Pathways:** Since 2019, the program has successfully placed over 95,000 unduplicated students in career pathway programs, directly connecting them with in-demand occupations and contributing to a skilled workforce.
- **Embracing Technological Innovation:** The AEL program has more than doubled its distance learning participation rate since 2019. Currently, 45% of students benefit from a state-approved distance learning curriculum, ensuring accessibility and flexibility for diverse learners.
- **Meeting Employer Needs:** The program consistently serves an average of 50 employers annually through tailored workplace literacy programs, directly addressing industry skill gaps and bolstering employee productivity.

Strategic Initiatives Drive Continuous Improvement

The AEL program is committed to continuous improvement and innovation. Recent initiatives include:

- **Pre-Apprenticeship Bridge Programs:** These programs provide a direct pathway for adults to enter high-demand apprenticeship opportunities, addressing workforce shortages and fostering career advancement.
- **Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The AEL program is at the forefront of educational technology by piloting AI-powered tools in the classroom, personalizing learning experiences, and improving student outcomes.
- **Expanding Support Services:** Distance Learning and Math Assistance Call Centers provide crucial support to students, ensuring access to assistance and guidance throughout their learning journey.
- **Partnerships for Increased Impact:** Collaborative efforts with the Windham School District facilitate Integrated Education and Training (IET) for incarcerated individuals, promoting successful reentry into society and the workforce.
- **Expanding Access to High School Equivalency:** Statewide virtual programs, developed in partnership with Texas Tech University and the University of Texas-Austin, expand access to high school equivalency credentials, opening doors to higher education and employment.
- **Supporting Internationally Trained Professionals:** Specialized career pathways

are being developed for internationally trained healthcare workers, enabling them to utilize their valuable skills and contribute to Texas' healthcare workforce.

- **Modernizing Data Systems:** A comprehensive data system modernization project is underway to ensure accurate, secure, and accessible information. This project will enhance data-driven decision-making and optimize program effectiveness.

The AEL program is a proven and essential resource for Texans seeking to improve their lives through education and workforce training. By embracing innovative strategies, collaborating with key stakeholders, and prioritizing student success, the AEL program is well-positioned to continue driving workforce development and economic growth throughout Texas.

REPORT ON GOALS

The [AEL 2021–2026 Strategic Plan](#) includes the following four goals:

Goal 1: Increase Outcomes

Goal 2: Address Demand with Increased Access

Goal 3: Enhance Customer Experience with Increased Coordination

Goal 4: Improve Program Effectiveness

Within each goal are specific objectives and action items to ensure that TWC is responsive in meeting the needs of a workforce system that supports Texas job seekers and employers. An overview of each goal and examples of how those goals were addressed follow.

GOAL 1: INCREASE OUTCOMES

The AEL program improves workforce, secondary, and postsecondary education and training outcomes through enhanced delivery methods and service integration. AEL's collaborations and integrations with workforce system partners such as employers, Workforce Development Boards (Boards), and community college systems have better aligned AEL customers' goals with local workforce needs. Since 2019, AEL programs have specifically worked to improve both the literacy and occupational training skills of approximately 95,000 customers in career pathways programs.



Employer Engagement and Partnerships

Employer Engagement Initiative—TWC engaged with employers by awarding a \$1.2 million Employer Engagement grant to three grant recipients. The purpose of the grant was to support partnerships in developing and implementing models that enhance:

- workplace literacy activities for incumbent workers,
- workplace literacy activities with employer-provided training, and
- integrated education and training (IET) that leads to industry-recognized credentials.

This tiered approach to services allows for an employer-centric model that meets the changing

95,000
Customers Trained in
Career Pathways

1.2 Million

Grant Awarded for
Employer Engagement

needs of employers and the workforce. As part of the initiative, grant recipients were required to develop curricula for workplace programs, which will be disseminated to workforce system stakeholders as educational resources for job readiness and advancement within the industry sector.

The three AEL grantees partnered with six employers in the construction, transportation, and food production services industries and served nearly 400 employees through 2023.

Alternative Service Models for Students

Statewide High School Equivalency Virtual Provider—This pilot supports AEL's goal of increasing the number of adults in Texas earning a secondary school credential—that is, a high school diploma or a high school equivalency (HSE). The virtual providers enable adults in Texas to receive education services leading to the attainment of a diploma or HSE. TWC initiated contracts with the University of Texas at

Austin and Texas Tech University as the pilot's service providers. Both providers offer instructional services in an asynchronous learning environment and the scheduling flexibility adult students need.

Collectively, the HSE providers have enrolled 417 students to date. Going forward, strategies will be refined to boost student engagement and enhance state reporting.

Accelerate Texas—Accelerate Texas grants expand the capacity of local service providers to develop and deliver IET programs across the state. Through a variety of education and training entities, including community colleges, education service centers, independent school districts, community-based organizations (CBOs), and Boards, grant recipients have served nearly 4,000 individuals, representing an investment of approximately \$14 million in career pathways programs since 2016.

Should additional funding become available, a future iteration of Accelerate Texas will expand services to

support short term credentials aligning with the Tri-Agency's work to support credentials of value.

The most recent grant awarded \$2 million to four entities to share best practices across the provider network and to fast-track individuals into career pathways leading to in-demand occupational employment or furthering postsecondary education. Current Accelerate Texas grantees served 523 individuals of which 449 made educational gains and 394 attained a credential in the program of study.

\$14M

Invested in Career Pathways Programs

Enhanced Curriculum

IET in Corrections Pilot Project—In spring 2021, AEL was selected by the federal Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) to participate in a yearlong

technical assistance initiative to help correctional education programs develop and implement Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs. Information and lessons learned were summarized in the [IET in Corrections Companion Guide](#) released in January 2023.

Throughout the pilot, collaboration with Windham School District (WSD) provided foundational understanding of the reentry process and reinforced the goal of a "warm handoff" between WSD



and AEL grantees across the state. The increased collaboration means better support for second chance individuals throughout the reentry process and a stronger alignment of services to reduce recidivism.

Content Standards—All AEL-funded providers must align their curriculum with AEL program content standards. First developed in 2016, the content standards increased the rigor and relevance of adult education through alignment with established assessments and standards such as Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (TCCRS), State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course exams, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE), and Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA).

Reviewed approximately every three years, the content standards have been revised multiple times to ensure that Texas is responsive to the changing educational needs of adult learners seeking employment and postsecondary education options. The revisions are as follows:

- 2016—Texas AEL Content Standards (new academic standards)
- 2019—Texas AEL Content Standards v.2, Alignment to Industry Clusters: Advanced Manufacturing; Construction and Extraction; Healthcare Sciences; and Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics
- 2021—Texas AEL Content Standards v.3, Standards for Family and Civics
- 2023 —[Texas AEL Content Standards v.4, Standards for Digital Literacy](#)

The rollout of the Texas Adult Education Digital Literacy Content Standards began in November 2022, with the brainstorming and organization of standards categories and sub-areas. From February 2023 to November 2023, TWC worked closely with the state’s professional development center to develop and implement the Digital Literacy content standards through several statewide information and training sessions to AEL grantees. The process culminated in January 2024 in a training-of-trainers (TOT) session, where 14 educators were equipped with the knowledge and materials to effectively implement the Digital Literacy standards.

As of July 2024, a contracted partner began working on an eight-week training titled Digital Literacy Innovations. It is set to launch in September 2024 and is designed to help educators enhance their digital teaching strategies.

Curriculum for Construction Trades— In 2021, TWC approved a \$500,000 initiative to design a general construction trades basic skills curriculum to support contextualized math, digital literacy, and reading instruction as a



resource for instructors in the AEL classroom. The materials focus on individuals with high school diplomas or HSEs who are seeking training and employment in construction-related careers.

The project began in late 2022 with final materials delivered and published in early 2024. A total of forty (40) hours of curriculum was produced. Seventy-five (75) instructors attended informational sessions about the materials during the pilot phase, and seventy-three (73) instructors accessed or requested materials during the initial release.

During the Career Pathway Symposium in May 2024, a session was held to walk through the final materials, and hard copies were provided to grantees, providers, and stakeholders. TWC staff and the contractor responsible for the development also shared materials

*“Adult education and literacy helps to build career pathways and improve skills for Texans to create life-changing opportunities,” said
– TWC Commissioner Representing Labor
Alberto Treviño III*

at the June 2024 Workforce Forum in Austin. AEL staff are sharing information about the materials and how to access and download the resources for use in classrooms. Materials are available for download through a link on the TWC website: <https://tcall.tamu.edu/CP-ConstructionCurriculum.html>.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Teaching and Employment Preparation—In PY 2024-2025, TWC AEL will launch an initiative to train instructors statewide on how to use AI to enhance classroom instruction and how to teach adult learners in the workforce to use AI related-products on track to be commonplace tools in the future of workforce



The rate at which AI is impacting the workforce will likely have profound impacts on both teaching and learning. It is essential to be current with these new technologies, and Texas AEL is working with national consultants and entities leading the field in deploying these tools in education and training. The Texas AEL Distance Education Professional Development Center (DEPDC) will lead the Harnessing AI Project and will include the three AEL professional development (PD) centers (Statewide, Distance Learning, and Career Pathway) to ensure an integrated, consistent approach.

Student Supports

Support Services—Since 2021, TWC has provided almost \$200,000 in funding to support adult learners with transportation assistance to address barriers to attendance. This strategy aligns with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act’s (WIOA) objective of expanding access to services for individuals with barriers to employment so they can succeed in a modern, local economy.

\$200,000
Funded for
Transportation Assistance

GOAL 2: ADDRESS DEMAND WITH INCREASED ACCESS

The AEL program strives to meet service demands in Texas by deploying strategies that give students options in how and when they access AEL services. Adult learners require education models that give flexibility when scheduling challenges arise. The following models serve as examples of how adult learners access services based on career goals, availability, location, and format.

Connections to Apprenticeships

Pre-Apprenticeship Bridge Program—As part of TWC’s Ending the Middle Skills Gap Initiative, AEL solicited applications for a pre-apprenticeship bridge program within the construction industry. A \$500,000 grant was awarded to design and deliver a bridge program or IET that provides sufficient basic skills instruction (reading, math, and digital literacy) to ensure participants are prepared to succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP).

\$500,000
Grant Awarded for
Pre-Apprenticeship
Bridge Program

The grant was awarded to Brazos Valley Council of Governments (BVCOG) in collaboration with the Brazos Valley Workforce Development Board (Brazos Valley) and in partnership with two RAPs—SSC Services for Education and BCA Electric LLC. BVCOG and Brazos Valley are working to grow regional opportunities and increase the number of apprenticeships for electricians to meet the projected 14 percent growth in demand for qualified electricians over the next 10 years.

The project launched October 1, 2022, and is serving the fourth cohort of participants. To date, 101 students have enrolled with seventy-one (71) completing.

Distance and Remote Learning

Distance Education Professional Development Center and Distance

Learning Call Center—

The Distance Education Professional Development Center (DEPDC) was established in 2021 with an annual \$1 million investment to expand alternative methods for students to connect to AEL services. The DEPDC

focuses on distance education, which includes remote learning, distance learning, digital literacy, and more. A major component of DEPDC is the Distance Learning Call Center and website (txdistanceedhelp.com), both of which provide services to all AEL instructors and students, with the goal of participants being able to access both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. The call center addresses the post-pandemic need for flexible online models and increases access to services both for instructors who are challenged with simultaneously conducting online and

“The Texas Workforce Commission’s commitment to the education of all Texans not only strengthens our workforce system, but also Texas’ reputation as the best state for doing business.”
– TWC Commissioner Representing Employers
Joe Esparza

face-to-face classes and for students who must attend their online classes after hours. DEPDC is available seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and employs 22 tutors. The DEPDC is developing cutting-edge PD methods on hybrid and blended learning models.

Distance Learning Technology Symposium—Each May, the DEPDC hosts a Distance Learning and Technology Integration (DLTI) Symposium in San Antonio. Approximately 200 individuals attend each year. The symposium includes tracks to support inclusion of education technology and current innovative instructional approaches.

The DEPDC also conducts a monthly webinar for all AEL Distance Learning Leads, a position required of all core grant recipients. The webinars provide guidance, insight, and opportunities to participate in a community of practice.

Digital Literacy Resources—At TWC’s direction, DEPDC purchased statewide digital literacy curriculum licensing available to all AEL grantees and subrecipients. Since PY 2023, 5,323 unique users have generated 11,852 learning hours with 4,181 badges issued. Solid digital literacy skills are imperative for advancing in today’s workforce and educational environments. The DEPDC Call Center are charged with assisting both students and instructors in the use of these online resources.

99%
Satisfaction Rate

Math Assistance Call Center—The Math Assistance Call Center (MACC) provides live tutor support for students to prepare for the HSE exam, the Texas Success Initiative Assessment, and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Call center staff

use online tutoring software to provide visual support to students in addition to phone support and online chat. MACC currently provides an average of 1,800 30-minute tutoring sessions monthly, and student satisfaction surveys indicate a 99 percent satisfaction rate. The call center is open seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. to address the demand for this valuable AEL service.

Community-Based Partnerships

Professional Development Support for Nonprofit Adult Literacy Organizations—The Professional Development Support for Nonprofit Adult Literacy Organizations project provides PD and capacity-building services to nonprofit and community-based adult education providers as well as to federally funded AEL grantees, Boards, Workforce Solutions Office staff, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program staff. Primary participants are tutors, instructors, program administrative staff, and trainers of nonprofit adult education providers in Texas.

TWC recognizes both the importance of building capacity for nonprofit community- and volunteer-based literacy providers that serve AEL students and the value that these entities offer as part of the AEL provider network. The project supports PD and the integration of services for providers and underscores TWC’s commitment to enable the expansion of these services. In FY 2023, TWC increased funding for this initiative from \$300k to \$500k to fully support and expand PD for non-profit family literacy organizations. In the first year of increased funding, the number of PD hours generated by attendees almost doubled, thus expanding the reach of this initiative extensively. The number of organizations participating grew from 204 to 326.

GOAL 3: ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH INCREASED COORDINATION

The AEL program enhances the workforce customer experience through increased coordination and integration between state and local workforce system stakeholders. TWC has increased coordination across workforce system partners and multiple education stakeholders. The work of AEL grantees and workforce partners continues to focus on the experiences for thousands of learners who are navigating complex systems.

Cross-Agency Coordination

Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency Subsidy Program—In partnership with TEA, TWC continues to administer the TxCHSE subsidy program. Through the TEA-funded program, TWC may subsidize an HSE exam for a Texas resident age 21 and older, thereby removing the financial barrier to obtaining an HSE. The HSE provides more opportunities for job placement, admission into postsecondary education and training, and access to financial aid for higher education. Funding for this subsidy program is available through the end of FY '27.

28,000

High School
Equivalency Vouchers Issued

Beginning in FY'22, TWC and TEA's coordinated marketing campaigns reenergized the state's effort to ensure that eligible Texans are aware of the financial

supports and know how to participate in the subsidy program. Since 2020, TWC has issued over 28,000 high school equivalency vouchers.

TWC Coordination and Alignment

Workforce Integration Academy—TWC will release a Request for Applications (RFA) in PY 2025 for a redesigned Career Pathway Professional Development Center (CPPDC). One objective of the redesign will be to create and host an annual Workforce Integration



Academy in which WIOA core partners² will work together to better support system partners (for example, Boards, public colleges, RAPs) through robust referral systems; shared, secure customer information; and streamlined intake processes. The Academy will also offer valuable insights for TWC staff on the complexities and opportunities for implementing federal policies, enhancing state guidance, and better supporting local coordination efforts.

2. WIOA Core Partners: Title I, Adult Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs; Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program; Title III, Employment Service program under the Wagner-Peyser Act; Title IV, Vocational Rehabilitation program under the Rehabilitation Act

GOAL 4: IMPROVE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

The AEL program continuously works to improve program effectiveness, including accountability and fiscal integrity. The foundation of a high-quality program is accurate and transparent data. Data assists TWC in identifying statewide and local performance trends, developing more efficient program models, and providing technical assistance. Examples of how data is shared and used to inform the success of the AEL program—for grantees, instructors, and students—follow.

Collaborative Professional Development System

Statewide Professional Development Center—Since 2015, TWC has made significant investments in funding a statewide PD center to serve the more than 3,700 adult education administrators, instructors, and staff. In 2021, TWC increased its investment to \$2,500,000 annually. In the most recent solicitation, Texas Center for the Advancement in Literacy and Learning (TCALL) was awarded to function as AEL’s primary PD center, serving 9,432 attendees at state and regional events during PY 2023–2024. These events include hosting an AEL meeting before the TWC Annual Workforce Conference, facilitating the AEL Fall Institute each September, and conducting regional trainings on the AEL content standards 4.0 rollout, which include the new Digital Literacy Content Standards.

\$2.5M
Annual Investment
in Professional Development

The statewide PD center acts as the central hub and lead coordinator for communication across the Career Pathways and Distance Education PD centers, including scheduling a statewide calendar of events and hosting the Texas AEL PD Portal.

The portal houses all online PD courses offered across the state and had more than 4,200 active users in PY 2022–2023. Usage increased to 4,294 during PY



2024. The PD Portal serves as the hub of PD activity, averaging 22,000 online course completions during the two program years. Additionally, the PD Portal automatically maintains transcripts as documentation of PD hours accrued by 4,179 staff members to ensure compliance with TWC Chapter 805 Adult Education and Literacy rule §805.21. A total of 36,730 PD hours were accrued in PY 2023–2024, with 127 courses added to the portal.

The PD center employs full-time PD specialists who work one-on-one with their respective AEL grantees and, in PY 2023–2024, spent 353 online and face-to-face hours assisting local programs by developing and implementing program PD Plans. PD plans guide professional development based on need as



evidenced by performance data and a needs assessment conducted each spring. At the half year mark, a PD Plan Follow-up report is completed by TCALL PD Specialists and program staff to ensure that the PD received is positively impacting program effectiveness. Statewide PD recommendations are published by the center after conducting needs assessments and careful research of evidence-based best practices occurring nationwide and within Texas.

Career Pathway Professional Development Center—The CPPDC, established in 2020, contracts with external subject matter experts to provide PD on quality career pathways to AEL instructors and staff. During PY 2023–2024, the CPPDC offered a Workforce Integration Academy to support integration across WIOA programs that serve priority populations in need of foundational skills. AEL career pathway service models include:

- Integrated Education and Training (IET)
- Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) – IETs
- Services to Internationally Trained Professionals who are English Language Learners
- Workplace Literacy and Employer Engagement
- Corrections and Reentry Services for Second Chance Individuals

A major focus for the CPPDC in PY 2024 was growing the expertise of AEL grant recipients to design effective services for internationally trained professionals (ITPs) who are English language learners. Information was shared through online webinars led by state

22,000
Online Course Completions

\$3.4M

Data System Modernization Project

subject matter experts. The focus on ITPs ensures that members of this population have access and opportunity to contribute their knowledge and skills in the Texas economy.

In PY 2023-2024, CPPDC hosted 21 PD events with an attendance of 1,737 participants who received a total of 2,338 PD hours.

Data System Collection and Analysis Enhancements

Data System Enhancement—In September 2023, TWC launched a 3-year, \$3.4 million data system modernization project for the state’s adult education data management system. This project will create a highly scalable, accessible, and secure system that meets Electronic and Information Resources (EIR) accessibility and security and user access controls. The new system will allow for more direct interfaces with existing TWC systems, other state agency systems, and external stakeholder systems to enhance services to adult learners across all systems while keeping personal information secure.

Digital Literacy Questionnaire—In order to better understand adult learners access and ease in using digital devices and broadband services, TWC AEL launched a new data collection process that requires all enrolled adults to complete a digital literacy questionnaire upon entry into the program. The data will be collected in the state’s data system and allow staff to analyze the existing digital literacy

skills of adults entering TWC AEL programs. This level of analysis helps TWC collaborate with other state initiatives focused on broadband and digital equity.

Statewide Service Transparency—TWC has made substantial enhancements to the state’s current AEL data system (Texas Education Adults Management System, or TEAMS) to ensure grantees have secure access to participant-level data. Because students often participate in multiple programs as they relocate throughout Texas, the data system must clearly show what services each student received.

Statewide access to participant data gives grantees a comprehensive view of each student’s participation and services and reduces duplication of services. By creating an open door for adult learners to attend programs that align to their goals and needs, they are more likely to stay engaged in educational programs.

Data Accuracy and Reporting

Technical Assistance—Technical assistance to AEL grantees ensures that data reported is reliable and accurate and provides insights into student progress. Each month, TWC staff review TEAMS data reports for each AEL grantee and analyze the number of AEL participants reported, the measurable skill gains achieved, and students who may be ready to take a posttest.³

3. In this instance, a posttest measures improvements in a student’s literacy or math skills.

Continuous data monitoring allows TWC staff to identify performance trends, such as significant increases or decreases in enrollment from the previous month, and any trends in student retention to assist AEL grantees in reaching out to students to continue program participation.

Coordinated WIOA Data Validation—TWC’s Subrecipient Monitoring Department (SRM) conducts data validation testing for all AEL grantees to ensure that data being reported has appropriate source documentation and meets federal and state requirements. In September 2022, in coordination with TWC’s Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring Division’s Business Support department, SRM developed a dedicated database to capture testing results while allowing TWC to generate testing outcomes for each AEL grant recipient. In addition, TWC’s Information, Innovation, and Insight team performs error-checking audits to ensure compliance with Department of Labor reporting requirements. SRM conducts data validation for all AEL grantees.

CONCLUSION

This report marks significant progress in accomplishing the goals of TWC’s AEL Strategic Plan for 2021–2026. Through strategic investments and innovation, TWC has built a comprehensive and interconnected adult education system that prioritizes accessibility, transparency, and a student-centric approach.

At the heart the AEL work is TWC’s dedication to equipping Texans with the essential literacy, numeracy, and employability skills needed to thrive in today’s dynamic and growing workforce. Going forward, TWC and its partners will continue to build upon the success of the AEL program and will use those successes to inform the next AEL Strategic Plan.







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