



Improving Economic Mobility for Adult Learners Request for Proposals

March 2023

Important Information

Initiative Title: Improving Economic Mobility for Adult Learners

Proposal Due Date: Friday, May 5, 2023, 5 p.m. ET

Project Duration: June 2023 – December 2024

Decisions Announced: Late May 2023

Project Kick-Off: June 27, 2023, 1-3 p.m. ET, Virtual

Purpose: To expand upon and enhance the policies and/or practices that states and institutions have designed to improve outcomes for adult learners (21+) in community and technical colleges.

Funding: Each selected team will receive \$200,000 to participate.

Eligible applicants: Eligibility is open only to state-level organizations that oversee and/or influence policy, funding, and reporting within states with existing state-wide, evidence-based efforts designed to enroll and support adult learners in community and technical colleges. States will determine which three colleges to partner with for this initiative. Only one organization per state should apply.

Expected number of applicants selected: 3

Application: [Click here to request the application](#)

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact adultlearnersinfo@jff.org.

About the Improving Economic Mobility for Adult Learners Initiative

The Improving Economic Mobility for Adult Learners Initiative aims to improve postsecondary success for adult learners. Achieving The Dream (ATD) and Jobs for the Future (JFF) developed the initiative to expand upon and enhance current policies and/or practices that states and institutions have designed and implemented specifically to improve outcomes for adult learners in community and technical colleges. We define adult learners as individuals who are 21+ years old and have not yet completed a postsecondary certification or degree.

I. Background and Context

Disruptions in our labor market and economy and widening gaps in education, income, and wealth— all exacerbated by the COVID pandemic—have heightened the need for postsecondary systems designed to meet the needs of adult learners, so that more adults can acquire postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market.

At present, there are almost 90 million adults in the United States without a postsecondary credential, approximately 40 million, or 45%, of whom started but have not completed a credential.¹ These adults represent 22% of the US population aged 18 and older.²

A growing number of institutions and states seek to understand these adult learners as a key population.³ However, several states with statewide programs focused on enrolling adults have found limited success in both enrollment and completion, despite financial incentives and various support services.⁴

This initiative seeks to build upon the current financial incentives and supports offered in many adult-focused programs and to implement more transformative policies and/or practices to support the paths of adult students to economic advancement. Fundamentally, the student experience and pathways approach must be based on the understanding that adults who return to college do so with the express goal of career and economic advancement.

II. Applicant Eligibility

Eligibility is open only to state-level organizations that oversee and/or influence policy, funding, and reporting within states with existing state-wide, evidence-based efforts designed to enroll and support adult learners in community and technical colleges. This may be a "College Promise" or "Reconnect" program that targets adults and offers free tuition (after other forms of aid) or another type of program that offers incentives for adults to enroll, including free tuition. States will determine which three colleges to partner with for this initiative. Only one organization per state should apply.

III. Expectations and Objectives

Through this RFP, JFF and ATD will select teams in three states comprised of state higher education leaders and institutional leaders from three colleges within each state. These "Core Teams" must include 1-2 senior leaders at the state level and 1-2 at each college who are positioned to make decisions regarding policies to pursue or revise. Proposals also must include the expressed commitment to supporting the implementation of the policy and practice changes identified in the Core Team's action plan by the most senior executives leading the state-level entity and each participating college.

Each Core Team will work with staff and faculty to advance policies and/or practices that improve outcomes for adult learners. Each Core Team will name two policy or practice changes to implement at the state level, and two policy or practice changes to implement at each college.

Examples of evidence-based policies and/or practices are listed below. Participating states/institutions are also encouraged to identify additional policies or practices that they believe will positively impact their adult students. See the references section for reports on these policies and/or practices.

- Incorporating labor market information into programs of study and student advising;
- Use of credit-for-prior learning and other designs for accelerated program learning and completion;
- Holistic student supports (socio-emotional, financial, academic);
- Changes to instruction and course design and policies; and
- Development of shorter-term credentials connected to longer-term degree paths.

IV. Initiative Design

Design Phase (June 2023 – December 2023)

Activities to occur during the design phase include:

- Virtual kick-off event on June 27, 1 – 3 pm ET for all Core Team members and key individuals from state-level organizations and colleges that are part of the initiative.
- Self-assessment for all states to identify the current status of state-level policies to support adult learners and to identify the status of adult learner policies and/or practices at colleges.

- Regular virtual coaching support for each state and participating colleges within each state to support the self-assessment process and identify goals, key stakeholders, and possible policy and practice changes.
- Design Event to be held in-person in October for teams comprised of 5-8 members total from the state-level organization and participating college. Each will select the policies and/or practices they plan to implement and develop an action plan for their work throughout the initiative.
- Participation in and contribution to monitoring and evaluation activities (see below).

Implementation Phase (January 2024 – October 2024)

Activities to occur during the implementation phase include:

- Regular virtual coaching support for each state and for participating colleges within each state.
- One virtual learning event per quarter on topics related to evidence-based practices that support adult learners at the state and institutional levels.
- 1-2 virtual convenings across all state and institutional teams to collectively share promising practices, celebrate progress, and navigate challenges.
- Participation in and contribution to monitoring and evaluation activities (see below).

V. Evaluation

Throughout the design and implementation phases, an evaluation team will work with coaches and Core Teams to collect qualitative and quantitative data to identify the baseline, track progress against their action plan, and measure other outcomes of the initiative. State and college leads will be expected to participate in and support activities such as survey completion, interviews and data tracking.

Specific outputs and outcomes we will be measuring include:

- Improvements to student advising process including use of labor market data and review of prior learning experiences.
- Progress on implementation of at least two policy or practice changes at state and college levels.
- Support for adults most marginalized by existing systems: adults experiencing economic hardship and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations.

VI. Dissemination of Learnings

Selected applicants will be asked to participate in dissemination activities, such as contributing to written products, speaking at conferences, or participating in webinars to share learnings with the field.

VII. Timeline

	Design Phase			Implementation Phase		Dissemination
	June – Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov - Dec 2023	Jan 2024 – Sept 2024	Oct 2024	November 2024 – February 2025
State- and college-level teams, individually	Assess and plan Virtual coaching		Finalize Action Plans Virtual coaching	Peer learning events (quarterly) Virtual coaching (monthly)		Contribute to case studies and blogs, Share lessons learned through conferences, webinars
Full State Teams (college and state leaders together)	Assess and plan Virtual coaching	Design Event	Finalize Action Plan Virtual coaching	Peer learning events (quarterly) Virtual coaching	Capstone Event	

VIII. Application

[Click here to request the application](#)

IX. Key Criteria for Selection

1. Existing evidence-based, statewide and institutional policies/practices designed to enroll and support adult students to complete credentials with labor market value.
2. Demonstrated success at both state and institutional levels in implementing strategies that have increased enrollment, persistence and completion of adult learner postsecondary credentials.
3. Composition of the Core Team.
4. A project structure and staffing plan that demonstrates capacity to participate in all initiative activities.
5. Disaggregated data at the state and institutional levels that documents progress of existing policies/practices and informs the chosen policies/practices.
6. Data collection systems that can be used at the state and institutional levels to collect data on adult student outcomes and service provision.

Other considerations that may affect our selection:

1. Geographic diversity
2. Diversity of the potential policies/practices proposed

Key Partners

About Jobs for the Future: Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the American workforce and education systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

About ATD: Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a partner of 300+ community and technical colleges that in turn serve more than four million students across the country. Drawing on expert coaches, groundbreaking programs, and a national peer network, we provide institutions with integrated, tailored support from foundational capacities to intentional strategies for supporting students. <https://www.achievingthedream.org>

References

The reports, briefs and studies below include discussion of the policies and/or practices found to be effective for adult learners.

Ann E. Person, Julie Bruch, and Lisbeth Goble, *Supporting Adult Learners from Enrollment to Completion: Implementation Findings from the Adult Promise Evaluation*, (Mathematica, 2021), <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/supporting-adult-learners-from-enrollment-to-completion>.

Ann E. Person, Julie Bruch, and Ashley Hong, *How States and Institutions can Work Together to Serve Adult Learners: Lessons from Adult Promise* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica, 2021), <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/how-states-and-institutions-can-work-together-to-serve-adult-learners-lessons-from-adult-promise>.

Tashera Gale, Wendy Erisman, Alisa Cunningham, *Persevering to Completion, Understanding the Experiences of Adult Students Who Successfully Return to College* (Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation, January 2022) https://higheredinsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/LuminaReport_FINAL.pdf

Himani Gupta, *The Power of Fully Supporting Community College Students: The Effects of the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs After Six Years* (New York, NY: MDRC, 2017), http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2017/01/MDRC_Brief_CUNY_ASAP_Six_Years_October2017.pdf.

Rebecca Klein-Collins et al., *The PLA BOOST: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes* (Chicago, IL: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2020), <https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf>.

Rebecca Klein-Collins, *Attracting Adult Learners with Credit for Prior Learning* (Cael & Charles Framularo, Strada Education Network, January 2022), <https://www.cael.org/hubfs/018-21%20CAEL%20Attracting%20With%20CPL%20Booklet.pdf>

Fulfilling Ohio’s Adult Learner Promise: Adult Learner Working Group, High-Impact Practices Subgroup Report (September 2022) https://highered.ohio.gov/static/files/uploads/FFYF/FFYF-Subgroup-Report_High-Impact-Practices.pdf

“Best Bet Services,” Jobs for the Future, accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.jff.org/what-we-do/impact-stories/best-bet-services/>.

“Realizing the Potential for Rapid Reskilling,” JFF.org, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.jff.org/resources/realizing-potential-rapid-reskilling/>.

Sara Lamback, Carol Gerwin, and Dan Restuccia, *When Is a Job Just a Job—And When Can it Launch a Career? The Real Economic Opportunities of Middle-Skill Work*, https://www.burning-glass.com/wp-content/uploads/BurningGlass_JFF_RealCareerLaddersReport.pdf.

“End Occupational Segregation,” JFF.org, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://info.jff.org/end-occupational-segregation?hsCtaTracking=f182340a-c3da-432d-bf8e-32a8aaa51bcd%7C582cc9d2-0049-49f4-be02-a00fb449a35d>.

“Modernizing Career Navigation in the United States,” JFF.org, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.jff.org/resources/modernizing-career-navigation-in-the-united-states/>.

“Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes, Annual Progress Report – Academic Year 2020/21,” <https://nscresearchcenter.org>, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/>.

The College System of Tennessee Office of Policy and Strategy, *Pathways to Success for Students with Some College, No Degree* (December 2021) <https://www.tbr.edu/sites/default/files/media/2022/02/WorkingPaper4SCNDEmploymentOutcomes.pdf>

Endnotes

¹ **Jamie Merisotis**, “A ‘closing argument’ for the national goal of 60% of adults having more than a high school diploma by 2025,” *Lumina Foundation*, September 15 2020, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/a-closing-argument-for-the-national-goal-of-60-of-adults-having-more-than-a-high-school-diploma-by-2025/>.

² **James Causey, Hee Sun Kim, Mikyung Ryu, Abigail Scheetz, & Doug Shapiro**, *Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes, Annual Progress Report - Academic Year 2020/21*, (Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, May 2022), <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SCNCReportMay2022.pdf>

³ Causey, Ryu, Scheetz, & Shapiro, *Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes*, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SCNCReportMay2022.pdf>

⁴ Causey, Ryu, Scheetz, & Shapiro, *Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes*, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SCNCReportMay2022.pdf>, and The College System of Tennessee Office of Policy and Strategy, *Pathways to Success for Students with Some College, No Degree* (December 2021) <https://www.tbr.edu/sites/default/files/media/2022/02/WorkingPaper4SCNDEmploymentOutcomes.pdf>