



SHEEO

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

ADULT PROMISE PROGRAM: A PILOT DESIGN TEMPLATE FOR STATES

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to assist states interested in implementing a “promise-type” aid program specific to meeting the needs of adult students. It is intended to serve as a playbook to guide states through the implementation and pilot year of such a program. Because SHEEO’s members are the executive directors of the statewide governing and coordinating boards of higher education, this design template focuses on the state-level levers that SHEEO agencies can utilize to implement new policies or programs. With that in mind, it is clear that successful implementation of an adult promise program also requires buy-in from and collaboration with postsecondary institutions as well as other state agencies and key policy makers. ***This document offers suggestions to maximize input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders.***

Over the last two years, a number of states have adopted, considered or proposed legislation creating promise programs. These proposals often are viewed as cost-effective strategies to encourage or promote postsecondary enrollment and improve attainment of credentials of value. For our purpose, credentials of value refer to certificates, associate degrees, bachelor’s degrees, and any others that provide benefits to the individual. These promise programs offer free community college tuition and fees for a specific subset of students in a state. According to research by the Education Commission of the States (ECS)¹, as of July 2016, a total of 22 states proposed 46 pieces of legislation to create these programs within the last year; however, the vast majority limited eligibility to traditional-age students (18-24). Eighteen policy proposals or enactments specifically define eligibility by the student’s age, and 24 proposals limit eligibility by the year that the student graduated from high school.

Two promise programs currently underway in Tennessee and Oregon are geared toward recent high school graduates. These programs function as last dollar scholarships and rely primarily on the federal Pell Grant to cover all or most of the tuition and fees, with existing state grants making up the difference where necessary. These programs do not represent significant investments of new state funding. In fact, for low-income students in Tennessee, tuition is already “free” because the Pell Grant covers these costs. If these programs are successful, it may be due to eliminating the sticker shock many potential students and families face when they consider paying for college prior to applying for financial aid. These programs make the promise of free tuition up front so that affording postsecondary education seems possible. In Tennessee, a strong mentoring component, designed to help students navigate postsecondary education and succeed, also may assist in improving credential attainment.

Simultaneously, with the growing interest in promise programs for traditional students, state SHEEO agencies, legislators, governors, and policy makers have expanded their focus on improving state completion rates and overall postsecondary attainment. Twenty-six states have statewide attainment goals, ranging from 37% of young adults with an associate degree or higher in Kentucky to 80% with a certificate or higher in Oregon². There is recognition among SHEEO leaders that more effectively serving nontraditional-age students is a necessary component to meeting these goals. Lumina Foundation’s *A Stronger Nation* report³ for 2016 shows the need for an additional 10.9 million high quality postsecondary credentials by 2025. They estimate 3.9 million of these could be earned by Americans between the ages of 25 and 54 who already have some college credit but have not earned a degree.

¹ “Free College Legislative Database,” Education Commission of the States [unpublished database], www.ecs.org.

² A map with current postsecondary attainment and state attainment goals is available at: <http://strategylabs.luminafoundation.org/>.

³ Matthews, D. (2016). *A Stronger Nation 2016*. Lumina Foundation. https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation2016.

There are three main reasons that current promise programs (both enacted and proposed) are focused on traditional students:

1. Restricting the population to traditional-age students (usually defined as ages 18-24) limits the cost of the program and also makes the cost more predictable. Unlike adult students, students straight out of high school won't have prior educational debt or have exhausted their aid eligibility. In many states, total tuition and fees at community colleges is less than the full Pell Grant awarded to low-income students with \$0 expected family contribution (EFC). According to College Board's *Trends in College Pricing 2015*⁴, which uses data through 2015-16, U.S. average in-district tuition and fees at public two-year institutions was \$3,440 per year. The maximum Pell Grant for 2016-17 has been set at \$5,815⁵. In contrast, adult students with some college/no degree may no longer be eligible for a Pell Grant or state financial aid because they exhausted these resources during previous attempts to earn a credential. Many state aid programs also restrict adults from receiving their financial aid. ***The cost of a promise program invariably would increase substantially for these students and would have to be covered through state, institutional, or private funds.***
2. In non-higher education circles it is not widely understood or accepted that adult students are a significant portion of undergraduate enrollment—40% are 25 and older⁶. The traditional college experience where students spend the ages of 18 to 22 studying and living on a residential campus is no longer the norm, contrary to beliefs of the general public and many policy makers. This misunderstanding may help explain why all the proposed promise programs were geared exclusively to traditional students.
3. Perhaps most important, linking a promise program to the senior year of high school eases outreach challenges since potential eligible students are essentially a captive audience who can be contacted easily. The promise program in Tennessee includes a number of steps that high school seniors must complete before beginning the program with fall semester enrollment at a community college, including advance FAFSA completion and community service. It is easier to explain the benefits, along with the requirements, of a program to high school seniors compared to a dispersed adult population across the state.

In addition to the outreach challenges, adult students—once enrolled—will face different barriers than traditional students. These challenges, summarized below, may potentially derail an adult student's attempt to earn a credential of value. However, ***a successful adult promise program will take these challenges into account and provide appropriate support services to address them in addition to the promise and delivery of free tuition and fees.***

- For potential adult students, it may have been many years since they engaged with a traditional academic setting, and they may be less prepared for college-level coursework and for navigating the postsecondary system than students straight out of high school. However, adult students

⁴ Ma, J., Baum, S., Pender, M., and Bell, D. (2015). *Trends in College Pricing*. College Board.

<https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/trends-college-pricing-web-final-508-2.pdf>.

⁵ Retrieved on July 18, 2016 from the Federal Student Aid Office of the U.S. Department of Education,

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/grants-scholarships/pell>.

⁶ Taliaferro, W. (2016). *The Case for Redesigning State Financial Aid to Better Serve Nontraditional Adult Students*. Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success. Powerpoint Presentation.

may have developed skills through work or military experience that could translate into college credits via prior learning assessment programs (PLA). One way to entice adult students to postsecondary education may be to offer the opportunity to demonstrate competencies for college credit, thereby shortening the time to a credential and showing the value of adult students' life experiences.

- Unlike traditional students, adult students are more likely to have other obligations such as dependent children and work demands, which make full-time enrollment more challenging. In order to deal with these issues, mentoring, on-campus childcare, flexible scheduling, and alternative delivery methods are critical to successful implementation of a promise program geared to adult students.
- Similarly, adult students typically carry more financial obligations than traditional students. Low-income adults who do not qualify for financial aid because of low credit-hour loads or exhausted eligibility face additional affordability concerns. Adult students may carry student loan debt from prior postsecondary attempts. There are a variety of resources available to help Americans become more economically independent, but these resources do not complement one another. In some circumstances, programs to help sustain people may provide barriers or disincentives to completing a postsecondary credential⁷. A key strategy of a promise program geared toward adult students would be addressing those barriers and allowing adults to access all the financial resources for which they are eligible and attend college simultaneously. For low-income adult students, the critical question may be how combined government assistance from federal, state, and local sources can be leveraged and integrated with support services to increase the student's likelihood of persistence and credential attainment.

It is too early to tell whether traditional promise programs will be successful in increasing both access and attainment of postsecondary credentials of value for students straight out of high school. Initial results, however, are promising with increased enrollment of traditional-age students at community colleges in Tennessee in the first two years of their program⁸. A well-designed promise program geared toward adults could help states make progress toward their completion and attainment goals. A program that better serves adult students must do more than just promise and provide free tuition. It must also include the necessary supports and services tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of adult students to help them succeed.

⁷ Duke-Benfield, A.E. (2016). *New Student Aid Perspectives Column Discusses How Public, Means-Tested Benefits Can Help Low-Income Students Make Ends Meet*. National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. <https://www.nasfaa.org/news-item/Student-Aid-Perspectives-Public-Means-Tested-Benefits>.

⁸ Morabito, Nate (November 16, 2016) Community College Enrollment Down Two Years After Start of Tennessee Promise WJHL.com <http://wjhl.com/2016/11/16/community-college-enrollment-down-two-years-after-start-of-tennessee-promise/>

The purpose of this design template is to enable states to combine the enthusiasm around promise programs with the need to better serve adult students, creating a pilot program to model a promise-type aid program for adult students. Based on our research and from the discussion during the Adult Promise Pilot Program – Design Convening, held May 3 and 4, 2016, in Boulder, CO, an effective program must do much more than cover the cost of tuition and fees from existing financial aid sources. An adult-focused free college policy should provide nontraditional adult students with sufficient financial resources as well as the necessary academic supports and services to earn a credential of value as expeditiously as possible. The program should leverage aid from all resources (not just financial aid) available to low-income students and emphasize consistent (part-time or full-time), year-round enrollment.

The remainder of this document lays out the steps needed to design an adult promise pilot program. It includes estimates of the cost to cover free tuition and fees, along with parameters and considerations in key areas.

PART 1: SURVEY THE LANDSCAPE

A critical first step for states setting up an adult promise pilot program is to review, understand, and establish the landscape with respect to the adult population. State SHEEO agencies can do so by analyzing data from internal and external sources and reviewing past efforts and initiatives to serve adult students. The primary reasons for completing this first step are:

1. To understand the magnitude of need and opportunity within a state and use this information to garner support for the program among key constituencies
2. To understand how state and institutional policies are aligned with meeting the needs of adult students
3. To critically review past efforts to improve adult student attainment to discover lessons learned and opportunities for improvement
4. To assess which institutions are the best candidates for the pilot program
5. To establish benchmarks from which to evaluate the pilot program

DEGREE ATTAINMENT

According to Lumina Foundation's 2016 *A Stronger Nation* report⁹, 10.9 million more Americans need to earn a postsecondary credential of value by 2025. They estimate 3.9 million (35.8 % of the gap) of these credentials could be awarded to nontraditional adult students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), there are over 44 million adults aged 25-54 with a high school diploma as their highest level of education and another 36 million with some college credits but no earned credential¹⁰.

In addition to these national data, *A Stronger Nation* provides a snapshot of each state and is a good starting point for states to get a sense of where their needs and opportunities exist to serve adult students through a promise program. Data for each state include:

- Level of education for state residents
- Credential-attainment rates among residents (ages 25-64) by race/ethnicity
- College enrollment rates compared to national rates by age and race/ethnicity
- Associate degree and above attainment rates by county

⁹Matthews, D. (2016). *A Stronger Nation 2016*. Lumina Foundation. https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation2016.

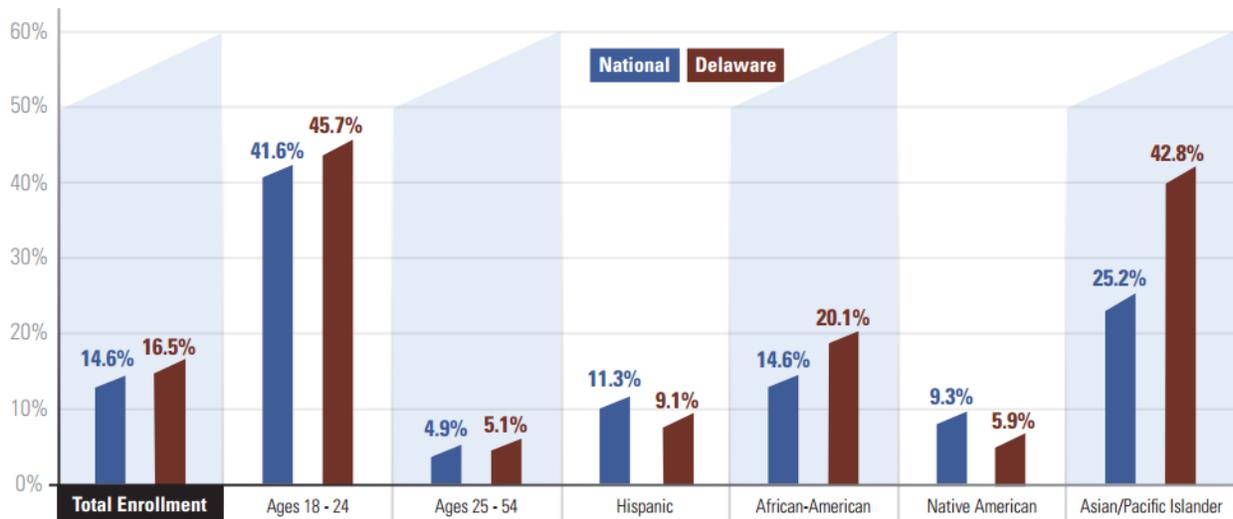
¹⁰U.S. Census Bureau (2014). *American Community Survey (ACS)*. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/summary-file.html>.

STATE DATA EXAMPLE: LUMINA'S STRONGER NATION REPORT¹¹

Levels of education for Colorado residents, ages 25-64



College enrollment among Delaware residents, ages 18-54



From these data, a state can learn, for example, that a significant percentage of their overall population has some college but no degree and may decide to focus their pilot program on this subpopulation. Similarly, a state may look at a particular ethnicity or a set of counties with below average attainment rates and focus the pilot program on a community college that primarily serves those populations or counties.

The ACS data provide important information on education level and attainment in a state; however, they do not fully describe how well a state's higher education system is serving adult students. For example, a state (or a county within a state) may have above average attainment even though its institutions have below average completion rates because residents move there after completing their

¹¹ www.luminafoundation.org/

credentials in another state. Other data sources are needed to assess how well a state is serving adult students. These include other national datasets like the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)¹² or the Completion College America (CCA) metrics¹³ (for the 30 participating CCA states). The NSC data follow students across institutions and state lines providing states with data on how many of their students who never earned a credential eventually completed one at another institution (or in another state), while CCA data includes progress and success metrics for students over the age of 25.

In addition to these national datasets, states should review their student level data systems. According to SHEEO's survey on state unit record data systems, 51 agencies reported that they collected date of birth (and could therefore calculate age) in 2010. By 2016, this number increased to 58 of the 59 agencies¹⁴. States can use this demographic information to analyze outcomes on a variety of other topics that they collect at the unit record level broken out by age, providing additional context on which institutions within a state seem better at serving adult students.

INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Institutional Characteristics (IC) file in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)¹⁵ can provide states with detailed information on which services institutions provide. While state SHEEO agency leaders and staff know their public institutions well, the IC data file still provides valuable information on the services those institutions, and Title IV private institutions, provide. For example, from this file, states can learn if each institution currently offers:

- Credit for life experiences (e.g., PLA)
- Undergraduate programs or courses offered via distance education
- Weekend/evening course offerings
- Academic/career counseling services
- Employment services for students
- Placement services for completers
- On-campus childcare for students' children

In other words, the IPEDS IC file provides a snapshot of each institution's current ability to offer the support services that will be critical to maximizing the success of adult students.

From these internal and external data sources, a state can establish both the need to serve adult students more effectively and how doing so will impact educational attainment. Further, these data provide important information that can help guide the design of the pilot program, such as which subpopulations and which institutions to focus on.

Additionally, states should conduct a policy review in order to see whether or not state and institutional policies are aligned with the needs of adult students. Where disconnects exist, is there an opportunity to revise these policies? For example, is a state's financial aid program limited to full-time students only? If so, can it be altered to provide aid to part-time students since adult students may need to attend part time due to work and family commitments? As another example, will institutional policies regarding

¹² <https://nscresearchcenter.org/>

¹³ <http://completecollege.org/>

¹⁴ Armstrong, J., and Whitfield, C. (2016). *The State of State Postsecondary Data Systems*. State Higher Education Executive Officers Association. http://sheeo.org/sites/default/files/publications/SHEEO_StrongFoundations2016_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁵ <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/Default.aspx>

outstanding debt or unpaid fees deter adult students from returning to complete their credential? If so, can a debt forgiveness or forbearance policy be implemented to eliminate this barrier?

PAST EFFORTS

Equally important is to review past efforts and programs intended to improve adult student completion rates. Many states have led efforts to reach out to adults with some college but no degree with varying levels of success (e.g., Minnesota, South Dakota). Before implementing an adult promise pilot program, states should review their own past efforts critically, along with efforts in other states, if appropriate. Were past efforts successful? If not, why not? Were they more successful at certain institutions? If so, why was that so and can that success be scaled to other institutions? In states where past efforts have occurred, we suggest interviewing those individuals directly involved and, where possible, involve them (and their institutions) in the design and implementation of this pilot program.

There have also been multiple regional and national efforts to engage (or re-engage) adults in order to improve completion rates. “Non-traditional No More,” a Lumina-funded initiative, was overseen by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) from 2008 to 2010 and involved efforts in five states: Arkansas, Colorado, Nevada, North Dakota, and South Dakota¹⁶. The project focused on helping those states determine their “ready adult” population—those adults with almost enough credits for a credential but who were not currently enrolled. The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) led Project Win-Win for four years until 2013¹⁷. This project worked with institutions in nine states (Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, and Wisconsin). The primary goal of the initiative was to award retroactive associate degrees to students who had earned sufficient credits to earn them. A secondary effort more germane to this project was identifying adults who were 9-12 credits short of earning an associate degree and bringing them back to earn their credentials. According to the project website, 20,000 students were identified as being within 12 credits of a degree and almost 1,700 of these students re-enrolled. Both [WICHE](http://www.wiche.edu) and [IHEP](http://www.ihep.org) maintain webpages for these past projects that provide results and lessons learned.

Pilot states should review the summary and results documentation for these projects to understand where past efforts to improve adult student completion have succeeded and where better results could be achieved. Finally, pilot states should review and engage with the [Adult College Completion Network](http://www.adultcollegecompletion.org)¹⁸ to learn of best practices in serving adult students. Table 1 can be used as a reference guide for states developing the foundation for their state pilot program.

ESTABLISHING BENCHMARKS FOR EVALUATION

Program evaluation is an essential component of any program, particularly a pilot program where demonstrating a positive effect is necessary to move the program to scale. Benchmarks for evaluation should be based on the demographics of each state’s population and institutions, yet states should work to establish common measures across their programs. To establish a baseline, a state might start with current students in a comparable population (e.g., adults over 25 with some prior credit before enrolling at their current institution). How many students are in this population? Are certain demographics over or underrepresented? Use credit completion, graduation rates, and cost-per-credential for those students as baselines from which to assess the pilot program. Further comparisons might be made

¹⁶ <http://www.wiche.edu/ntnm>

¹⁷ <http://www.ihep.org/research/initiatives/project-win-win>

¹⁸ <http://www.adultcollegecompletion.org/>

between program participants and adults who are not enrolled in postsecondary education. Are program participants more successful in the workforce than those who are not enrolled? Do they require fewer resources from the state?

Take the time to map out a comprehensive program evaluation plan *before* pilot implementation. If data for your state are not available from the resources listed in the *external resources* table (below), consider using national baseline data, or collecting data directly from the selected institutions to establish the baseline from which the program can be evaluated. See PART 7: ESTABLISH PROGRAM EVALUATION for additional information on evaluating an adult promise pilot program.

TABLE 1. RESOURCES

	RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION	WEBSITE
MEASURING THE MAGNITUDE OF NEED	American Community Survey	State population-level educational level and attainment	www.census.gov/programs
	Lumina's <i>A Stronger Nation</i> state reports	Attainment by age and race/ethnicity	www.luminafoundation.org
	National Student Clearinghouse	Student migration and completion out of state	www.nscresearchcenter.org
	Complete College America Dataset	Progress and success metrics for adult students	www.completecollege.org
	State-level data systems	Detailed information on student population	N/A
UNDERSTANDING POLICY ALIGNMENT	SHEEO's Strong Foundations	Capabilities and weaknesses of state data system	www.sheeo.org
	CLASP's Benefits Access for College Completion	Interactions between government benefits	www.clasp.org
	NASFAA's Student Aid Perspectives	Interactions between government benefits	www.nasfaa.org
REVIEWING PAST EFFORTS	State or governing board policies	Review policies for alignment with adult student needs	Various
	Tennessee Promise	Mentoring in a statewide promise program	www.tennesseepromise.gov
	WICHE's Non-traditional No More	Determining the "ready adult" population	www.wiche.edu/ntnm
	Adult College Completion Network	Best practices for serving adult students	www.adultcollegecompletion.org
	IHEP's Project Win-Win	Awarding retroactive degrees and capturing near-completers	www.ihep.org/research
	Past efforts in appropriate states	Understanding lessons learned from past efforts to serve adult students	N/A
ASSESSING PILOT SITES	Lumina's <i>A Stronger Nation</i> state reports	Attainment by county	www.luminafoundation.org
	IPEDS Institutional Characteristics survey	Availability of services for nontraditional students per institution	www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds
ESTABLISHING BENCHMARKS	State-level data systems	Detailed information on student population and success	N/A

PART 2: CREATE INTENTIONAL PROGRAM LIMITS

Creating limits on program eligibility is essential for any program that relies on limited funds. The tables below list choices states can make in designing an adult promise pilot program. These choices can control costs by defining the scope of the pilot. Limitations on which students can qualify for the program will reduce the number of eligible adults for the program. Credential-type limitations change what the program covers, narrowing a student’s options within the program. States should carefully consider the specific goals of their program in order to determine these limits. For example, a program aiming to increase attainment for low-income students could focus funding on Pell-eligible students, while a program to meet state attainment goals may need to also serve students with a slightly higher income. In addition, program limitations can be chosen in conjunction with the estimated cost analysis in PART 4: ESTIMATE PROGRAM COSTS. Tables 2 and 3 below summarize various ways to limit an adult promise pilot program.

TABLE 2. STUDENT PROGRAM LIMITS

	OPTIONS	PROS	CONS
AGE	All independent students (determined by FAFSA)	Proxy for most students with nontraditional circumstances	Many younger, independent students are still eligible for state aid programs geared to traditional students
	25-49	Easy to collect data on the 25-49 population (standard metric)	May be too broad—Is a 25-year-old facing the same concerns as a 40-year-old?
	25+	Provides opportunities for adults of all ages	Limited ROI and workforce value for older adults in the upper range
INCOME	No limits	Inclusive, easy message to market/promote	Significant cost where it might not be necessary
	Portion above Pell (i.e., 150%, 200%)	Supports more students with low income	Cost is higher than a more strict income limit
	Eligible for Pell based on income	Limits pilot tuition and fees costs significantly	Excludes middle class families, working students, those with exhausted Pell
SPECIAL POPULATIONS	Target certain populations (military, unemployed, receiving benefits)	Focuses help for a specific population of interest	Challenges with outreach and making progress toward attainment goals
PRIOR CREDIT	No prior credit required	More equitable for students regardless of past	Cost
	Require prior credit (e.g., 1 semester, 1 year, 75% of degree)	Prior personal interest and commitment, states may have had prior financial investment	Excludes students without the resources to attend any college
TIME OFF	If requiring prior credit, include time off limitations (e.g., 1 to 5 years)	Necessary for some college no degree population; previous investment	May encourage current students to stop out in order to qualify
ACADEMIC ABILITY	No limitation	Increases access	Lower retention, higher cost per degree
	Require passing score on placement exams	Focuses funding on students who are academically capable	Excludes remedial students and those who have been out of school for a while
	Prior postsecondary work GPA 2.5/3.0 or above	Works for students who have prior credit, ensures academic capability	Barrier for students with extenuating circumstances, incompatible for students with no prior credit

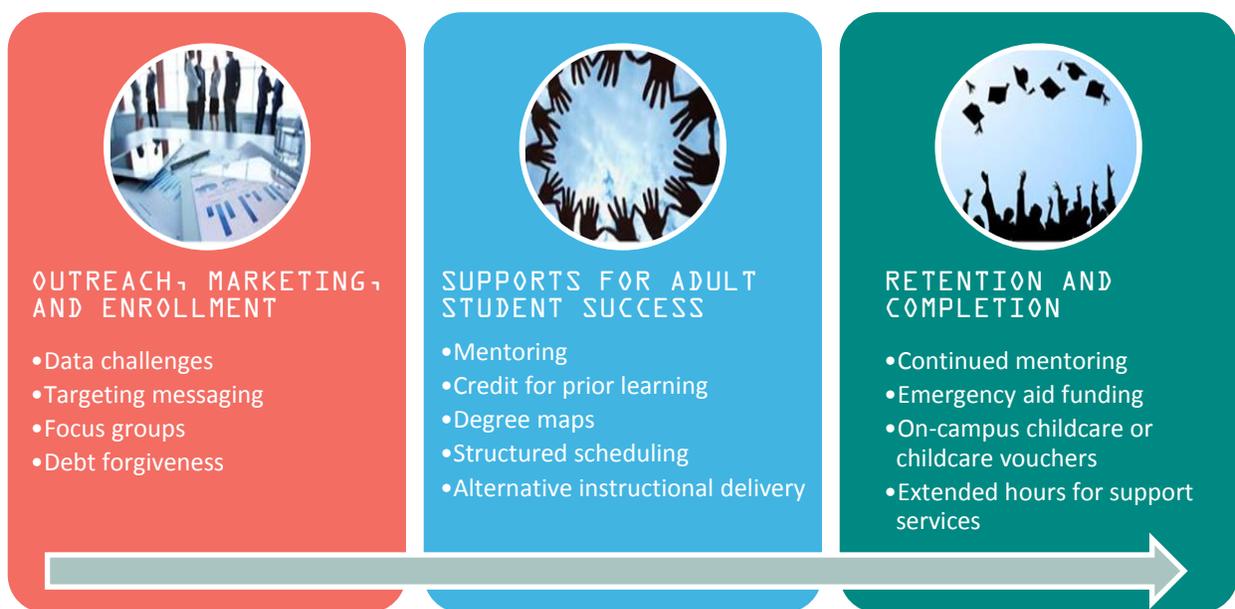
TABLE 3. INSTITUTION / CREDENTIAL TYPE PROGRAM LIMITS

	OPTIONS	PROS	CONS
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR	No limits on institution type	Higher degrees are also needed for the workforce, includes four-year stop-outs, makes clear adult success is a priority of higher education system	Complex admissions, eligibility questions for transfer students
	Two-year institutions only	Lower cost, easy admission process	Low graduation rates, excludes many stop-outs, causes under-matching
ADDITIONAL COURSES	Certificate programs	Including certificates help meet attainment targets and many are tied to workforce needs	May not provide long term ROI for students
	Remediation, non-degree	Removes entry barriers for many students	Cost, low completion rate, longer time to ultimate degree or certificate
INTENSITY	No requirements for intensity	Very inclusive	May increase the time it takes to earn credential
	Term-based credit requirement (e.g., at least 6 credits or 12 credits)	Higher intensity correlates with higher retention and graduation rates	May overload working students or students with family obligations
	Year-long credit requirement (i.e., summer enrollment or 24 credits per year)	Increases student choice and flexibility while maintaining progress	May exclude students who cannot remain enrolled through the summer
AREA OF FOCUS	No limits on major	Allows greater flexibility for varied job opportunities, serves more students	Weakens connection between funding and fulfilling workforce needs
	Limit to high demand majors for workforce or STEM fields	Clear and definable incentive and goals, potential connections with workforce	Prerequisites create barrier, other degrees are important for economic vitality

PART 3: TAILOR THE PROGRAM TO ADULT STUDENTS

Existing promise programs feature additional components beyond covering free tuition for participating students. Often these additional components are integral to a program's success or failure. For example, an analysis of the City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP)¹⁹ found that one of the most critical components for ensuring student degree completion was the unlimited transit pass provided to students contingent upon fulfilling program requirements. ***An adult promise program may prove successful due to one or more of the additional services described below, and not just because of the free tuition component.***

Effectively serving adult students involves many services and programs that can be considered on a continuum with three distinct phases.



First, **states must find eligible adults and get them to enroll in the program.** This involves marketing and outreach to eligible adults and addressing the lack of accessible data on these potential students. Second, once enrolled, **students must be set up to succeed as expeditiously as possible.** Components in this phase can include a prior learning assessment designed to award meaningful and transferrable college credit for life experience that has resulted in demonstrated learning, and degree mapping which, in advance, outlines the courses and schedule for the full length of the credential program. Third, once the program has begun **states must maximize the likelihood that students will succeed and attain a credential of value.** This requires a variety of programs from on-campus childcare to providing emergency funds to help adult students deal with unanticipated expenses (e.g., a necessary car repair).

Before describing the various components that states should consider when implementing an adult-focused promise program, it is important to acknowledge concern about the costs of these program components. Clearly, one reason promise programs resonate with policy makers, at least conceptually,

¹⁹ <http://www.mdrc.org/project/evaluation-accelerated-study-associate-programs-asap-developmental-education-students#overview>.

is that they should be relatively inexpensive for states to implement. Implementing the various program components described below as part of the promise program will certainly drive up its cost and estimating each cost is beyond the scope of this design template document. However, many of these programs already exist at institutions of higher education. They may be geared or set up for traditional students currently and with incremental costs could be tailored to serve adult students as well. Given their importance in supporting adult student success, cost alone should not deter these components from being included in a state's adult promise program.

Finally, although these programs may drive up the total cost of an adult promise program on the front end, ***because they positively impact student success, the cost per completion may actually decrease.*** This was the case with the CUNY ASAP program which was more expensive per student, but much less expensive per completion compared to the status quo on the CUNY campuses²⁰.

OUTREACH, MARKETING, AND ENROLLMENT

Most of the prior work geared toward improving success of adult students in postsecondary education has focused on the subpopulation with some college but no degree. With this population, there may be institutional level data available that can be used to contact these potential students and encourage them to return to postsecondary education; however, contact information from a student's prior enrollment is often not up-to-date. Prior state efforts to reconnect with these potential students often have hit road blocks. As one example, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (Minnesota State) ran the Graduate Minnesota program to reach out to students with some college no degree (estimated at over 600,000 Minnesotans in 2011)²¹. The project used regular U.S. mail to reach out to over 40,000 adult learners and sent an email blast to over 19,000. According to Minnesota State, from this targeted outreach:

- 2,928 (7.9%) enrolled in a system institution the following year
- 1,554 (4.2%) enrolled in a non-system institution the following year
- In total, approximately 12% enrolled as a result of this outreach
- Of those enrolled at Minnesota State institutions, 782 (26.7% of those who enrolled) have since earned a credential to date
- Of those enrolled at a non-system institution, 248 (16% of those who enrolled) have since earned a credential to date

This response rate required working with a specific subpopulation for which prior contact information was available. For the broader adult population without a degree, targeted outreach is even more difficult. States who decide to focus an adult promise pilot program toward all adults without a credential (regardless of prior credit) are likely to have minimal data available from which to target outreach. ***In lieu of contact information, these states may need to rely on public service campaigns and social media platforms to promote the opportunity.***

It is critical that the message of the public service campaign is effective and targeted in a manner that resonates with those adults in a state without a postsecondary credential. Indiana's "You Can. Go Back." campaign began in early 2016 with a series of core messages meant to encourage adult students to go

²⁰ See <http://www.mdrc.org/project/evaluation-accelerated-study-associate-programs-asap-developmental-education-students#overview>.

²¹ Younger, T., Anderson, R., and Fergus, M. (May 3, 2016). *Minnesota Adult Learners* [Presentation at SHEEO Adult Promise Pilot Program - Design Convening, May 3 and 4, 2016, Boulder, CO].

back to college. These messages came from Indiana’s work with focus groups, where they learned that adults with some college but no degree did want to graduate in order to make more money, have opportunities for advancement, realize personal goals, and provide a better life for their families. However, lack of time, work and family commitments, lack of money, and indebtedness contributed to their hesitation to return to college²². Further, **focus group participants indicated they were negatively impacted by their past experiences and reluctant to try again** and the adults who did want to return were confused and did not know where to go to get started. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education used these findings to craft messages delivered around the core message:

“A lot has changed since you left college. You Can. Go Back.”

These messages were targeted to adults in the state with some college but no degree. Below are two examples of the marketing materials²³:



These messages are tied directly to the lessons learned from the focus groups and acknowledge that the postsecondary system has also changed (e.g., now offering PLA and flexible course schedules). This program is an excellent example of a state’s deliberate effort to understand its adult population and determine how to market to them in a manner that resonates. It is important to note that the messaging directs potential returning students to a central, web-based resource to get started in the process.

²² Ancel, S. (May 3, 2016). *You Can. Go Back. Comprehensive PPT ICHE*. [Presentation at SHEEO Adult Promise Pilot Program - Design Convening, May 3 and 4, 2016, Boulder, CO]

²³ See <http://www.learnmoreindiana.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/You-Can-Go-Back-Campaign-Overview-and-FAQs-2.pdf>.

States considering implementing an adult promise program should conduct research (perhaps including focus groups) to understand the target population prior to beginning the outreach campaign.

Finally, outstanding debt may play a large factor in the reluctance for adults with some college but no degree to attempt college again. This barrier goes beyond student loan debt, and could include fees and charges such as parking tickets or outstanding registration fees from their previous experience on a college campus. Participating institutions in an adult promise program should be strongly encouraged (if not required) to forgive minor campus debts and provide counseling about refinancing/restructuring options for student loans and/or other more substantial debts in order to support a student's return.

SUPPORTS FOR ADULT STUDENT SUCCESS

Once adults commit to a postsecondary education program, it is important to set them up for success, providing a “jump start” on their degree program. States should consider the programs, policies, and concepts described in this section when designing a pilot program. They are intended to help students navigate the postsecondary environment, reduce the time it takes to complete their degree, and ultimately reduce cost.

1. **MENTORING** Adult students will either have no experience with higher education or enough time will have passed since their prior attempt that they will return to a different and unfamiliar environment. As was discovered from the focus groups Indiana held prior to launching You Can. Go Back., many adults with some college but no degree are frustrated from their prior attempt. A good mentor can help students address this frustration and concern while they move through their chosen program(s).

Mentoring is a critical component of the Tennessee Promise program²⁴ and because these mentors are volunteers it would be inexpensive to implement a similar “light touch” mentoring component into an adult promise pilot program. According to the Tennessee Promise program website, volunteers “are the folks who will help students navigate the college admissions process and ensure they complete Tennessee Promise program requirements.” In Tennessee, partnering organizations supply mentors to help participating students. One can also volunteer to mentor from the program website. A background check is required which adds a negligible cost to the program. After completing mandatory training, mentors commit to 10 to 15 hours annually in order to assist 5 to 10 high school seniors complete the necessary steps to finish the program. Similarly, mentors in an adult promise program should connect potential students to an institution and help them enroll and “get on board” at the institution. This could involve assistance applying for financial aid, choosing a degree program, connecting with appropriate offices at the institution, and connecting with an institutional advisor to assist the student through completion. Recruiting mentors for an adult promise pilot program is also an opportunity to connect with the business and nonprofit sectors and may help with community engagement to support the program during its pilot year (see PART 6: INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN AND STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS for more information).

²⁴ See <http://tnpromise.gov/volunteers.shtml>.

2. **PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT** Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) awards college credit for past experiences that are relevant to a student’s program of study. The Center for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)²⁵ is a resource that states can utilize to incorporate PLA into their promise programs. At many institutions PLA capabilities already exist and are considered a best practice for serving adult students and these institutions should be considered strong candidates for the pilot program.

- For purposes of the promise pilot program, PLA should be considered a means to award college credit for past experience that shortens the time for adult students to earn their degree. According to CAEL²⁶, “Adults who pursue postsecondary education often bring with them considerable college level learning that they acquired from their work, military, or life experience. [PLA] can save students a significant amount of time that would otherwise be spent completing coursework in subjects they have already learned.”
- In order for PLA to actually reduce the time to a degree, it must award credit that counts toward a degree, not just elective credits. Further, in most cases, students must pay a fee for the portfolio assessment that determines how much credit to award for prior experience. While this fee is normally cheaper than tuition charges, it should be covered as part of the promise of free tuition inherent in this program.
- Faculty at participating institutions should be encouraged to consider PLA credits and other institutions in the state should be asked to include these credits as part of transfer and articulation agreements.

3. **DEGREE MAPS, STRUCTURED SCHEDULES, AND YEAR-ROUND ENROLLMENT**

Traditional higher education embraces choice. Students have thousands of courses from which to choose as well as hundreds of majors. There is little guidance provided unless students seek it out and the responsibility for crafting a schedule to meet the requirements of a degree usually falls on the individual student. Each semester involves classes scheduled at different times. Even if the student manages to make all the right choices, the necessary courses for their degree may not be offered the semester in which they are needed. The end result of these myriad choices for many students is an unfinished program of study at worst, and too many excess credit hours earned at best.

- This system is even more problematic for adults who are more likely to have work and family commitments that complicate their schedules. Even more so than traditional students, adult students need structure and consistent course offerings. An adult promise program should enable participants to choose their certificate or degree programs and develop degree maps that lay out the courses and sequencing of the entire program of study. Further, structured block schedules and year-round enrollment should be strongly encouraged to allow adults to plan most effectively to balance coursework with life commitments.

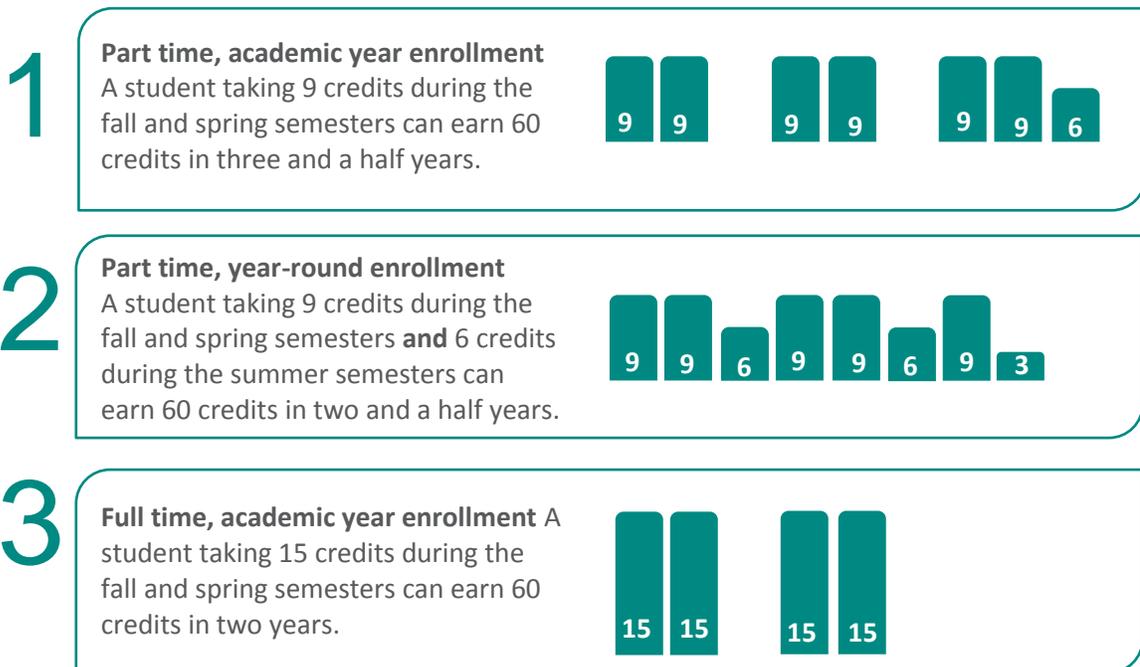
²⁵ <http://www.cael.org/>

²⁶ Olson, R., and Klein-Collins, R. (2014). *LearningCounts Portfolio Assessment Means Cost Savings for Students...and Employers*. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). <http://www.cael.org/employer/publication/learning-counts-portfolio-assessment-means-cost-savings-for-students-and-employers>.

- Complete College America (CCA) promotes structured schedules as one of their Game Changer policies. According to their website²⁷:

Structured scheduling is easiest to accomplish when it is used in whole programs of study. Students make one choice — their program of study — and then colleges make the decisions about the necessary sequence of courses. The colleges then block the required course sequences in coherent, connected schedules. This approach has the added benefit of eliminating common errors by students when choosing courses. And institutions benefit when they can predict with near certainty — often semesters or years in advance — the timing and capacity of required courses needed to complete chosen programs on schedule.

- There is a push to encourage full-time enrollment for students as a means to increase on-time completion of certificates and degrees (e.g., 15 to Finish campaigns)²⁸. Given work and life commitments, enrolling in 15 credit hours per term is probably not feasible for most adult students. Part-time enrollment usually will be necessary and will increase the time it takes to earn a credential. Encouraging year-round enrollment is a possible means to shorten the time it takes to earn a degree for the part-time student. As shown below, enrolling in 15 credits per term leads to an associate degree in two years. Attending part-time taking 9 credits per term, but also 6 credits over the summer term (where that is still part-time enrollment) will enable a student to complete their AA degree in less than three years.



²⁷ Complete College America. *Guided Pathways to Success*. <http://completecollege.org/the-game-changers/#clickBoxTeal>.

²⁸ <http://15tofinish.com/>

- In summary, using degree maps with structured scheduling for the length of the program and encouraging year-round enrollment eliminates some of the barriers adult students may face as they embark on their postsecondary education. They will be better able to plan and balance their work and life commitments with their schooling. Such a program allows them to develop a long-term, consistent work schedule with their employers that accommodates their class schedules. The structured schedule also can be set up to take advantage of alternative instructional delivery.
4. **ALTERNATIVE INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY** Another way to provide flexibility and reduce the time it takes for adult students to complete their degree programs is to utilize alternative instructional delivery methods. For example, classes taken through blended instructional delivery or in back-to-back blocks and potentially on nights or weekends would reduce transportation time to and from the campus. Given that many adult students will be a number of years out from an academic setting, the likelihood of remediation is high and placing these students into modified remediation programs can reduce the time it takes to be ready for college level work. The opportunity to take classes online may provide additional flexibility to adult students and enable them to do coursework when they have available time (e.g., after their children have gone to bed).

RETENTION AND COMPLETION

Additional challenges arise as adult students move through their courses toward their degree. These challenges become potential barriers to student success and threaten to derail a student from the degree path. As states design an adult promise pilot program they should consider incorporating an emergency aid fund, working with institutions with established childcare centers, providing childcare vouchers or other assistance, and requiring participating institutions to offer expanded hours of student services to allow adult students to pay bills or meet with an advisor at a time that works with their schedules.

1. **EMERGENCY AID FUND** According to the National Association of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)²⁹, college administrators are beginning to manage and operate emergency aid programs to cover unexpected expenses that may cause a student to drop out of college. A student may not have the means to cover the cost of a car repair, suddenly lacking the ability to get to class. A \$300 emergency aid grant may enable that student to pay for the repair and continue the course of study.
 - While many institutions offer emergency aid programs to help students deal with unexpected expenses, many students are not aware these programs exist. Word of mouth is the primary way that these programs are promoted with most grants falling between \$100 and \$1,000. Institutions must balance the need to promote the program with the limited funds available. Students in an adult promise pilot program should be made aware that emergency funds may be available on a case-by-case basis throughout their program of study for unexpected emergencies.

²⁹ Kruger, K., Parnell, A., and Wesaw, A. (2016). *Landscape Analysis of Emergency Aid Programs*. National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA). https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Emergency_Aid_Report.pdf

2. **ON-CAMPUS CHILDCARE** Research from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research³⁰ (IWPR) shows 26% of college students have children while the number of campuses offering childcare continues to decline. In 2014, only 45% of community colleges reported providing on-campus childcare, providing one child slot for every ten students in need of the service³¹. Childcare is a barrier to postsecondary success for adult students in two ways. First, childcare is expensive and the financial burden makes it difficult to work toward a credential. In addition, children in a daycare setting often become sick, requiring their parent to “drop everything” and remove the child from care. This reality means that employers and higher education institutions must be flexible in order to accommodate the parent’s needs; however, most are not.
 - States designing an adult promise pilot program should diligently work to address the needs of adult students with dependent children. Further research from IWPR provides examples of institutions that offer childcare on campus, provide assistance in finding the appropriate care at another location, and help to fund childcare. For example, the Oklahoma City Community College Child Development Center and Lab School offers drop-in care for children of current students at a rate of \$10 per three hour session³². Reservations are required but made for the entire semester in line with the student’s course schedule. Lane Community College in Oregon offers an on-campus resource center that helps students find appropriate care their children.
3. **CONTINUED MENTORING** Given the challenges that adult students are likely to face, a more involved “heavy touch” mentoring or coaching program may be a critical component to helping students stay on track to finish their degree or credential. In contrast to the light touch, volunteer-based mentoring component described above, continued mentoring is more costly. Participating institutions will need to devote staff time and resources to more intensive advising and coaching with higher numbers of interactions and check-ins with each student.
4. **EXPANDED HOURS OF SERVICE** As mentioned above, adult students may benefit from block scheduled courses delivered during evening hours or on weekends. Such a schedule allows students to balance their course work with employment hours and also reduces the amount of time spent commuting to and from campus. However, the benefit of such a schedule is lost if students have to come to campus during normal business hours to meet with an advisor or to pay a bill, for example. Institutions participating in an adult promise pilot program should ensure the hours that student services, advising, financial aid, and other administrative offices are open align with these students’ schedules.

While these support services may be expensive, they are critical components to better serving adult students providing the necessary supports to help them succeed. States should investigate opportunities to partner with other government programs, foundations, and the business community to provide the resources to meet this need.

³⁰ Institute for Women’s Policy Research. *Student Parent Success Initiative*. <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/student-parent-success-initiative/resources-publications>

³¹ Institute for Women’s Policy Research. (2016). *Student Parents’ Access to Child Care Continued to Decline in 2015*. <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/student-parents2019-access-to-campus-child-care-continued-to-decline-in-2015>

³² See <http://www.occc.edu/childdev/>

PART 4: ESTIMATE PROGRAM COSTS

When designing an adult promise pilot program, states need to consider which costs to cover. For example, many potential adult students with dependents are the primary earners in their households, and a reduction in work hours may lead to food or housing insecurity. At the same time, many working adults *without* dependents are above the income limit for a Pell Grant yet cannot meet their living costs if their wages or work hours are reduced. For this reason, it is particularly important for adult students to understand, anticipate, and plan for the real costs of their entire program in advance. It may help to model potential financial contributions from the student's perspective. In a promise program, the student's portion of the cost of attendance should not be more than they can be expected to contribute from working a reasonable number of hours while enrolled at an institution. The following questions can help with program design:

1. How many hours can adult students work each week?
 - Base this on the chosen enrollment pattern and intensity limitations.
2. What is the take-home pay for a minimum wage earner in the state?
 - Use the hours and wage to calculate a base monthly income.
3. What is a reasonable cost of living in the state?
 - Consider cost-of-living estimates posted at two-year institutions.
4. Can students reasonably pay for their cost of living with the monthly income calculated above, or will they need additional funding?

As an example, the Washington Student Achievement Council's [interactive affordability model](#)³³ sets parameters of affordability for traditional-age students³⁴: This model allows the council to understand the true cost of postsecondary education for different types of students in their state.

Estimating the costs of a pilot program requires considering many moving parts. The intentional program limits a state chooses will have the largest impact, but existing state grant programs, the income distribution of the population, and tuition costs will also impact the bottom line. While additional program components like mentoring and childcare may add to the program cost, the initial cost estimation should focus on costs associated with the "promise" component (tuition, fees, emergency fund, etc.). In addition, states should consider selecting institutions that already have many supports like mentoring, flexible scheduling, and prior learning assessment. Using the data resources provided in the "Survey the Landscape" portion of this document, a state can create a cost estimation structure using the following components along with their intentional program limits:

STATE POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

1. What percent of adult students attend two-year vs. four-year institutions?
2. In each sector, what percent of adult students attend part-time vs. full-time?
3. What is the distribution of estimated family contribution (EFC) for current students OR what is the state income distribution of students with no degree or some college but no degree?

³³Sharpe, R., and Fridley, J. (2014). *Affordability Model Handout*. Washington Student Achievement Council. <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2014.AffordabilityModelHandout.pdf>.

³⁴<http://www.wsac.wa.gov/>

REVENUES AND EXPENSES

1. What is the average tuition and fees for students at the selected institutions?
2. What is the cost of books and supplies per academic year?
3. What are the costs of living and an emergency fund?
4. What portion of these costs is covered by the federal Pell Grant?
5. What state grants apply to these students?
6. How much can the student reasonably contribute?
7. Will institutions cover any additional supports?
8. What other potential revenue sources can be leveraged to help fund the program (e.g., community foundation support, support from the business community)?

INTERACTIVE DASHBOARD

An interactive Tableau™ dashboard is available to determine quick estimates of the cost of the pilot. This dashboard uses publically available data to aggregate an estimate for a 1,000 student pilot. This tool can be used to help answer many of the questions and considerations throughout this document, such as the financial benefits of intentional program limits and the components that can be added with minimal financial investment. While the cost of attendance and population distribution data are specific to each state, it is important to remember that the income information comes from a national data source and may not represent the EFC distribution and Pell award structure in a given state. View the dashboard and find more information here:

<http://tabsoft.co/2abSwsY>

Using data from Tableau, the following table shows the estimated annual cost for a 1,000 student pilot program in each participating state. The parameters used in Tableau to obtain these numbers are:

1. Pell-eligible students
1. No limit on full or part time
2. Two-year sector only
1. Covers tuition only
2. No emergency fund
3. Excludes state grants
4. No additional sources of revenue

For each state, the chart below lists the costs based on these parameters for each state and the U.S.

ESTIMATED COST PER 1000 STUDENTS (ACADEMIC YEAR)	
State	Estimated Cost
U.S.	\$350,004
Maine	\$326,937
Minnesota	\$548,194
Oklahoma	\$378,185
Virginia	\$364,810
Washington	\$315,057

Without considering the additional financial barriers adult students face, an adult promise program is relatively inexpensive like those geared toward traditional-age students. That said, a successful program needs to consider the entire financial situation of a student. If you expand the cost estimation to include additional expenses (cost of living, books and supplies, etc.), and funding from state grants (when applicable) as well as the amount a working student could reasonably contribute to his or her expenses, the estimated cost to completely fund 1,000 students increases. For example the cost in Maine increases to \$3,180,000.

Many additional costs such as expanded service hours, offering PLA, and forgiving small amounts of debt may be covered by participating institutions. However, some additional components would add to the cost for a state. For example, if institutions do not offer an emergency fund, the state can expect to spend roughly \$200,000 to make small one-time grants of up to \$400 available for adult students in emergency situations. Heavy-touch mentoring would likely require additional staff. States should estimate these costs based on salary and benefits costs for comparable positions.

PART 5: MAXIMIZE RESOURCES FROM ALL SOURCES OF AID

The promise of free tuition and fees covers the basic cost of college but does not come close to covering the full cost of attendance. Students, especially adult students, must find the resources to cover housing and other living expenses for themselves and their families. Because a promise program may redistribute some resources over and above the cost of tuition and fees to students further up the income spectrum, some students may need to cover even more of these non-tuition expenses. A number of other government benefits programs exist outside of higher education financial aid that could be used to at least partially cover these expenses.

These programs include, but are not limited to:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) commonly referred to as food stamps
- Childcare subsidies
- Programs housed under the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Transportation assistance
- Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

Those in higher education circles often talk about the need to maximize financial aid resources from all sources, but that typically is limited to federal Pell, state grant aid, loans, work study, and institution-funded financial aid. Maximizing aid from all sources should also include the myriad assistance programs provided by other federal, state, and local government agencies who administer programs such as those listed above. Many low-income students who qualify for a full Pell Grant will be eligible for at least some of the other benefits, which, combined with the free tuition and fees of an adult promise pilot program, will help to offset housing and living costs and reduce some of the stress that comes from balancing school with work and family commitments.

One of the primary criticisms of promise programs is that they ignore non-tuition expenses and therefore do not address the full cost of attendance. Maximizing these benefits for eligible students is a means to directly address this concern and should be a component of the pilot program. Many students are unaware that they are eligible for additional benefits, while others may not want to go through another cumbersome application process, or may associate a negative stigma with receiving these government benefits³⁵. At the same time, financial aid and student services administrators may have a general sense that their low-income students are eligible for additional support but are nervous to over promise or share incorrect information.

³⁵ Duke-Benfield, A.E., and Saunders, K. *Benefits Access for College Completion: Lessons Learned from a Community College Initiative to Help Low-Income Students*. Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success. <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Benefits-Access-for-College-Completion-Lessons-Learned.pdf>.

To address these concerns, states setting up an adult promise pilot program should involve leadership and staff from those state and local agencies in the state that administer these other governmental support programs along with the appropriate institutional staff in order to determine ways to collaborate to maximize the benefits that eligible students may receive and to minimize the burden of applying for multiple benefits. While some of these benefits have strict federally mandated eligibility requirements, others are controlled by the state and changes in state policy may enable more students to access these additional benefits.

There exist legitimate governance challenges to maximizing aid from all resources. With government aid programs and financial aid spread across multiple state agencies, it is critical to involve all the important decision makers who administer these programs in discussions on how to maximize the aid available to adult students. There are also many misperceptions about these programs. For example, according to CLASP, there is a belief that students are not eligible for SNAP benefits. This is not actually true and a student may be eligible to receive up to \$200 a month in these benefits to help cover the costs of groceries.³⁶

The Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success at CLASP administered Benefits Access for College Completion (BACC), an initiative with the goal to “develop sustainable operational and funding strategies for integrating services into existing community college operations to help low-income students more easily access public benefits.” This project worked at seven community colleges, which followed very different paths to complete the project, much as states will take different approaches to developing an adult promise pilot program. The final review of the project found the level of success varied among the participating community colleges primarily due to seven factors, the most critical of which was institutional leadership to foster buy-in among key constituencies. States implementing a pilot program should thoroughly review this project and explore if similar concepts can be applied to maximize the aid that eligible adult students receive.

³⁶ Duke-Benfield, A and Saunders, K. (2012) Benefits Access for College Completion: Lessons Learned from a Community College Initiative to Help Low-Income Students.

PART 6: INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN AND STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

The adoption of adult promise programs presents opportunities to engage stakeholders in important discussions that address state-specific degree attainment goals, policies, and best practices. To that end, achieving widespread buy-in is conceivably predicated on productive dialogue that recognizes state and institutional variety, including governance structures. This section offers a few thoughts and a framework to guide dialogue with policy makers, the business community, higher education leadership, faculty, staff, and students.

Despite unwavering evidence of the importance of education in relation to how one engages with society, there remain significant numbers of adults (25 and older) who begin higher education but do not complete a degree program. Consequently, state governments, institutions of higher education, and businesses are becoming increasingly aware that many of their residents begin college but do not complete degrees or certificates.

Higher education must adapt to new realities at the state, national, and international levels, especially with regard to educating adults in changing political, economic, and social environments. Fortunately, systems and institutions of higher learning have access to research and best practices to consider when implementing wide scale change. Scholars from disciplines including political science, business, education, and organizational psychology have investigated the phenomenon of change for decades—there is a rich pool of data and information for leaders and practitioners alike. A recent article in *Community College Week* (July 21, 2016)³⁷ highlights one state’s “crisis” that will necessitate change in thought and action. With just 40% of South Carolina’s adults aged 25-64 possessing industry certification or postsecondary credentials, businesses are challenged to attract qualified employees. According to the director of the state’s Education Oversight Committee, Melanie Barton,

“Even if we graduate 100% of our kids ready for college tomorrow, it’s still not enough. You’ve got to address the adults.”

Through adult promise programs, states and institutions of higher education can improve degree attainment levels through a tailored approach that will also improve the economic, physical, and overall quality of life (including civic engagement) for individuals, families, and entire communities. The programs will importantly serve the needs of the business communities within states. Public, private, and nonprofit organizations will continue to assert the need for employees who possess the critical knowledge, skills, and dispositions that develop through the process and experience of formal higher education. In addition to demands from employers, philanthropic organizations are partnering with institutions of higher education, policy makers and others to invest in improving the life trajectory of adult non-completers and the economic competitiveness of their communities.

Here are some things to consider when implementing an adult promise program in a state:

³⁷ Slodysko, B. (2016). South Carolina Official Calls for Improvements to adult Education. *Community College Week*. July 21, 2016. Retrieved July 21, 2016, <http://ccweek.com/article-5211-south-carolina-official-calls-for-improvements-to-adult-education.html>.

- Engage a cross section of stakeholders throughout the process of exploration, development and implementation: The notion of an adult promise program designed to increase the number of adults (25 years and older) with postsecondary credentials is not new, but there will certainly be degrees of familiarity and consensus within states. It follows that a wide range of stakeholders should be engaged at each stage of the process—exploration, development, implementation, and evaluation. Stakeholders should include but may not be limited to policy makers, the business community, students, institutional research, student affairs professionals, and academic affairs leadership.



Institutions	State Government	Private Sector
<input type="checkbox"/> Adult students	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher education staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Chambers of commerce
<input type="checkbox"/> Student affairs staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Key legislators	<input type="checkbox"/> Local foundations
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic affairs staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Governor's staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Business /industry representatives
<input type="checkbox"/> Financial aid administrators	<input type="checkbox"/> Education agencies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty	<input type="checkbox"/> Social service agencies	

- Provide clear and concise information about the states' adult student population including a disaggregation of demographic information, in addition to workforce development circumstances: Every state is unique and has a distinct set of challenges, opportunities, needs

and concerns. This adult promise program, although a template for increasing degree attainment, is not a one-size-fits-all approach and will require input from institutions of higher education (faculty, administration, and students), policy makers, the business community, and other community leaders to maximize buy-in and sustainability.

- Emphasize philanthropic support for states committed to increasing degree attainment: Adult promise program development efforts will be strengthened through illustration of support from the philanthropic community that includes businesses and well regarded local foundations. Increasing attainment levels should be supported by the entire community because of the direct impact it has on everyone in the community.
- Establish an organizational structure to implement and manage the program (aligned with mission, vision, and goals, and objectives): An adult promise agenda should not be treated the same as are traditional undergraduate programs. Adult students typically enroll in degree completion programs for different reasons (e.g., career change, job promotion, personal satisfaction, job loss).
- Advance programs that serve the unique needs of the state and its citizens: States have varying needs, interests, and priorities in addition to diversity among their citizens. There are best practices and systems for determining what's in the best interest for states, but one size does not fit all.

The concept of an adult promise program represents a major change with major benefits to states and the country, and the success and sustainability of any such endeavor is a careful and deliberate undertaking. John Kotter (2007)³⁸ has studied reasons transformations fail, and identified eight errors leaders make when embarking on change initiatives—errors contrary to his “Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization.” Those errors include **not doing the following**:

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
2. Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition
3. Creating a Vision
4. Communicating the Vision
5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision
6. Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins
7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change
8. Institutionalizing New Approaches

The first and last errors may be the most important with regard to degree attainment and economic development: not establishing a sense of urgency and not anchoring changes in the organization's state and institutional culture. First, leaders and policy makers should be intentional in creating a sense of urgency about educating adult populations. What the data show is unequivocal and according to Lumina's *Stronger Nation* report, current degree attainment rates for adults 25-64 are not adequate to meet state and national needs. The U.S. Census Bureau reported the following attainment levels by population group: Associate degree or more: White – 43%; African-American – 32%; Hispanic – 23%; and

³⁸ Kotter, J.P. (2007). Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail. *Harvard Business Review*, January, 2007. <https://hbr.org/2007/01/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail>. Only available by subscription

Asian/Pacific Islander – 60%.³⁹ The most recent reports from Georgetown’s Center on Education and the Workforce⁴⁰ place the needed level at 60%-65% for our entire society—a level not achieved by almost any subgroup.

The final error leaders should avoid is failure to anchor changes in the higher education culture. Stakeholders must be provided opportunities and information to see how an adult promise program will improve their lives, community, state, and the country. Special attention should be given to institutional leadership and policy makers to ensure the long-term viability of this promising approach to adult degree attainment. It is important to note that the culture of an institution is rooted in its mission, institution type, geographic location, history, governance structure, academic program mix, and faculty.

In closing, the approach to the development, implementation, and evaluation of an adult promise program will vary some by state, but the impact on economic development and quality of life for states’ citizens always will be positive. Promising adults opportunities for growth and states opportunities for economic development is a win-win proposition on which we must deliver.

³⁹ Ryan, C.L. and Bauman, K. (2016). *Education Attainment in the United States: 2015 Population Characteristics*. U.S. Department of Commerce. [www.census.gov. http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf](http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf).

⁴⁰ *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020*. Georgetown University Public Policy Institute. https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.ES_Web.pdf.

PART 7: ESTABLISH PROGRAM EVALUATION

The goal of a pilot program is to demonstrate viability for full-scale program implementation; states should design their promise pilots to include an evaluation component that demonstrates whether and how the program contributes to the state’s completion and attainment goals.

Evaluation of pilot adult promise programs should address four broad policy questions:

1. Are students in the program progressing at higher rates than students in the baseline group? As described in PART 1, a key component of the “survey the landscape” phase of pilot design is to define and measure benchmark measures for currently enrolled adult students. After the program is implemented, states should compare enrollment, credit accumulation, retention, and graduation rates of students in the pilot with those in the baseline group.
2. Are program participants completing credentials with value? While there is widespread interest in identifying “high quality” or “high value” credentials, a national consensus definition of those terms has yet to emerge. States should determine how to define “credentials of value” in their particular context. Considerations might include:
 - Do the credentials produced align with state economic development priorities?
 - Are graduates of the promise program more likely to gain and retain employment than those in the baseline group?
 - Are students’ wages higher after participation in the program than prior to participation? Are their wage outcomes higher than those of the baseline group? Are their wages higher than adults who do not enroll in college?
3. Is the promise program benefitting underserved students? Promise programs should be evaluated with an “equity” lens. States should examine how progress and completion rates within the program vary by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and income status, and determine if the promise program ameliorates any previously existing achievement gaps. Additionally, states should evaluate whether students at all levels of preparation (not just those who are most prepared or nearest completion upon entry) benefit from the program.
4. What is the return on investment for the program? States should track their financial investments in the program and compare costs-per-credential for program participants with those of the baseline group. Is the per capita cost of the program lower than the per capita cost of support programs for adults who are not in college?

While the large majority of these evaluation questions can be addressed using existing state unit record systems, states should consider whether a robust evaluation of the pilot will require implementing additional data collection or partnering with other agencies.⁴¹ These efforts might include:

⁴¹Armstrong, J., and Whitfield, C. (2016), *The State of State Postsecondary Data Systems: Strong Foundations 2016* contains detailed information regarding the data elements available in existing systems, and their capacity to link data with other agencies.

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- Qualitative assessment of adult students' support needs and participants' satisfaction with the pilot program,
 - Data collection on student and academic support availability and use, and
 - Data-sharing agreements with state financial aid or workforce agencies.

For more information about using data for evaluation, visit the Community College Research Center (CCRC)⁴². For information specific to promise-type programs, the MDRC's recent evaluation of CUNY's ASAP program⁴³ includes detailed information about data sources and evaluation metrics, and reflects a rigorous research design.

⁴² <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Using-Data-to-Improve-Student-Success-and-Institutional-Performance.html>.

⁴³ Scrivener, S., Weiss, M.J., Ratledge, A., Rudd, T., Sommo, C., and Fresques, H. *Doubling Graduation Rates*. MDRC. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/doubling_graduation_rates_fr.pdf.

CONCLUSION

This design template draws upon research and helps select the best practices aimed at increasing degree attainment among adult students across states. Higher education leaders and policy makers have been aware of the need to focus on this subset of the population for several years, but momentum is increasing to act on data and information, considering the individual, state, and national advantages of an educated citizenry.

Advantages afforded to educated adults have been studied for decades—and the benefits of higher education are largely unequivocal. It may be useful to recall the *Education Pays* report⁴⁴ which concluded the following:

- Individuals with higher levels of education earn more and are more likely than others to be employed.
- The financial return associated with college credentials and the gaps in earnings by education level have increased over time.
- Federal, state, and local governments enjoy increased tax revenue from college graduates and spend less on income support programs for them, providing a direct financial return on investments in postsecondary education.
- College-educated adults are more likely than others to receive health insurance and pension benefits from their employers.
- Adults with higher levels of education are more active citizens than others.
- College education leads to healthier lifestyles, reducing health care costs.
- College-educated mothers spend more time with children and alter the composition of that time to suit children’s development needs more than less-educated mothers.
- College education increases the chances that adults will move up the socioeconomic ladder.

Every state is unique, but states are nonetheless similar in their need to ensure citizens are educated at levels necessary to compete in a global, knowledge-based economy. Degree attainment of its adults impacts a state’s ability to compete for business and promote overall economic development. As organizations seek to hire employees with content expertise, they also assert the demand for other critical skills including problem solving, teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution. Adult promise programs meet potential students where they are and provide opportunities for them to pursue higher education in environments that recognize the value of their life experiences. Adult promise programs leverage a student’s previous learning in the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills that contribute to the growth of individuals, families, organizations, communities, and the country.

SHEEO is privileged to work with states committed to increasing degree attainment levels while providing opportunities to create pathways that improve the quality of people’s lives. We have a team of policy staff dedicated to this work and eager to support your efforts throughout this adult promise program process including implementation and evaluation.

We look forward to continuing the journey with you.

⁴⁴ Baum, S., Ma, J., and Payea, K. (2013). *Education Pays*. College Board. <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report-022714.pdf>.

APPENDIX A. PROGRAM CHECKLIST



SURVEY THE LANDSCAPE

- Review existing data sources
 - Measure the magnitude of need
 - Analyze existing policies
 - Review past efforts
 - Select possible pilot institutions
 - Establish benchmarks
-



CREATE INTENTIONAL PROGRAM LIMITS

- Determine size of pilot (e.g., 1,000 students at two institutions)

Student Population

- | | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Age: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Independents | <input type="checkbox"/> 25-49 | |
| Income: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Pell eligible | <input type="checkbox"/> 150% Pell | <input type="checkbox"/> 200% Pell |
| Groups: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Receiving gov. benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> Military |
| Academics: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Pass placement test | <input type="checkbox"/> College GPA 2.5/3.0 | |
| Prior credit: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 semester | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 75% complete |
| Time off: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 years |
| Other: | _____ | | | |

Institution/Degree Type

- | | | | | |
|----------------|--|--|---|--|
| Sector: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Two-year only | <input type="checkbox"/> Four-year only | |
| Courses: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Certificates | <input type="checkbox"/> Remediation | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-degree |
| Intensity: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 credits/semester | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 credits/semester | <input type="checkbox"/> 24 credits/year |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 credits/semester | <input type="checkbox"/> Year-round (summer) | | |
| Area of focus: | <input type="checkbox"/> No limits | <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce demand | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit to STEM | |
| Other: | _____ | | | |



TAILOR THE PROGRAM TO ADULT STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- Develop outreach and marketing strategies
- Schedule preliminary research focus groups
- Set up customized student supports, such as mentorship programs or “concierge” style services

Prioritize institutions with the following student services or programs:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Comprehensive advising: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Prior learning assessment: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Degree maps: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Structured schedules: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Year-round enrollment: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Alternative instructional delivery: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| On-campus childcare or assistance: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Expanded hours of service: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes |
| Other: | _____ | |



ESTIMATE PROGRAM COSTS

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Sources of revenue: | <input type="checkbox"/> State taxes | <input type="checkbox"/> Institutions | <input type="checkbox"/> Grants | <input type="checkbox"/> Private sector |
| Student work requirements: | <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 hours/wk | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 hours/wk | |
| Financial support: | <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> Tuition+fees | <input type="checkbox"/> Supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost of living |
| Emergency aid funds: | <input type="checkbox"/> None | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200/student | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500/student | |
| Redistribute excess state grants: | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | | |
| Other: | _____ | | | |



MAXIMIZE RESOURCES FROM ALL SOURCES OF AID

- Conduct a review of support policy interactions
- Meet with executive directors of social service agencies

- | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> SNAP | <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare | <input type="checkbox"/> WIC | <input type="checkbox"/> TANF | <input type="checkbox"/> CHIP |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | | |

Other: _____



INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN AND STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

- Organize stakeholder meetings

Institutional leadership:

- Adult students
- Student affairs staff
- Academic affairs staff
- Financial aid staff
- Faculty

State government:

- Higher education staff
- Key legislators
- Governor's staff
- Social service agencies

Private sector:

- Chambers of commerce
- Local philanthropies
- Potential donors
- Employer reps

Other: _____



ESTABLISH PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Establish the goals of the program
- Create a data template
- Design program evaluation to assess those goals

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

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