



SHEEO

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

ADULT PROMISE:

DESIGN TEMPLATE

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THREE ARROWS UP CONSULTING

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2016, the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), with generous support from Lumina Foundation, has been working with states to explore establishing “promise-type” aid programs for adult students (adult promise programs).

The pilot phase of SHEEO’s adult promise work included five states. SHEEO is currently working with 15 states to implement adult promise programs through 2020. These states include Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington.

Adult promise programs are programs that:



- Promote a simple, transparent message that postsecondary education is affordable for adult learners.



- Make a financial commitment to adult students through leveraging aid from all available sources. Commit to fill in the gaps where needed to cover tuition and fees.



- Establish and support programs and services that are tailored to the unique needs of adult students and will help them succeed in postsecondary education.

This design template is intended for states, regions, localities, and institutions that are interested in developing promise programs for adult learners. It provides a checklist for those designing adult promise programs and includes examples and specific items to consider as those programs are being designed. The information and concepts presented here should also be useful for those looking to improve adult learner success in postsecondary education outside of the promise program framework. This design template is intended to be used alongside the resources available on SHEEO’s [Adult Promise website](#).

Although this document focuses on state levers and strategies for designing adult promise programs, these programs can be implemented by and require buy-in from a wide variety of stakeholders. With this in mind, we have offered a streamlined document that can easily be translated and adapted for a variety of audiences and uses. When using this design template, it is important to acknowledge that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to developing these programs. Each state, region, locality, and institution is different, and context matters. To that end, we urge you to consider this design template as a series of helpful suggestions and topics to consider, rather than a step-by-step playbook.

We hope the suggestions, guidance, and information in this design template help those developing adult promise programs.

THE POWER OF A PROMISE

IMPLICATIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF ADULT PROMISE PROGRAMS

SUMMARY

Read the full white paper

SHEEO began work on its adult promise project in 2016 to help address the gap between the need to reengage and improve postsecondary outcomes for students over 25 years of age and the interest among policymakers at the time in creating promise programs for traditional-age students. This gap existed even though adult students make up nearly 40 percent of the undergraduate population and are a critical group for states looking to meet their educational attainment and economic goals. Since SHEEO first began this work, that gap has started to narrow, and momentum for adult promise programs has increased.

Although there are many different examples of adult promise programs, each unique to a state's context and needs, these programs have three common characteristics.

- There is a simple, transparent message that postsecondary education is affordable for adult learners.
- A financial commitment is made to eligible participants, leveraging aid from all available sources. This commitment includes filling in the gaps as needed to cover tuition and fees.
- Support programs and services are provided to help adult students succeed in postsecondary education.

Adult promise programs have the potential to increase adult student enrollment and retention. However, careful design and messaging are critical to the success of these programs, which are not without criticism. Most of the criticism argues that while promise programs are politically powerful, they are often not the most effective nor economically efficient means for helping disadvantaged students with the most financial need. And a promise made is not always a promise kept. In other words, any promise program must be funded sufficiently to meet its commitments.

Even with their challenges, the political feasibility of adult promise programs means they will continue to be developed. Through intentional program design, these programs can promote equity and provide the supports and services that adults need to help them succeed.

The 43 states¹ with ambitious postsecondary attainment goals will need to close equity gaps and increase the number of adults with a postsecondary credential to achieve those goals. An adult promise program can be a framework to align, leverage, and support existing and new efforts to increase adult student success.

1. <https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/aiming-for-equity-a-new-resolution-for-statewide-degree-attainment-goals>

DESIGN CHECKLIST

States and others looking to develop adult promise programs can use the following design checklist to ensure that they have thought through the major considerations. The items in this checklist are not intended to necessarily be completed sequentially. On the following pages, we present more detail for each item on this checklist, including:

- ❑ **Survey landscape and need, conduct policy audits** *(Page 6)*
Before designing an adult promise program, states must first understand, and be able to describe, the need and context unique to their state.
- ❑ **Engage stakeholders and earn their buy-in** *(Page 6)*
Buy-in from a wide variety of stakeholders is critical for the success of adult promise programs.
- ❑ **Program Design**
 - Program parameters *(Page 9)*
 - Financial resources *(Page 10)*
 - State-based financial aid
 - Institutional aid and tuition waivers
 - Emergency financial aid
 - Employer-based aid
 - Debt forgiveness
 - Childcare
 - Integration of other government benefits and aid programs
 - Supports for student success *(Page 12)*
 - Mentoring
 - Navigators
 - Credit for prior learning
 - Degree maps
 - Structured scheduling
 - Availability of evening and online courses
 - Alternative instructional delivery
 - Extended hours for support services
- ❑ **Develop strategy and outreach for reengaging adult learners** *(Page 13)*
- ❑ **Estimate program costs** *(Page 14)*
- ❑ **Establish program evaluation strategy** *(Page 15)*

SURVEY LANDSCAPE AND NEED

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. A survey of the landscape should:

Review existing data sources to measure the magnitude of need and build support for adult promise programs

States must understand the needs and opportunities to serve adult students. Reviewing existing national and state data sets can help identify where supports are most needed and how resources can be most effectively used. This information can be used to help create stakeholder buy-in and a sense of urgency to meet degree attainment challenges.

States can look to a number of data sources to begin their survey of the landscape. Lumina Foundation's [A Stronger Nation](#) provides national and state-level postsecondary attainment data pulled from the American Community Survey. A Stronger Nation provides national, state, and county-level degree attainment data for people ages 25-64. It also provides degree attainment data by race and ethnicity for people ages 25-64 at the national and state levels.

States can also use data from the [National Student Clearinghouse](#), [Complete College America](#), and the [Integrated Postsecondary Data System \(IPEDS\)](#) to glean information about how well colleges are serving students and what kinds of supports are available to students. Finally, states should look to their own longitudinal data systems.

Analyze existing policies

States should conduct a policy review to see whether or not state and institutional policies are aligned with the needs of adult students. 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 outstanding debt or unpaid fees deter adult students from returning to complete their credentials? If so, can a debt-forgiveness or forbearance policy be implemented to eliminate this barrier?

Review past efforts

A review of past efforts and programs intended to improve adult student completion rates can help states to understand which strategies have been successful and which have not. States should seek to learn all they can from past efforts and use these lessons to strengthen the design of future efforts.

Establish benchmarks

Benchmarks for evaluation should be established and based on the demographics of each state's population and institutions. States should also 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.

DATA SOURCES FOR LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

MEASURING THE MAGNITUDE OF NEED		
American Community Survey	State population-level education level and attainment	www.census.gov/programs
Lumina's A Stronger Nation state reports	Attainment by age and race/ethnicity	strongernation.luminafoundation.org
National Student Clearinghouse	Student migration and completion out of state	www.nscresearchcenter.org
Complete College America data set	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 systems	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
Education Commission of the States	State policy scans, state-federal partnerships, financial aid redesign	www.ecs.org
REVIEWING PAST EFFORTS		
State or governing board policies	Review policies for alignment with adult student needs	Various
WICHE's Non-traditional No More	Determining the "ready adult" population	www.wiche.edu/ntnm
IHEP's Project Win-Win and Degrees When Due	Awarding retroactive degrees and capturing near completers	www.ihep.org/research
Competency-Based Education Network (CBEN)	Examples of practices to more effectively serve adult students	www.cbenetwork.org
Past efforts in appropriate states	Understanding lessons learned from past efforts to serve adult students	N/A
ASSESSING PILOT SITES		
Lumina's A Stronger Nation state reports	Attainment by county	strongernation.luminafoundation.org
IPEDS Institutional Characteristics survey	Availability of services for nontraditional students per institution	www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter
ESTABLISHING BENCHMARKS		
State-level data systems	Detailed information on student population and success	N/A

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS AND EARN THEIR BUY-IN

Strong adult promise programs, regardless of the specifics of their design and structure, will need the buy-in and support of a wide variety of stakeholders. This will include state policymakers, institutional and system leadership, and the general public. There are two main essential reasons to involve stakeholders. First, engaging a wide variety of stakeholders can ensure that the program design is strong and will address the needs of both the state and the students it intends to benefit. Second, engaging stakeholders is an effective way to earn their support, without which programs will tend to falter and fizzle.

Some considerations for states:

Engage a broad cross section of stakeholders throughout the process of exploration, development, and implementation of adult promise programs. These stakeholders include:

At institutions

- Adults students
- Student affairs staff
- Academic affairs staff
- Financial aid administrators
- Faculty

In the state government

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

In the private sector

- Chambers of commerce
- Local foundations
- Business/industry representatives
- Advocacy organizations

Depending on the specific circumstances of the state and the goals of the program, there may be other types of stakeholders who should be engaged in conversations around adult promise programs.

Provide clear and concise information about the state's adult student population, including 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.

Emphasize philanthropic support for states committed to increasing degree attainment. Adult promise program development efforts will be strengthened through the illustration of support from the philanthropic community that includes businesses and well-regarded local foundations.

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 of states, but one size does not fit all. Advancing a program that best fits the state will encourage stakeholder buy-in.

Establish a sense of urgency for the adult promise program. For most states, reaching adult students is crucial to achieving educational and economic attainment goals, and without a sense of urgency, a sense of urgency, transformative change is unlikely to happen.²

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

PROGRAM DESIGN

There are several different considerations when it comes to designing an adult promise program. These fall into three main categories:

1. Program parameters;
2. Financial resources; and
3. Student supports.

SET PROGRAM PARAMETERS

For transparency and clarity, adult promise programs need to have clear parameters in terms of student and institutional eligibility. This is especially true as these programs will rely on limited funds.

Student eligibility parameters should be clear descriptions of who is eligible for the program and what they need to do to maintain eligibility. The specific student characteristics and behaviors that states might consider are in the table below.

	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 stricter 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
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
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

Institutional eligibility parameters should clearly describe which institutions participate in the program. Is it all public institutions? Only two-year institutions? Specific, named institutions? It is important to be clear about which institutions are eligible so there is no confusion for potential program participants.

	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 helps 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 barriers, other degrees are important for economic vitality

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

One of the major components of any adult promise program is the financial resources it commits to adult students. States should leverage as many different financial aid sources as possible in their adult promise programs. Potential financial resources available include:

- *State-based financial aid.* Existing state financial aid programs may be used to fund adult promise programs. States should engage in conversations about which state financial aid resources will be available to students. Additionally, states should ensure that their financial aid programs are inclusive of adult learners.
- *Institutional aid and tuition waivers.* In addition to state financial aid, institutions can use their aid sources to provide financial assistance to adults, even outside of statewide initiatives. For example, Purdue University offers *Span Plan*, an aid program targeted at adult students.

- *Emergency financial aid.* Setting aside resources for one-time, sudden, unexpected expenses that would otherwise cause adult students to stop out can increase student success. Many institutions are offering some type of emergency aid program. See, for example, [Cal State Los Angeles' program](#). In addition to encouraging emergency aid programs, states can help communicate the availability of such funds.
- *Employer-based aid.* Many employers across the nation are offering tuition reimbursement and other types of financial aid to their employees. Return on investment for these types of programs is high,³ and states could leverage these types of partnerships in adult promise programs. Several examples of successful employer partnerships that provide tuition reimbursement or other types of aid to students can be found [here](#).
- *Debt forgiveness.* Outstanding debt may be a large factor in the reluctance of 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. Wayne State University's [Warrior Way Back](#) program is an excellent example of a creative debt forgiveness program which allows returning students to have their outstanding institutional debt forgiven as they successfully complete coursework over a [three-semester](#) time frame.
- *Childcare.* 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. Second, 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 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.
- *Integration of other government benefits and aid programs.* The promise of free tuition and fees will go a long way toward making college affordable for adult students. Still, there are other costs associated with attending college, such as housing, food, and transportation. States can leverage other financial resources available, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help low-income adults better afford college.

3. Lumina has done a series of reports on this, available here: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/employer-engagement>

SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

A number of specific student supports have been effective at increasing student persistence and success. Many of these have been integrated into states' adult promise programs and have proven successful for reengaging adults and ensuring their success.

- *Mentoring.* Adult students are likely to have had less 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 Indiana discovered during the design phase of their adult promise program, many adults with some college but no degree are frustrated from their prior attempt. A good mentor can help students address their frustration and concern while they move through their chosen program(s).
- *Navigators.* As a more intensive way to provide mentoring, some programs have established navigators to help students succeed. For example, adult learners who reenroll in one of the four participating Minnesota State colleges that participate in MN Reconnect are provided navigators to help them overcome barriers such as managing academic and career planning, scheduling, tutoring, and accessing emergency financial assistance. These navigators are education professionals and provide intensive, one-on-one guidance.
- *Coaching.* Similar to mentors and navigators, coaches can help students throughout the process of applying, reenrolling, and completing their degree. The coaching relationship provides a structured way to help students throughout their education. Many states have taken an innovative approach to provide coaching to students—outside of advising services at institutions themselves. For example, in Idaho, adult learners in underserved rural counties can access such services at community libraries.
- *Credit for prior learning.* Credit for prior learning, such as through prior learning assessment (PLA), awards college credit for past experiences relevant to the student's field of study. There are several types of PLAs, including exams, portfolios, and credit equivalencies (see, for example, [ACE-CREDIT](#)). When these credits are applied toward a degree (rather than simply elective credit), credit for prior learning can help reduce a student's time to degree.
- *Degree maps.* 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. The resulting transparency and clarity help students understand what to expect and plan out their course of action, resulting in better outcomes.
- *Structured scheduling.* Block schedules and year-round enrollment help adult students plan more effectively and balance their coursework with life commitments.
- *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 for adult students and enable them to do coursework when they have available time (e.g., after their children have gone to bed).

- *Extended hours for support services.* 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 program should ensure that the hours that student services, advising, financial aid, and other administrative offices are open align with these students' schedules.

DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR REENGAGING ADULT LEARNERS

For an adult promise program to be successful, **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.

Much of the prior work geared toward improving the success of adult students in postsecondary education has focused on the subpopulation with some college but no degree. With this population, there may be institution-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 roadblocks.

STATE EXAMPLE: COMPLETE 2 COMPETE

In 2017, Mississippi launched *Complete 2 Compete (C2C)*, a statewide effort to encourage adults who have some college but no degree complete their college education. All of Mississippi's eight public universities and 15 community colleges participate. In designing their program, Mississippi relied on the lessons and best practices of other state adult reengagement programs. Adults apply to the program, are connected with a coach who guides them through the process of requesting transcripts and maximizing credits, and eventually either enroll to earn remaining credits or are awarded a degree if they are eligible. For those who need to enroll to earn additional credits, there is a C2C grant to help make college more affordable. To date, 1,291 degrees have been awarded through C2C and 1,090 students are currently enrolled.

For the broader adult population without a degree, targeted outreach is even more difficult. States that 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 without a postsecondary credential.

STATE EXAMPLE: YOU CAN. GO BACK.

Indiana's "*You Can. Go Back.*" campaign began in early 2016 with a series of core messages meant to encourage adult students to go 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 college. Further, ***focus group participants indicated they were negatively impacted by their past experiences and were reluctant to try again*** and the adults who did want to return were confused and did not know where to go to get started.

ESTIMATE PROGRAM COSTS

Estimating the costs of an adult promise program requires considering many moving parts. The student and institution eligibility parameters 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" scholarship 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, in place.

In estimating the costs of the program, states should consider which institutions students are likely to attend, their enrollment intensity, the income distribution of students, costs associated with attending college, student costs that could be covered by federal financial aid, reasonable student contribution, and other sources of revenue that could be leveraged.

CONSIDERATION FOR STATES: HOW MUCH CAN A STUDENT REASONABLY CONTRIBUTE?

In an adult promise program, there can be a reasonable student contribution expectation. 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 determine what that number is:

1. How many hours can adult students work each week?
2. What is the take-home pay for a minimum wage earner in the state?
3. What is a reasonable cost of living in the state?
4. Can students reasonably pay for their cost of living with the monthly income calculated above, or will they need additional funding?

ESTABLISH PROGRAM EVALUATION STRATEGIES

To continue to keep support for adult promise programs, and to illuminate potential areas for improvement in such programs, states should have an evaluation strategy for their programs. Evaluation of 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?
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 before 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 vast 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. These efforts might include:

- 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.

CONCLUSION

This design template provides some information and action steps for states interested in designing and implementing adult promise programs. It should be considered a starting point for states to use as a conversation and a road map. In addition to the resources provided herein, many resources and examples are available on the [SHEEO Adult Promise](#) website.

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 the adult promise program process, including implementation and evaluation.

STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

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