Massachusetts Guidelines for Effective
Adult Career Pathways Programs
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Adult and Community Learning Services
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Malden, MA 02148-4906
www.doe.mass.edu
Massachusetts Guidelines for Effective Adult Career Pathways Programs

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1. Introduction

The Adult Career Pathways (ACP) Program is one that represents Adult and Community Learning Service’s (ACLS) commitment to increasing the number of Adult Basic Education (ABE) students with the skills, industry-recognized credentials, certificates, and degrees needed for employment in high-demand occupations. It is aligned with the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and underscores ACLS’s ongoing priority to strengthen connections and collaborations among the ABE, higher education, and workforce systems in order to maintain and enhance a comprehensive education and training system for the state. In addition, ACP Program activities can include integrated education and training (IET), workforce preparation, and integrated English literacy and civics education activities that are aligned with regional workforce priorities. The ultimate goal of the ACP Program is to place students on pathways leading to family/self-sustaining employment.

ACLS awards ACP funding through collaboration with its regional workforce partners1 who determine funding sector priorities specific to their regions. Through a competitive RFP process, ACLS in collaboration with each regional workforce partner, awards funding to eligible applicants. Eligible applicants must propose classes and services, including contextualized curricula that address the regional priorities.

The Massachusetts Guidelines for Effective Adult Career Pathways Programs is intended to support Community Adult Learning Centers (CALCs) implementing ACP programs in partnership with their regional workforce development partners.

The goals of the ACP Program are to support adult learners with career goals aligned with sector pathways within their workforce regions, providing them with the academic, technical, and career readiness skills and/or occupational skills necessary to advance along those pathways.

Specific program outcomes are determined by the workforce partners. Those outcomes can include, but are not limited to: postsecondary education, family/self-sustaining employment, apprenticeship, skills training, and Transition to Community College Programs.

2. Collaboration with Local Workforce Development Partners

ACLS collaborates with local workforce partners in the administration and oversight of ACP programs. The ACP programs are to align with the WIOA definition of career pathway noted below:

The WIOA definition of career pathway is: (Title I Sec. 3 (7) (Pg. 10.) CAREER PATHWAY.—The term ‘‘career pathway’’ means a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training leading to an industry-recognized credential, and other services that— (A) aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;

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1 Massachusetts has 16 workforce development regions. Each region is overseen by a workforce development board. Depending on the region, these boards are known as local workforce investment boards, regional employment boards, and other names. For the purposes of these Guidelines, the workforce development boards will be referred to as “workforce partners.”
(B) prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937 (commonly known as the “National Apprenticeship Act”; 50 Stat. 664, chapter 663; 29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.) (referred to individually in this Act as an “apprenticeship”, except in section 171); (C) includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals; (D) includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster; (E) organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable; (F) enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least 1 recognized postsecondary credential; and (G) helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster. Workforce partners funded to implement these grants offer multiple supports to ensure the success of ACP programs and alignment with WIOA priorities, including:

- Defining and prioritizing workforce needs in order to inform program planning for current and future sector demands.
- Providing input in the proposal review process about each applicant’s adherence to the requested design elements.
- Collaborating with the CALC of each ACP program to support adherence to the approved program design. The approved design must address and support regional WIOA priorities and outcomes. Further, contract agreements must identify the terms and conditions of contract procurement in the region and may include outcome requirements to assure that each ACP program is in compliance with federal, state, and local requirements.
- Convening and facilitating their region’s ACP Working Group whose members include the ACP programs, One-Stop Career Centers (OSCCs), and when appropriate, local community colleges, business and industry representatives, labor organizations, and other workforce and community partners.
- Helping ACP programs develop programmatic strategies to build students’ academic skills, career readiness for regional career pathways, and their understanding of workforce needs.
- Helping programs develop strategies for employer engagement.
- Updating partners on changing workforce and employer needs in order to support job seeker readiness and employment outcomes.
- Providing or identifying resources so ACP program staff can understand the workforce needs of the region in order to integrate the information into ACP curricula and advising strategies.
- Providing opportunities for ACP classes, staff, or students to visit OSCCs to learn about resources and services and/or for OSCC staff to visit ACP classes, and strengthening communication between CALCs and OSCCs.
- Assisting with curriculum development and alignment with workforce sector priorities and needs.
- Providing resources to and supporting ACP programs in the design and implementation of IET models.
3. **Shared Responsibilities for the Adult Career Pathways Program**

The three key partners in a region – the workforce partner, ACP program(s), and OSCC(s) – share both the customer and the responsibility for providing services to that customer, including moving the customer through the system to an identified outcome. The design, implementation, and success, in the form of customer outcomes, of an ACP program, therefore, is the shared responsibility of three regional partners.

**A. Role of Workforce Partner**

The workforce partner, the lead convener and facilitator of the ACP programs in its region, is responsible for:

- Articulating an ACP vision, including identifying high-demand industries and workforce priorities, and engaging ABE providers in the implementation of that vision.
- Providing administration and oversight of ACP programs.
- Convening the regional ACP Working Group, typically on a quarterly basis.
- Building strong collaborations with additional workforce development partners, local community colleges, and representatives of the business community, and/or labor organizations and other community partners.
- Facilitating the connection of ACP programs with employers to lead workplace tours, provide speakers, input on contextualizing the curricula, and identifying job opportunities for ACP graduates.
- Facilitate access to existing career and education resources such as MassCIS.
- Overseeing the Continuous Improvement Planning (CIP) process, which includes an annual review to ensure that regional ACP programming is providing high-quality services aligned with pathways to high-demand jobs in local industries.
- Assist with recruitment by making referrals to ACP programs.
- Collect, analyze, and evaluate ACP program data.

**B. Role of Community Adult Learning Center**

ACP programs must employ lead staff to provide the vision and leadership of career pathways in the 21st century to guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the ACP program. Staff hours may be assigned to a teacher, an advisor, a program coordinator, the program director, or other person directly involved with the program. Responsibilities include:

- Designing programs and identifying outcomes aligned with workforce partner regional priorities.
- Ensuring the curriculum is contextualized with academic skills and the workforce priority or priorities.
- Recruiting and enrolling students.
- Participating in the regional ACP Working group.
- Attending relevant trainings or meetings.
- Collaborating with regional workforce entities, (e.g. OSCCs, workforce development partners, community colleges, representatives of the business community, labor organizations, and others).
• Seeking innovative approaches, such as the Washington state’s I-BEST model, that are effective in achieving student outcomes.
• Modifying their ACP program model in real time to be responsive to changing needs.
• Helping students register at and access OSCC services.
• Following-up with ACP graduates to ensure they are on clearly defined career pathways.
• Providing advising and career planning.
• Developing an ACP CIP process that aligns with their CALC CIP.

C. Role of One-Stop Career Center

The OSCCs work closely with ACP programs by keeping them informed of OSCC service and workshops, making presentations, leading tours, helping students register at their centers, and providing employment assistance. OSCCs are also required members of regional ACP Working Groups and should attend relevant trainings and meetings related to ACP. They should also:
• Assist with recruitment by making referrals to ACP programs.
• Help eligible students register with the OSCC.
• Provide skills, interests, values and other assessments to help students identify occupations.
• Assist students in identifying job leads and matching them with appropriate job openings.
• Follow-up with ACP graduates to ensure they are on pathways leading to family/self-sustaining employment.

D. Role of Adult and Community Learning Services

ACLS provides oversight and funds state ACP programs. ACLS assigns a program specialist to each ACP program. The program specialist provides technical assistance to programs. In addition, ACLS convenes an annual ACP meeting that brings together the statewide ACP system for presentations, information sharing, and networking. ACLS also provides professional development to the ACP field through the System for Adult Basic Education (SABES) Education and Career Planning Center.

4. Program Requirements

E. Eligibility Requirements for Adult Career Pathways Students

ACP programs are primarily designed for high-level students ready to transition from ABE to employment or postsecondary education or both. It is possible to have ACP programs for mid to lower level students if they lead to employment in high-demand occupations, but it is otherwise recommended that only high-level students enroll in ACP.

Eligible students are 16 years of age or older, including out-of-school youth ages 16-24, who are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, lack the level of reading, writing, and/or computation skills expected of a high school graduate (even if they already possess a high school diploma) as shown on an assessment, and/or who are limited English proficient.
and whose career/education goals are aligned with the goals of the ACP program. Students who possess a high school credential must assess at or below 8.9 grade level equivalent (GLE) in reading, writing, or math in order to be eligible for services.

Students may be co-enrolled in ABE and ACP. This co-enrollment exists as an accelerated, viable alternative for some students. It can be successful as long as students are able to maintain an ongoing commitment to an increased amount of instructional and support time.

In addition, adults who meet the eligibility requirements for ABE services, but who are not enrolled in the CALC, may enroll solely in the ACP program.

F. Student Outreach, Recruitment, and Placement

ACP programs are encouraged to employ a variety of outreach efforts to inform the region of its ACP program. Outreach efforts should include providing information and materials to local ABE programs, OSCCs’, libraries, community centers, and other community agencies.

ACP programs should seek to recruit students from its own program, local community, regional ESE-funded ABE programs, OSCCs, and other community agencies. In addition, ACP programs must connect with ABE Navigators outstationed at OSCCs if ACP students are seeking to connect to community colleges.

Programs should ensure that the ACP program is a cohort model. Cohort models have many benefits, including peer support, shared interests, and common goals. Therefore, it is important that only students interested in pursuing careers in the ACP program’s sector focus be placed in the program.

G. Educational Advising and Career Planning: Role of the Advisor

Programs are required to have a designated advisor to provide, coordinate, and document all advising, and to provide students with support services and guidance to assist them in meeting their educational and career goals. The advisor must work with students to: provide educational advising and career planning; develop and maintain individual education and career plans; and ensure they receive academic and support services.

The advisor must also refer students to appropriate resources within the community to support and assist them with transitioning to their next steps. Advisors should work closely with college admission offices and OSCCs.

The advisor must ensure that students stay on track in achieving their career-related goals through regular meetings beginning at enrollment. Students persist when they:

- Identify immediate goals and define intermediate steps toward distant goals
- Can assess progress toward goals on a regular basis
- Have advisors with strong communication and problem-solving skills, who also make referrals to address student needs
- Have advisors who will keep up-to-date with industry trends in their region
- Have advisors who maintain working relationships with the OSSCs, community colleges, and relevant training programs that are part of the regional career pathway

H. Program Design and Key Components

ACP programs must offer classroom-based instruction (i.e. contextualized curricula) that integrates academic skills with the regional workforce priority or priorities.
Classes may be rate based and non-rate based. While a sequence of classes is not required, long-term classes (not short-term workshops) must be offered so that students improve their academic and career readiness skills. The program design should be responsive to the postsecondary and employment outcomes of the specific ACP classes. ACLS supports semester and one year programs and encourages programs to use intensive models to both accelerate student learning and offer integrated education and training activities.

ACP programs are not subject to the formulas outlined in the *Massachusetts Policies for Effective Adult Basic Education in Community Adult Learning Centers* or the SMARTT reference documents but are expected to use the rate based staff salaries as a guide. For example, the prescribed percentages of time in the rates formula that CALCs are assigned for educational and career advising, staff development, and teacher preparation are not prescribed percentages for ACP programs. However, these components cannot be eliminated from the ACP program design, and should be assigned an adequate percentage of time. Because the curriculum must integrate academic skills, technology, and workforce priorities, programs are strongly encouraged to provide an adequate prep to teaching time ratio.

The rationale for assigning higher percentages to advising, staff development, and teacher preparation must be based on the following:

- the needs of the students
- the workforce priority or priorities
- the professional development needs of the ACP program instructors and staff
- integrated education and training, workforce preparation, and integrated English literacy and civics education activities that are aligned with regional workforce priorities

Note the following:

- Occupational training components should be supported with leveraged resources and partnership models with workforce partners, community colleges, and other appropriate training partners. When that’s not possible, a percentage of funds can be used to support an occupational training component.
- Grant funds may be used to purchase technology such as tablets, e-readers, laptops, and printers.
- Other allowable costs include childcare, transportation, books, and other supports.
- Adult Diploma Programs are not included as an option under ACP.
- The ACLS program specialist and the workforce partner will jointly review the ACP model and related program SMARTT plan, budget, and narrative responses to the continuation application at the end of each non-competitive year of refunding.

I. Continuous Improvement Planning

Continuous Improvement Planning (CIP) is the purview of the workforce partners. The workforce partners and the ACP programs are required to engage in an ongoing CIP process for each year of the three-year grant. The overall goal of the process is to ensure the program is offering high quality services. This includes evaluating whether all students have career pathways leading to successful outcomes when leaving the ACP program. Additionally, the CIP is to ensure the workforce priority or priorities and technology are adequately integrated into the curriculum, instructional units, and lesson plans. The CIP should also include an
analysis of student and other data provided through SMARTT and Cognos. Data on employment trends and data relevant to the college and career readiness goals of the program should also be reviewed. This CIP process may be separate from the CIP process at the CALC.

J. Curriculum and Instruction: Developing Contextualized Curriculum

ACP programs must support students in the acquisition of academic and college and career readiness knowledge and skills that will allow their students to move on to postsecondary and/or a career in a high-demand occupation. A key component of the ACP program, therefore, is the integration of the respective industry and/or occupational skills with academic instruction as demonstrated in models such as Washington state’s I-BEST. Curriculum and instruction must be contextualized with the academic skills of reading, writing, math, and communication skills, if needed, to succeed in the identified high-demand occupations. Integrated education and training, workforce preparation, and integrated English literacy and civics educations activities aligned with regional workforce priorities are also activities recommended for ACP models.

See the Massachusetts Community College and Workforce Development Transformation Agenda (MCCWDTA) for contextualized curricula for three key Massachusetts industries.

a. Adult Secondary Education

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCR Standards) provide clarity about the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind needed for success in college and careers. They encompass rigorous core skills in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. The goal of these standards is to guide curriculum development and teaching so that all students become college and career ready. Adult students who master these standards may avoid college developmental courses and obtain employment that provides a living wage. ACP programs offering ABE services must adopt the CCR Standards as the basis of their curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (Please note this approach is somewhat modified for ESOL as explained below.)

Increased rigor in the standards has had a profound impact not only on what students need to know and do but also on what teachers need to know and be able to do. The CCR Standards demand specific and important “instructional shifts” in how ELA and mathematics are taught. These instructional shifts are vital to supporting students in becoming college and career ready, and must be reflected in the ACP program’s pedagogy, scope and sequence, units, and lesson plans.

b. ESOL

ESOL programs should align their curriculum with the standards and benchmarks in the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Framework for English for Speakers of Other Languages and incorporate math instruction. Although there are many benchmarks that identify the skills students need to be successful in postsecondary education, there remain several important skills that are not addressed in the Framework. Therefore, ACLS recommends that programs weave the CCR Standards into instruction. The CCR Standards, however, are not a curriculum and do not specify the support and interventions appropriate for ESOL students. Given the
sophisticated use of the English language required by the CCR Standards, ESOL curriculum and instruction must simultaneously help students acquire and develop English while acquiring the knowledge and skills in the CCR Standards.

General principles drawn from a variety of theories and hypotheses of second language acquisition, however, inform us that in order for ESOL students to meet the challenges required by the CCR Standards, teachers should:

- Build ESOL student language, experience, and talents.
- Provide copious amounts of exposure to and practice in English communication skills, including Tier 2 and, depending on the program offered, Tier 3 vocabulary.  
- Contextualize instruction to help students negotiate situations outside of classroom settings and participate with native speakers in all aspects of social, workplace, and academic endeavors.
- Teach units and lesson plans that incorporate a process approach to teaching writing, and provide many opportunities for students to practice writing.
- Teach math and numeracy to build critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- Teach students to monitor their own academic progress.

c. Digital Literacy

Programs must integrate technology into the ACP program offerings. Programs must also ensure that students develop digital literacy skills because this is the expectation in postsecondary education and the workplace. Programs are also encouraged to supplement instruction with the ACT Career Ready 101 online curriculum and other relevant online instruction.

Properly integrated into the curriculum, technology helps students acquire the skills they need to survive in a complex, highly technological, knowledge-based economy. Teacher planning and commitment, however, are required to ensure that technology integration supports curricular goals. Program designs must include planning and teacher preparation time for contextualizing curricula to incorporate technology in the content-specific student learning outcomes and develop higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and research abilities. Through technology, students:

- Gain mastery of keyboarding skills allowing them to write and edit their work more easily
- Engage in meaningful practice in reading and writing
- Explore mathematical facts, relationships, and patterns
- Perform real-world math tasks, such as using spreadsheets
- Use calculators, smart boards, and software programs regularly incorporated into curriculum and instruction

A further benefit of using technology in the classroom is the opportunity it presents for the teacher to differentiate instruction, including computer-assisted instruction to meet the needs of classes with students at multiple levels.

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2 For more information on “Tier” words (Beck, McKeown, & Kukan, 2002), see the Academic Word List at http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist.
Because it is important to maintain up-to-date technology for student use, 5%-10% of ACP program grants may be used for instructional technology. If an ACP program has a need for a higher level of technology support, a rationale for additional funds may be submitted to ACLS.

For digital literacy resources, programs are encouraged to visit the SABES Professional Development Center for ABE Distance Learning and Technology Support website.

K. Assessment

Programs are encouraged to develop and/or adapt appropriate placement tests and career skills, interest, and values surveys and use relevant student information to determine class placement. Recommended sources of student information can include ACCUPLACER test results, MAPT test results, and/or teacher recommendations.

ACP programs must use National Reporting System (NRS) approved assessments as required for the CALCs. See the assessment section of the ACLS website to view the required assessments and policy manuals.

Programs are required to make use of ACLS’s ACCUPLACER account with students who wish to enroll in community college. The Department of Higher Education mandates the use of the ACCUPLACER at all public higher education institutions to assess the basic academic skills of entering students. Students who do not meet the cut-off scores in math, reading, and writing must take non-credit, developmental courses. ACP programs should help prepare students for the ACCUPLACER by using the ACCUPLACER Diagnostics. For more information about using the ACCUPLACER Diagnostics in your program, contact Tom Mechem at tmechem@doe.mass.edu.

ACLS is a member of the statewide, multi-agency Massachusetts Career Readiness Initiative (CRI). One component of the CRI program is making ACT Career Ready 101 licenses available to ABE programs. ACT Career Ready 101 is an online academic remediation tool that offers an integrated approach to exploring careers and their skill requirements. It also prepares students for the ACT WorkKeys assessment which leads to the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).

ACP programs have the option of using ACT Career Ready 101 in its programming. ACT Career Ready 101 may also be used as an online supplement. For more information about ACT Career Ready 101, contact Derek Kalchbrenner at dkalchbrenner@doe.mass.edu.

L. Professional Development (PD)

ACLS offers ACP professional development through the SABES PD Center for Education and Career Planning (CECP). The CECP provides support to ACP advisors, instructors, and administrators and offers workshops on topics including contextualizing curricula, program design strategies, career focused instruction, and education and career planning. In addition, ACP resources, curriculum, and research can be found on the CECP website. The National College Transition Network (NCTN) provides career pathways technical assistance and professional development services to ABE programs. World Education, Inc. provides capacity building and training activities for CRI participating organizations. This support
includes convening regional user group meetings to share best practices and facilitate discussions on using the ACT career readiness curriculum.

M. **National Reporting System (NRS)**

The NRS is the federal reporting system that each state receiving federal funds for ABE must use to report data about the number of students served, demographic information, and the outcomes achieved. ACP program data is included in ACLS’s federal reporting.