2017-18 Distance Learning Policy

Adult Education and Family Literacy Act

Implementation Date: July 1, 2017

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Rationale

To best align with instructional priorities outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the needs of adult learners across the state, the Office of Adult Education Initiatives (AEI) has drafted the following distance learning policy based upon National Reporting System (NRS) guidelines.

Distance learning provides an opportunity for programs to increase their capacity to serve learners; however, it is also sufficiently different from traditional classroom instruction and may require instructors to develop new skills. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors and administrators attend training before the implementation of distance learning activities. Ongoing professional development opportunities related to distance learning will be available from AEI.

The adoption of a statewide distance learning policy is intended to allow adult literacy programs a means to accurately document and deliver services to learners using flexible instructional models and diverse media. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to AEFLA-funded programs on how to classify, track, and report acceptable hours fo**r distance learning activities.**

Definitions

- **Distance Learning**: A formal learning activity where learners and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media including, but not limited to, print, audio recording, videotape, television broadcasts, computer software, web-based interaction, and other online technologies. Instructors support distance learners through communication via telephone, e- mail, or other web-based technologies or software.

- **Traditional Learners:** Learners who receive the majority of their instructional hours through in-person instruction are considered traditional learners.

- **Distance Learners:** Learners who receive the majority of their instructional hours through distance learning are considered distance learners. In-person contact hours and distance learning hours will be recorded separately. The determination of the learner's status as a traditional or distance learner will be made at the end of the year and will be based on which category of hours comprises over 50% of the learner's total instructional time. The learner's hours in both traditional and distance situations will be included in the NRS report, according to the 2016 NRS Implementation Guidelines.

- **Blended or Hybrid Learners:** Blended or Hybrid Learning is an instructional delivery model that incorporates telephone, video, teleconference, or other online communication components with traditional in-person classroom instruction. Teachers must monitor learner progress on an approved online curriculum in addition to the in-person class. Instructors may support their learners both in and outside of class via virtual learning communities, telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, or other technologies and software.
    - A learner who participates in blended or hybrid learning will be considered a distance learner for NRS purposes only if the majority of instructional hours credited to the learner are considered proxy hours as opposed to in-person contact hours.

- **Contact Hours:** Synchronous time spent instructing the learner. Contact hours for distance learners include two-way interaction between instructor and learner by telephone, video, teleconference, or

other online communication where learner and program staff are able to interact and through which learner identity is verifiable.

- **Proxy Hours:** Asynchronous time a learner spends independently engaged with distance learning activities, such as using an approved distance learning platform or approved instructional tool. Proxy hours can include approved independent instructional activities in a computer lab, activities assigned out of class, or supplemental activities. Local programs are required to use approved distance learning platforms.

Requirements

AEFLA-funded programs must:

1. **Follow Mandatory Assurances**
   a. The distance learning courses are identical to traditional courses at the program in terms of the quality, rigor, and breadth of academic and technical standards.
   b. The program ensures timeliness of its responses (synchronously or asynchronously) to learners' requests by placing a requirement on response time of no more than 24 hours within the program's operational schedule.

2. **Apply to Operate a Distance Learning Program**
   Programs must designate which distance learning instructional tools or platforms they will implement at the beginning of each fiscal year and thereafter if additions are requested. Requirements for approval of distance learning platforms are outlined at the end of this document.

3. **Administer Assessments**
   Programs must administer all pre- and post- assessments used to measure educational gain of distance learners for NRS reporting in person, at a proctored program site within the state. Assessments not conducted in-person with a trained test administrator in a secure setting are not allowed for NRS reporting. Distance learners should be post-tested after the same amount of instructional time as other learners, according to the state assessment policy. Instructional hours to determine post-test eligibility can be a combination of in-person contact hours, distance contact hours and proxy hours. Homework is not included in reportable proxy hours.

4. **Measure Proxy Hours for Distance Learners**
   Proxy hours are tracked depending on the model approved for each distance learning platform or instructional tool. Two models for tracking proxy hours are available:
   a. Clock Time Model
      i. Proxy hours are assigned based on the elapsed time that a learner is connected to, or engaged in an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time.
   b. Learner Mastery Model
      i. Proxy hours are assigned based on the learner passing a test on the content of each lesson or unit of instruction. Learners work with the materials and take a test when they are prepared. A high percentage of correct answers (typically 75%-80%) earns the credit hours attached to the material.

5. **Classify Instructional Hours for Reporting**
   In-person and distance learning instructional hours for each learner will be recorded in LACES.

a.   Programs must identify distance contact and proxy hours in LACES. All distance learning hours should be marked as "Instruction - Distance Learning – Subject Area" choosing the subject area most appropriate to the content covered.
b.   Reporting distance proxy hours that are tracked using the Clock Time Model is similar to reporting in-person attendance (see the assessment policy). It is reported weekly at the daily level & partial hours in 15 minute increments only.
c.   Reporting distance proxy hours that are tracked using the Learner Mastery Model requires entering the instructional hours associated to a lesson or unit as a cumulative number in LACES on the date the learner completed/mastered that unit of instruction.
d.   A learner will be reported as either a distance learner or traditional learner. This classification is determined at the end of the reporting period and is based on which category of instructional hours (in-person or distance learning) is 50% or more of the learner's total attendance time.

Recommendations

It is recommended that each program interested in offering distance learning follow these procedures to prepare for implementation:

- Review AEI training resources.
- Ensure adequate additional paid time for each distance instructor to serve learners at a distance appropriately.
- Select an individual to become the lead distance learning instructor for the program.
- Provide in-house staff training on distance learning platforms/instructional tools in use at local program as needed.
- Maintain communication with state staff via e-mail or telephone if challenges arise.

Approval of Distance Learning Platforms

If a program wishes to use a distance learning platform or instructional tool to report proxy hours, then they must submit a written request for approval to their AEI Program Coordinator. Requests must include the following information about the platform or instructional tool:

1.   Its name.
2.   A detailed description of the platform or instructional tool.
     a.   Including the instructional delivery mode (online, print, video etc.); pre- and post- testing structures; lesson assignment methods; learner feedback mechanisms; and evidence that it is research-based, effective, and appropriate for use with adults.
3.   The model it uses to track proxy hours (clock time or learner mastery).
4.   The criteria it uses to track and validate proxy hours (if using learner mastery model).

AEI may reject any requests for approvals if the description or evidence is deemed insufficient.