

## Adult Promise Pilot Program – Design Convening

May 3-4, 2016  
Boulder, Colorado

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In May 2016 as part of a grant funded by Lumina Foundation, SHEEO hosted a two-day convening to focus on designing a promise-type aid program for adult students. During this convening, we explored the possibility of implementing a promise program to serve the unique needs of an adult population without a postsecondary credential or degree. As the convening progressed, some clear themes developed.

**Funding.** Financing an education is especially difficult for adult students. Because of their age and time since graduating from high school, these students are often ineligible for state aid and grants. Working adults are above the income barrier for a Pell grant on the FAFSA, yet they can't afford to reduce their hours *and* pay for tuition and fees. On the other hand, unemployed adults may lose other welfare services if they enroll in college. For adult students, affording college requires consideration of their cost of living, potential for lost wages, elder or child care needs, and more. It is also particularly important for these students to understand the real costs in advance and be able to anticipate and plan for the cost of a full program, not just the first semester.

**Support Services.** Typical support services offered on campuses are not geared toward adult student needs. Institutions need to commit to serving adult students, and determine how best to support these students. For example, offering extended hours for campus services helps students taking evening courses find the support they need when they are on campus. Adult students have busy lives with other time commitments, requiring significant advising and assistance before they can even enroll.

**Flexibility.** Adult students are a very diverse population, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. An adult promise program should create choices, not requirements. For example, some students have prior credit and need help applying those credits to their degrees, while others can complete competency-based courses to receive credit for prior learning. Some adults can only take evening courses, while others need courses scheduled during a typical K-12 school day. A third group of students may only be able to take courses one or two days a week, while a fourth may look for weekend intensives and online courses.

**Information.** Adult students need to know what programs are available, and need up-front information about costs, requirements, time commitment, and outcomes. Students want to know where to get started, how to pay, what careers they should consider, and if they can get class credit for work experience. In addition, these students don't always trust marketing materials from institutions, and need a nonbiased entity to help them sort through options.

## Components of an Adult Promise Program

### State and System Level

- ◆ Standardized data collection and analysis
- ◆ Market to target audience
- ◆ Work with agency partners
- ◆ Broad focus, no micromanaging
- ◆ Provide last-dollar financial aid

### Institutional Level

- ◆ Based on incentives, not mandates
- ◆ Institutions must meet certain requirements to be involved and demonstrate that they are changing to serve the adult population
- ◆ Institutions receive additional funding for enrolling adult students and completing them

### Student Level

- ◆ Target population varies based on state
- ◆ Students receive funding for tuition and fees, or more, depending on the state
- ◆ Students respond to advertising by going to a website which allows them to figure out what they need and want
- ◆ Interested students speak with a local representative who helps them determine the best institution and program
- ◆ The representative helps students apply for admission and financial aid, and connects the student to a campus advisor