

## Adult Promise Pilot Program – Phase II Convening

June 4-6, 2017

Boulder, Colorado

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In June 2017, SHEEO hosted the second annual Adult Promise Pilot program convening to develop promise programs for adult students. This meeting kicked off Phase II of the project with the four pilot states (Maine, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Washington), each of which is beginning to implement their programs. Over the course of three days, the states participating in the programs presented their program designs and learned from experts in relevant policy areas. The program plans in each of the four pilot states are currently in development and subject to change. These programs are each unique, but they possess some common elements.

- They focus on leveraging and building upon existing state and institutional efforts to better serve adult students.
- There is buy-in from key stakeholders at institutions, other government agencies, economic development organizations, and the business community in each state.
- They represent much more than a last dollar scholarship for eligible participants and include improved supports and services to help adult students stay on track to earn their credentials.

The states are working to determine which resources will be used as a last dollar scholarship to cover tuition and fees for participating students. Additionally, each state has outlined some key areas of focus:

- Maine's Adult Promise will include developing a transparent structure for student services, provide a combination of financial incentives, tie together wrap-around services, and roll-out a series of marketing messages.
- The Minnesota State Returning Scholars program will include targeted outreach and re-enrollment, system navigation and support, and targeted financial assistance.
- Oklahoma will work with workforce partners to find last-dollar fees, implement an emergency funding system, and create a mentoring support structure to help students.
- The Washington Adult Reengagement Framework has three components: communications (connecting students to relevant programs), cost (assisting with transparent affordability), and completion (providing flexible programming).

**A number of important takeaways emerged during the convening. These include, but are not limited to:**

1. Many adults should be, and would be, in college if not for something that the states or institutions have done to make it difficult for them. Wherever possible, policies should be adjusted to better suit the needs of non-traditional students so we stop excluding adults from the postsecondary system.
2. The idea of a promise of free college is really powerful and important. States should lead with the promise concept, and keep it simple on the front-end (rather than leading with the FAFSA). Managing different sources of aid can be dealt with behind the scenes so they don't discourage potential students.
3. Although states must restrict their pilot programs to a certain number of students, prior programs with strict guidelines have had low participation. States should not make their programs too limiting through prior credit, degree program, or enrollment intensity requirements.
4. Many returning adult students transfer institutions, so targeted outreach is most effective if it comes from an institution-agnostic source (like a state agency).
5. Previous program results suggest that states need to ensure equity gaps are not expanding with these programs. This can be done by targeting the program supports and outreach to lower barriers for underrepresented students.
6. These programs are some of the first state-wide initiatives to enhance supports for adult students, so they need to be adaptable to feedback received in the pilot years.

**Some additional program-specific lessons include:**

1. Mistakes you made as a teenager should not still haunt you into adulthood. Students who withdrew after failing to meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) during prior attempts at postsecondary education remain ineligible for financial aid, which makes it very difficult to return. States can fill this gap and provide aid for students while they re-enroll and demonstrate their ability to meet SAP in the future.
2. Adult students should not be forced into taking unnecessary courses because they can't afford the prior learning assessment (PLA) fees. States can provide supplemental aid to cover PLA fees to speed up credential completion for adult students.
3. Many students drop out because of financial pressures that could be solved with one-time emergency aid. Emergency aid is not a new concept, but many institutions fear that advertising its availability will lead to demand that outstrips funding availability. However, it is inequitable to use word of mouth to spread awareness about emergency funds (as many institutions do).
4. Even a program promising free tuition and fees won't meet the true cost of attendance for adult students. When we talk about the cost of attendance for traditional students, we include room, board, and transportation. Some public benefit policies restrict eligibility for students, but states can work around this to link additional benefits like medical, food, childcare, and public housing subsidies. In addition, states can teach financial aid administrators about available resources so they can share this information with students.

5. At a traditional institution, adults can't take more than six credit hours at a time due to logistical issues. Adult students must balance work, commuting, family commitments, and changing schedules each semester. Restructuring the traditional course load can help these students take more credits. Structured schedules are predictable, constant, and consolidated. They are the same every semester, and offer options (such as all AM or all PM courses) during a condensed time or condensed day schedule that better aligns with adult student needs. These types of schedules may significantly reduce the time students use commuting, and therefore may enable adult students to take additional courses, reducing their time to a credential.