



***Linking Workforce Systems and Community
Colleges through Prior Learning Assessment
(PLA) for Adult Learner Success***

Application for Project Participation

November 30, 2016

Linking Workforce Systems and Community Colleges through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for Adult Learner Success

PROJECT SUMMARY

A range of community stakeholders play a role in engaging adult learners. While many systems and partners exist to help adults access short-term training and rapid job placement, many of those individuals may in fact be well positioned to earn postsecondary credentials, ultimately resulting in higher-value job and career opportunities. Connections between those serving adults on a daily basis, such as the Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), American Jobs Centers (AJCs), and community based organizations can have positive results in orienting adults to college level learning that better aligns with regional demand occupations and employer demand for college credentials. Strengthening relationships between public workforce system partners and community colleges presents a win-win for both and provides greater opportunity to students and jobseekers. It also presents great benefit to area employers who are struggling to find individuals who possess the skills and credentials they need.

In addition, individuals without college credentials who have been working in a specific industry have learned a great deal through their work and life experience and may be more qualified than their credential level indicates. Unfortunately, they do not have a degree or other credential to prove to potential employers what they know and prove what they can do, or to move up within their industry. Recognizing what adult students bring to college in terms of experience and prior learning by awarding college credit for that learning has proven to be a motivator toward completion, saving students time and money.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), through a grant provided by the ECMC Foundation, is undertaking a pilot project building on the existing assets of community-based entities, such as the workforce system and educational institutions. This project, to be piloted in up to four regions and/or communities, will establish strategies and processes for increasing the adult learner pipeline into postsecondary credential attainment and leveraging adult learner-focused strategies to support college credential completion.

CAEL will work with local education, workforce, and community stakeholders in selected regions and/or communities to design and implement processes that facilitate attainment of postsecondary credits leading to college credentials. CAEL will provide strategy, training, and process development/process improvement around participant engagement, assessment of prior learning, and generation of broader workforce system-wide knowledge of, support for, and policies to promote Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as a method for increasing post-secondary credential attainment for workforce system participants. Through this effort, workforce system partners and American Jobs Centers will be better positioned and prepared to:

1. communicate the value (in wage opportunities, available positions, and job security) of postsecondary credentials in attainment of job and career goals;
2. identify WIOA-supported training and other job seeker experiences that are college-level and can be assessed for college credit;
3. introduce and advocate for use of the tools and resources, including CAEL's PLA Accelerator and LearningCounts; and
4. facilitate the connection between individuals and colleges that are poised to offer college credits for that learning.

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About Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

CAEL is a national leader in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), the process by which an individual's college-level learning acquired from other sources, such as work and life experience, professional training, military training, or open source learning is evaluated for college credit. CAEL research has found¹ that students with PLA credit are 2.5 times more likely to graduate than students without PLA credit, regardless of race/ethnicity, age, financial aid status, or gender. PLA students also have higher persistence rates and a shorter time to degree completion. PLA students' GPAs also tend to be higher, and students who undertake PLA on average earned about 10 credit hours more credit (not including their PLA credits) at their institution than their non-PLA peers. Through PLA, adults learn the value of their experience, which boosts their confidence to complete their degrees.

Benefits to Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and Community Colleges

In some communities, the local workforce boards and colleges work independently and only connect when "handing off" a client from one to the other. This particular project aims to innovate around thoughtfully and efficiently guiding students from workforce training to a credentialing program and using PLA as a mechanism to bridge workforce training to college credit in high needs areas, enabling attainment of higher-wage high-demand jobs.

In addition to promoting PLA opportunities among those already pursuing college credentials, CAEL proposes to utilize PLA to better engage community workforce efforts. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides communities with a venue and infrastructure in which promotion and facilitation of PLA can address both workforce development and college completion goals, guiding participants onto a more efficient pathway toward a post-secondary credential or degree. This "pathways" approach will help workforce system participants obtain credentials in a faster and less costly way and facilitate better alignment between workforce boards and colleges in developing more comprehensive, better informed career pathways in the long run.

For the colleges, this process will provide a clear stream of new students to the program, who may have access to WIOA funding and have specific, career-oriented attainment goals at their college.

Furthermore, once crosswalks between WDB training and credit opportunities are established, the process of awarding PLA credit for these particular students will become far less burdensome for both the college and for individuals than trying to do so on an *ad hoc* basis as students arrive.

This model of direct coordination and articulation will not only serve as a possible model for further cooperation between the board and the college, but may in fact offer national best practices. CAEL, the ECMC Foundation, and the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) plan to promote this project and its findings on a national stage, with hopes of developing a replicable model in other areas.

¹ Klein-Collins, Rebecca. "Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success: A 48-Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes." Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2010. For the full report and more details about the benefits of PLA for students and institutions, please see http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/617695/premium_content_resources/pla/PDF/PLA_Fueling-the-Race.pdf

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Benefits for Workforce Development Boards (WDBs):

- PLA has been highlighted by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration as an effective strategy for increasing post-secondary credential attainment (TEGL 33-11).
- Having WIOA training participants' prior learning—gained through work experience, on-the-job training, classroom training, volunteering, and beyond—assessed for credit can result in cost-savings by reducing tuition expenses and avoids allocating resources to pay for learning that the training participant already knows.
- PLA enables attainment of often higher-value credentials, leading to higher wage jobs.
- PLA is especially valuable for adult learners, dislocated workers, and veterans—allowing them to earn credit for what they already know and recognizing the skills, knowledge, and experience they bring to the table builds confidence, increases positive outcomes, and enhances their ability to connect time spent in the classroom with their professional worlds.

Benefits for Community Colleges:

- Students who undertake prior learning assessment are much more likely to be retained, to persist, and to graduate.
- Students who utilize PLA also take more tuition-bearing, faculty-taught courses at the college than their non-PLA peers.
- PLA also moves students towards graduation much more quickly than if students needed to take courses for knowledge they already possess.
- While federal financial aid often does not pay for assessment fees, the utilization of WIOA funds means that students may not only be fully funded for their coursework but also for their assessment fees.
- This project allows colleges to demonstrate to potential employers in the area that a steady, reliable stream of graduates can be produced through this program with expertise in specific industry sectors.

Resources and Support for Selected Applicants

Participating entities will be supported through funding and technical assistance provided by CAEL. In particular, CAEL will make available the following resources and services:

- Training and professional development for the college, the workforce board, and AJC staff;
- \$25,000 for staff time, resources, meeting expenses, and other costs related to this project;
- Process mapping and assistance to streamline the process of helping students navigate the transition from the AJC to the college and the PLA process at the college;
- Access to CAEL resources, such as the PLA Accelerator (a web-based tool that assists in and streamlines the PLA advising process) during the life of the project; and
- Access to CAEL's expertise, research, and technical assistance in the areas of adult attainment, prior learning assessment, and workforce alignment.

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Project Timeline

Timeline	Selected Project Activities & Outcomes
Quarter 1: January – March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creation of public information materials – CAEL will assist in producing materials that promote postsecondary completion and PLA ○ Participation in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Process Mapping – CAEL will produce a visual representation of how partners will share information with one another and with participants, organization, and staff roles in promoting PLA, connecting participants with appropriate information and resources, conducting assessment and enrollment activity.
Quarter 2: April – June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAEL will create frameworks for analysis of ITA activity for assessment of college-level learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of 5-10 ITA-supported trainings for possible alignment with credit bearing offerings. ▪ Identification of 3-5 ITA-supported trainings that are credit worthy. ○ CAEL will define characteristics of high-potential participants, such as unemployed veterans or dislocated workers who have participated in work-based learning or company-sponsored training. ○ CAEL will conduct training for Workforce Development Board and college staff (est. 2-3 trainings per each selected partnership)
QUARTER 3: July – September 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAEL will work with the community college partner to complete crosswalks between ITA and college offerings for 3-5 trainings. ○ CAEL will deliver web presentations to Workforce Development Board and college staff on results of crosswalk development and definition of high-potential PLA candidates
QUARTER 4: October – December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Referral of up to 20 participants per selected site (80 total) to PLA processes at area colleges ○ 10-15 participants per site (40-60 total) applying for Prior Learning credit
QUARTER 5: January – March 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAEL will publish case studies, highlight pilot sites at national conferences, conduct webinars, etc.

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APPLICATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Application Timeline

Application Released	Wednesday, November 30, 2016
Applicants' Webinar	Monday, December 12, 2016 - 12:00-12:30pm CST
Email indicating intent to apply*	Friday, December 16, 2016 – 5:00pm CST
Proposals Due	Friday, January 13, 2017 – 5:00pm CST
Selections Announced	By January 31, 2017

**Note: Email of intent should be sent to Wilson Finch at wfinch@cael.org by 5:00pm CST on Friday, December 16, 2016. This very brief statement is non-binding, and it is primarily to help CAEL gauge interest. It will also be used to email potential applicants about any further information, should it arise during the application process.*

Submission Instructions

All submissions must be emailed to Wilson Finch at CAEL (wfinch@cael.org) by the submission deadline of 5:00pm CST on Tuesday, January 13, 2017. Late applications will not be accepted. Each applying site must be comprised of a joint partnership between a local Community College and the local Workforce Development Board, and the applying entities must submit a single, joint application for their community. Applications should address all questions, confirm all requirements and commitments, and have all applicable signatures at submission. Scanned copies of relevant signatures are preferred.

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be a joint partnership between a Workforce Development Board and a Community College.

A central component of this project is the close cooperation between a local Workforce Development Board and a local Community College in designing, streamlining, and implementing clear pathways that direct adult learners from the American Jobs Centers to the college and through to degree attainment. Therefore, it is critical that applicant sites demonstrate a solid partnership between the college and the workforce board. This project will require staff time, resources, and cooperation on both sides. By applying jointly for this project, both entities are committing to work together toward the project goals for the full term of the project.

It is understood that one entity will serve in a lead project management and/or fiduciary role for this; however, the details of that arrangement may be determined after the selection decision. Furthermore, each partnership will need to assign one or two people to serve as the primary point person(s) for this project. Again, this can be determined after the selection decision.

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In addition to this partnership requirement, participating entities must meet the following requirements, and by submitting this application, both entities are confirming that they meet these requirements:

Workforce Board Requirements:

- ☐ The Community College partner has programs on the WIOA Eligible Training Provider List
- ☐ The WDB has access to and can provide a list of the Individual Training Account (ITA)-supported training it has funded over the past 6 or 12-month period
- ☐ The WDB will produce, if selected, a list of the credentials (including postsecondary degrees) and/or certifications obtained by WIOA customers in the last and current program year
- ☐ WDB policies currently allow for (or could potentially be amended to allow for) the use of WIOA funds to:
 - Pay for fees or other costs associated with the assessment of prior learning for college credit² (e.g. CLEP, DSST and/or other national standardized exams, Challenge Exams, Demonstrations of Skill and/or Portfolio Assessments)
 - Pay for fees or other costs associated with converting certifications/licensures or other workforce training into college credit (e.g. ACE, intuitional transcription fees)

Community College Requirements:

- ☐ The college must be an Associate degree-awarding technical and/or community college that is regionally accredited and publicly funded.
- ☐ The college (and the departments and degree programs designated for this project) must currently have policies and procedures that allow for the awarding of credit for prior learning.² In particular, the institution must allow for developing processes (if they do not already exist) for evaluating workplace training, industry certifications, and other trainings that may be supported by the WDB. Please note this is not a guarantee of the award of credit, but merely that the institution will evaluate the WDB-supported training programs for possible credit.
- ☐ The college must have clearly articulated, course-level learning outcomes for the degree programs that will be utilized in this project for crosswalks to WDB-supported training programs.

Narrative Questions

Please answer the following questions so that we can better evaluate your partnership's fit for this project, including readiness and eagerness to participate, alignment of goals, and community context.

Please limit your responses to approximately 5 pages per application for this narrative section.

1. Please describe what you see as the perceived benefits to each of your entities for undertaking this project.
2. How will this initiative align with and complement other initiatives you are undertaking?

² Explanation: Prior learning assessment (or credit for prior learning) is a process by which college-level knowledge and skills obtained *outside* of a college environment is evaluated for college credit. This can include a wide variety of assessment mechanisms, including (but not limited to) CLEP, DSST, departmental challenge exams, portfolio assessments, credit for military training, credit for industry certifications or trainings, or demonstrations of skill. Colleges do not need to necessarily have all of these example assessment mechanisms. Transfer credit from another regionally accredited institution does not qualify as PLA credit.

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3. What do you see as the three biggest challenges at each of your entities to undertaking and completing this project? Please describe them.
4. For this project, the collection and sharing of data and key outcome measures will be of utmost importance. In particular, CAEL and ECMC will need de-identified data on adult learners/clients, including their outcomes and pathways through the crosswalks from the board through the college (the details of which will be worked out after the selection process). Note: CAEL will not be requesting any information that identifies the individual student/client, including name, date of birth, address, SSN, etc. nor will CAEL share institution-specific information in public forums. Please describe how the board and the college will work together to capture and share this data with each other (as is necessary to track participants) and with CAEL (to measure outcomes).
5. For this project, the colleges and boards will be focusing on developing crosswalks between WDB-supported training programs in a few key sectors to specific degree programs at the college. Please identify 2-5 industry sectors and their corresponding degree programs that the partnership would be interested in targeting for the crosswalks.
6. This project includes \$25,000 per site to help offset costs. This may be used for staff time, administrative expenses, meeting expenses, or other expenses approved by CAEL. While a detailed budget will be worked out with selected partnerships, for the purposes of this application, please indicate how you believe you will divide the amount between the college and the board.
7. Describe how the attainment of (two and/or four-year) college degrees is supported by the local WDB's strategies and policies.
8. Provide examples of how the partners on this proposal have worked together to: implement new training/education programs, cross-refer students/customers, co-enroll students/customers, report on student/customer outcomes, develop new policies or practices, provide shared training/professional development to staff/faculty, and/or other related efforts.
9. Describe how WDB strategies support longer-term education and training interventions such as two-year and/or four-year college degree programs in addition to other training activities.
10. Please describe the importance of prior learning assessment to your college.
11. What do you see as your college's areas of need regarding PLA?
12. In order to understand the potential barriers that may exist to crosswalking PLA credits, we need a better understanding of the community college's key PLA policies. In particular, please describe the following for both the college and the specific departments/degree programs designated in this project:
 - a. Do you require that a student earn a certain number of institutional credits *prior to* PLA credits either being evaluated or transcribed? If so, what is that requirement?

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- b. Do you place a limit or cap on the number of PLA credits that can be awarded to a student? If so, what are they (please note any caps that are more or less granular, such as a limit on portfolio credits or a limit on all external (PLA or transfer) credits)?
- c. Do you have any restrictions on the evaluation, awarding, use (e.g. can students only use them for electives), or transcribing of PLA credits that would be relevant to the pathways within this project? If so, please describe them.

Commitments:

- Both the Community College and the Workforce Development Board commit to the goals, timeline, outcomes, and activities outlined in this document.
- Both the college and the board will provide the necessary staff, staff time, and resources to complete the project goals and activities. In particular, it is essential that staff give the project the necessary prioritization and attention to ensure that deadlines are met:
 - For the Workforce Development Board, this means the board will provide or designate someone to provide leadership, coordination, project management support, and access to the AJCs. The AJCs will provide their career coaches for training sessions, for process mapping workshops, and for referring clients.
 - For the community college, most of the work will be focused in the degree programs that are being cross-walked to WDB trainings. However, this project and PLA generally require cross-campus involvement to run smoothly from a wide variety of campus staff and faculty. This includes, but is not limited to, faculty (for evaluating WDB training for possible credit awards and crosswalk creations), registrars, institutional research, academic affairs, student support services, admissions and enrollment, advising, and the business office. Project management, leadership, and coordination will also be important for the college's role.
- Both the college and board commit to providing leadership support for this project.

Signatures:

We, the undersigned, having read and understood the preceding project outline, commitments, and requirements, agree to abide by them in order to ensure the proper and timely progress of this project if selected. Furthermore, we commit to providing the necessary support, staff time, and prioritization to this project, as outlined in this agreement.

Institution President/Chancellor (name, signature, and date)

Chief Academic Officer (name, signature, and date)

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Department Chair(s) of Relevant Degree Program(s) (name, signature, and date—as many as necessary)

Registrar (name, signature, and date)

Head of Student Services (name, signature, and date)

Director of Workforce Development Board (name, signature, and date)

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ABOUT CAEL

CAEL is a national non-profit organization that has created and managed effective learning and assessment strategies for adults since 1974. CAEL is a leader in working to put lifelong learning opportunities in reach of every adult at all levels of the workforce – with a special focus on those who are on the front lines of organizations, those who are lower-skilled and who earn lower wages, and those who do not have easy access to postsecondary education. Through our broad array of programs and services, we serve adult learners in multiple sectors, including higher education, business and industry, and public workforce development, as well as individually through LearningCounts, and CAEL's career/education advising services. CAEL uses its knowledge and experience to ensure that all adult learners can earn the credentials they need to reach their education and career goals in a more timely and cost-effective way.

Over the last 42 years, CAEL's reputation, visibility, and ability to achieve its mission have grown significantly. With a staff of 55 and a membership of over 700 colleges, universities, corporations, labor unions, associations, and individuals, CAEL is headquartered in Chicago and also maintains offices in Denver, CO, and Philadelphia, PA. Through each of its activities, CAEL continues to advocate for system change that will help lower-skilled, at-risk adults receive the education and training they need for employability, and help more adults of all ages and ethnicities complete postsecondary education.

CAEL's Workforce and Economic Development team brings deep expertise in working with workforce investment systems and aligning investments in education and training with job growth and economic development needs. Coupled with our expertise in Higher Education and support for adult learners, CAEL brings a critical mix of skills and relationships needed to engage and align workforce development and postsecondary education priorities at the community level. CAEL also maintains a broad and deep network of subject matter experts who can be engaged to address challenges related to specific skill sets, industry credentials, and assessment techniques.

<http://www.cael.org>

ABOUT ECMC FOUNDATION

The ECMC Foundation is a Los Angeles-based, nationally focused foundation with current assets of \$354 million. The mission of ECMC Foundation is to inspire and facilitate improvements that affect educational outcomes—especially among underserved populations—through evidence-based innovation. The foundation has three priority investment areas: teacher development, college success, and career readiness. ECMC Foundation prioritizes evaluation and measurement and is committed to sharing its impact. Working with CAEL, participating sites will need to provide information as part of the reporting process to ECMC in evaluating and publicizing this project.

<http://www.ecmcfoundation.org/>