

Request for Applications Supporting the Implementation of Statewide Credit for Prior Learning through an Evidence-Based Community of Practice

I. Summary

- **General Overview:** The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), in partnership with RAND, will be offering technical assistance (TA) to states or statewide systems of higher education in enhancing their Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) public policies. After a competitive selection process, three states or statewide systems will be selected to participate in TA from January 2026 - December 2027.
- **Why CPL Policy:** Effective Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) policies are essential because they accelerate degree completion and reduce debt by recognizing knowledge gained outside the classroom, increasing access and successful outcomes for learners from a variety of backgrounds. CPL helps individuals upskill for the evolving job market, boosting economic mobility and contributing to workforce development. For institutions, CPL enhances efficiency by attracting and retaining students while promoting lifelong learning. In a 2024 [study](#) conducted by CAEL and the American Council on Education (ACE), we found 362 CPL policies and regulations across all 50 states, as well as DC, around CPL and the award of credit for military



experience. While many states or systems had policies that related to methods of assessment or military training, relatively fewer (30 or less) had policies in place to address affordability or data tracking and assessment. Overall, the results indicated that further strengthening and aligning these policies would likely lead to better outcomes for learners, institutions, and the economy at large.

- **CAEL and RAND's Roles:**

- CAEL will be the lead technical assistance provider throughout the project.
- RAND will develop a state policy framework to guide the technical assistance, and will collect administrative and qualitative data with state participants throughout the technical assistance period to understand states' experiences and ultimately refine the state policy framework.

- **Funding/TA Available:**

Each state or state system selected will receive:

- *Funding:*
 - Each selected state or state system will receive a \$40,000 stipend, paid out in two installments over two years, to help with capacity towards this effort, as well as to pay for travel and lodging to two all-cohort convenings.
- *Technical Assistance:*
 - Bimonthly calls (every other month) with a dedicated CAEL staff person to identify and work through specific TA requests;
 - Bimonthly (every other month) peer learning calls with the other selected states/state systems;
 - Potential for engagement with other subject matter experts external to CAEL/RAND

- **Key Dates:**

- RFA Release Date: October 8, 2025
- Application Deadline: Friday, November 21, 2025
- Notification of Selection: By December 12, 2025
- Kick-Off Convening in Santa Monica, CA: February 24-25, 2026. *Please have your team hold this date in your calendars.*

II. Ideal Applicants

- **A. Eligible Applicants:** Applications should include a team of 3-6 members representing a variety of stakeholders necessary to move the work forward in your state. Please also select a "team lead" and note who that will be in your application. The team lead will be responsible for coordinating with the CAEL staff point of contact.

Examples of key team members could include:

- Leader(s) from the state agency, coordinating board, or other office/initiative that oversees postsecondary education and credit for prior learning policy;
- Leader(s) from statewide systems of higher education in the state and/or key institutions.
- Other leaders or staff throughout the state engaged in CPL and/or adult student engagement, workforce development, etc.

- **B. Commitment:** Each application must include a signed letter of commitment from the team members listed above, including any relevant endorsement of participation, data collection, and data sharing from the leadership of their respective agency or institution(s).
- **C. Current State of CPL Policy:** Applications should include a detailed account of the current state of CPL policy within the team's state or statewide system, as well as the team's current TA goals. Ideal states/state systems will already have at least some CPL policies in place and demonstrated momentum and buy-in into strengthening and improving those policies. *More detail on application requirements are in section IV.*

III. Scope of Technical Assistance

- **A. Areas of Support:** A custom technical assistance plan will be created individually with each state team according to their specific goals and context. Areas of support could include, but are not limited to:
 - Policy framework development (e.g., statewide articulation agreements, public data dashboards, etc.)
 - Faculty, administrator, and advisor training and professional development
 - Credit transfer and transcript notation
 - Assessment methodologies (e.g., portfolio review, standardized exams, military transcripts, industry certifications)
 - CPL process mapping
 - Skills and competency mapping
 - CPL crosswalks from industry credentials
 - Data collection and reporting
 - Equity and access considerations
 - Student awareness and advising strategies
- **B. Deliverables and Activities:** Each state team, with their CAEL staff lead, will develop or expand upon:
 - A self-assessment utilizing RAND's to-be-released CPL policy framework and rubric
 - A detailed action plan for the two years of engagement, including setting KPI's/milestones
 - Stakeholder engagement strategies
 - Methods of data tracking and collection
 - And more, depending on their goals

Each state team will also have one in-person site visit facilitated by their CAEL staff lead. This site visit will be coordinated to advance their goals within the state and with key stakeholders.

State teams will also be required to attend two all-cohort convenings. Funds from the stipends should be utilized to cover travel and attendance costs. *The first convening will be held at RAND headquarters in Santa Monica, CA on February 24-25, 2026. Please hold the date in your team's calendars.*

State teams will work with RAND to establish a Data Use Agreement, secure IRB permissions, and securely transfer individual- and institution-/program-level data for the purposes of the evaluation.

- **C. Duration of Engagement:** January 2026 - December 2027.

IV. Application Requirements

- **A. Cover Sheet:**
 - State or Statewide System Name
 - Applying Agency/Department
 - Primary Contact Person for Application (Name, Title, Email, Phone)
 - Team Lead Contact Person (*if different from above*) (Name, Title, Email, Phone)
- **B. Narrative Questions:**
 - **1. Current CPL Landscape (2-4 paragraphs):** Describe the current state of CPL policies and practices in your state, including strengths, challenges, and existing initiatives. Please feel free to include any reference materials, such as policy documents, legislation, and/or websites.
 - **2. Need for Technical Assistance (1-3 paragraphs):** Explain why your state is seeking this technical assistance, identifying specific challenges or opportunities related to CPL policy.
 - **3. Goals and Objectives (1-3 paragraphs):** Clearly articulate the specific goals your state hopes to achieve through this technical assistance opportunity, including measurable outcomes. How does this work fit into your statewide priorities?
 - **4. Stakeholder Engagement (1-2 paragraphs):** Describe key stakeholders involved in CPL in your state and how you plan to engage them in this initiative.
 - **5. Leadership Commitment:** Demonstrate strong leadership commitment to advancing CPL policy within your state, including a signed letter of commitment from the core team members with any relevant endorsement of participation from the leadership of their respective agency or institution.
 - **6. Capacity and Resources (1-2 paragraphs):** Outline the internal capacity and resources your state will dedicate to this initiative.
 - **7. Sustainability Plan (1-2 paragraphs):** Describe how your state plans to sustain and scale the outcomes of the technical assistance beyond the engagement period.
 - **8. Data Collection (1-2 paragraphs):** Please describe the student- and program-/institution-level data that you collect on CPL offerings, use, and linkable student characteristics and outcomes. Please note the timeframe for which these data are available. Finally, what challenges have you encountered with CPL data collection, reporting, and use? Are there data gaps you have that you would like to address?
 - For student-level data, please address if you collect: number of CPL course credits received, course requirements fulfilled by CPL, student background characteristics, student persistence and completion, and student engagement, well-being, and/or other institutional survey measures.
 - For program-/institution-level data, please address if you collect CPL course crosswalk data, and if so, by semester or year.

- **C. Letters of Support (Optional):** You may include letters from key stakeholders (e.g., legislative leaders, higher education institutions, workforce development agencies) demonstrating support for the application and its goals.

V. Application Submission Instructions

- **A. Submission Platform/Method:** Please combine application materials into one PDF and submit online [at this link](#) by COB Friday, November 21, 2025.

VI. Questions and Contact Information

- **A. How to Ask Questions:** If you have any questions, please email both Rachel Hirsch, rhirsch@cael.org, and Patricia Wallace, pwallace@cael.org.

VII. Appendix

- **Relevant Resources:**
 - [The National Landscape of Credit for Prior Learning Policy: Effective State and System Policies for Success and Equity](#) and [Database](#)
 - [The PLA Boost: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes](#)
 - [The Four Stages of Building an Effective and Inclusive CPL Program](#)
 - Example of CAEL-facilitated state policy result: [Delaware CPL Policy Framework](#)
 - [Awarding College Credit for Industry Credentials: Findings from Ohio Community Colleges on Outreach and Intake Practice](#)