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Supporting adult learners from enrollment to completion

Implementation findings from the Adult Promise Evaluation

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Ann Person, Julie Bruch, Lisbeth Goble, Veronica Severn, and Ashley Hong

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Executive summary

Lumina Foundation seeks to increase the proportion of Americans who hold a postsecondary credential to 60 percent by 2025, across all racial, ethnic, immigration, and income groups. Recognizing that this goal cannot be achieved through a focus on traditional-age college students alone, Lumina launched the Adult Promise initiative in 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, the foundation made multiyear grants to a total of 15 states to address adult postsecondary attainment through recruitment, supports, and financial commitments. The Adult Promise evaluation tracked progress in 11 states included in the 2017 and 2018 grant waves (California, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Washington), focusing on six domains: (1) state and institutional policy context, (2) outreach and recruitment, (3) supports for adult students, (4) financial assistance, (5) equity considerations, and (6) crisis response, which was especially relevant in 2020.

State and institutional policy context

State and institutional policy context varies across grantee states along several key dimensions, including: the opportunity to build on or dovetail with other statewide attainment initiatives; extent of centralization in the higher education landscape; labor market demands in specific industries; and demographic shifts in the postsecondary population.

States used Adult Promise to build on existing attainment efforts. Several states, including Indiana and Maine, used it to enhance ongoing initiatives by adding specific supports and fostering collaboration. Others used Adult Promise to expand programming, as in Oklahoma, which increased the number of economically critical degree programs offered. Finally, some states used the grant to extend an existing effort, such as in North Carolina, where they bolstered the Partway Home initiative, which had been short on funding and political will.

States' higher education systems shaped their Adult Promise initiatives. Although centralization supported early implementation, it may have led to some later challenges. For example, Minnesota was forced to reassess its strategy when funding from the state legislature did not come through as expected, and stakeholders in Oklahoma expressed some concerns about a perceived "one-size-fits-all approach." Washington got off to a slower start with its decentralized system, but time spent gaining institutional buy-in was consistently viewed as worthwhile. In North Carolina, Adult Promise provided an opportunity to bridge the fragmented two- and four-year systems.

Outreach and recruitment

Engagement of adult learners differs substantially from what postsecondary institutions typically do to reach students entering from high school.

States found and reached diverse and dispersed adult learner populations through direct engagement. Adult Promise states deployed two key strategies to reach adult learners. First, they sought input directly from adult learners through focus groups, listening sessions, surveys, and other activities. Second, building on the information gathered, they created tailored materials, programs, and activities to meet adult learners' needs and encourage enrollment.

Tech-based and traditional tools facilitated adults' application and enrollment. States used both tech-based and traditional tools to make enrollment convenient and efficient for adults, who are often balancing work and family demands with education. Several created online portals and other tools to facilitate the enrollment process. Others used navigators as a powerful way to support adult engagement. These staff guide students through enrollment and connect them to resources and supports, sometimes serving as a coach after enrollment.

Supports for adult students

Adult learners can benefit from many of the same supports as their younger peers, but the states' targeted approaches took adults' prior experiences and competing demands into consideration.

States sought to understand adult learners to help them succeed. Three issues are especially salient for understanding adult learners' needs. First, they are intrinsically motivated, often because they want to be family and community role models. Second, adults have many commitments—especially related to work and family—that they must balance with the potential benefits of further education. Third, some adults struggle with emotional barriers to higher education, sometimes driven by negative educational experiences, as well as insecurity or isolation stemming from a disconnect with their younger peers.

Supports spoke to adult students' assets and barriers. Adult learners benefit from flexibility and individualized supports. Adult students place special value on faculty and staff who recognize that they have competing priorities or special needs, without singling them out. Evening, weekend, hybrid, and online course options can help adult learners balance competing demands, but it is also important to address gaps in access to technology and bolster adults' skills to engage fully in digital options.

Financial assistance

A cornerstone of Adult Promise is to ensure that students' financial needs are met. However, adults may not qualify for certain types of aid because of their age, prior credits, or degrees. They may also need different types of aid, such as child care assistance or debt forgiveness.

States tapped public and private sources to ensure adequate, sustainable funding for adults. Adult Promise states identified and leveraged available state and federal aid and designed their programs to complement these public sources. They braided funding from foundations, employers, and other sources to address the varied costs faced by adult learners including, for example, housing, child care, transportation, and educational expenses. Navigators may be especially important to guide students in cases where aid comes from multiple sources.

States looked beyond scholarships and grants to serve adult students' needs. Adult Promise states used creative means, such as microgrants and emergency funding, to address small-dollar expenses that might otherwise derail adult learners. They also sought to minimize barriers by creating broad eligibility criteria for aid and low-effort application processes.

Equity considerations

Adult Promise states used several strategies to focus explicitly on supporting enrollment and completion among adult learners of color and to hold themselves accountable to shared equity goals. These included:

- Hiring and training staff to engage communities of color
- Building and growing credible partnerships in communities of color
- Disaggregating data to better understand equity gaps
- Using data to inform outreach activities and eligibility cutoffs
- Identifying and addressing barriers that have an outsized impact on adult students of color
- Connecting adult students of color to targeted funding
- Setting and tracking clear, measurable, and relevant equity goals

Crisis response

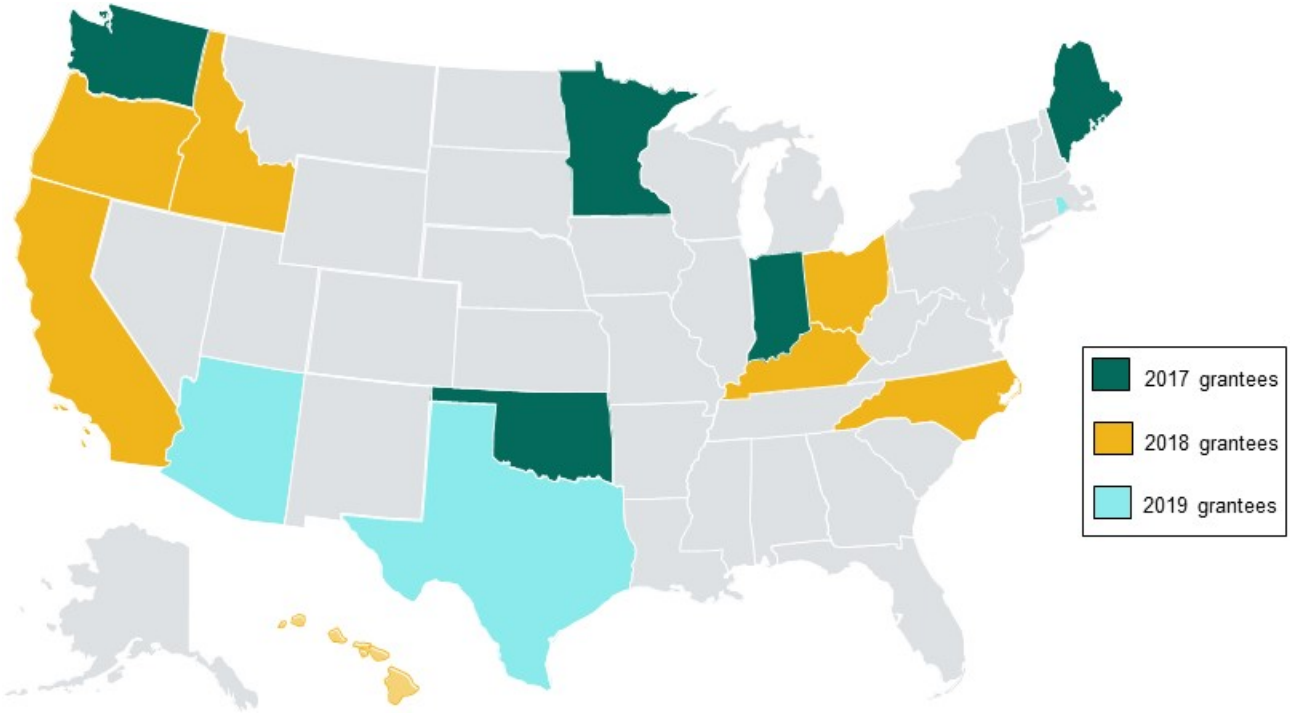
The Adult Promise grants were nearing their conclusion when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum. The evaluation found that states were addressing several prominent issues in the wake of these crises:

- Coordinating with other state and institutional leaders, particularly around budget and financial issues and day-to-day needs of adult learners
- Shifting programming to address emerging challenges and needs, such as canceling or reshaping events and placing greater attention on access to online opportunities
- Adapting to greater financial uncertainty, including monitoring state and federal resources and considering ways to respond to rising unemployment
- Responding to the racial justice movement by reviewing materials, policies, and procedures with an equity lens

In recent years, education, workforce, and policy stakeholders have come together under what is often called the "college completion agenda." Increasing the number of people in the United States with college degrees, workforce certificates, and industry certifications is critical to address workforce needs nationwide and improve people's ability to thrive in a changing economy. Recognizing this urgent need, Lumina Foundation seeks to increase the proportion of Americans who hold a postsecondary credential to 60 percent by 2025, across all racial, ethnic, immigration, and income groups.[1]

Recognizing that this goal cannot be achieved through a focus on traditional-age college students alone, Lumina launched the Adult Promise initiative in 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, the foundation invested nearly $8 million in multiyear grants to a total of 15 states to address adult postsecondary attainment through recruitment, supports, and financial commitments (Exhibit 1). These investments acknowledge that adults are an essential piece of the attainment puzzle. There are nearly 170 million U.S. residents between the ages of 25 and 64, and fewer than half have obtained a postsecondary degree or certificate; approximately 15 percent of these adults have some college but no credential.[2] Beyond the general focus on adults, Adult Promise explicitly prioritized investments that support enrollment and attainment for adult learners of color. Communities of color have been historically underserved by higher education and the economy. Indeed, while approximately 46 percent of white adults hold a college degree, the figures range from about 22 percent for Native Americans, 24 percent for Hispanic adults, to about 30 percent for Blacks.[3]

Exhibit 1. States receiving Adult Promise grants, 2017-2019



[1] Lumina Foundation. "A Stronger Nation: Learning Beyond High School Builds American Talent." February 2020. Available at https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#nation

[2] Person, Ann E., Julie Bruch, and Lisbeth Goble. "Why Equity Matters for Adult College Completion." Washington, DC: Mathematica, December 12, 2019. Available at https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/why-equity-matters-for-adult-college-completion

[3] Person et al. (2019).

Learning from Adult Promise

The Adult Promise evaluation followed 11 states from the 2012 and 2018 grant waves throughout their respective grant periods to understand how initiatives in each state were designed and implemented to better include and support adult learners in postsecondary education (for information on grant-funded activities in each state, see Exhibit A.1 in the appendix).[4] This report synthesizes findings from several rounds of data collection, analysis, and reporting that was completed between early 2018 and mid-2020, focused on various aspects of program implementation, and structured to provide formative feedback to the foundation and participating states (Exhibit A.2 in the appendix).

The experiences of Adult Promise states point to a set of strategic and tactical questions that stakeholders must grapple with in these types of initiatives (Exhibit 2). We organize the findings in this report to address these questions, providing cross-cutting lessons and examples in reference to each. These lessons and examples can guide stakeholders seeking to fund, design, implement, and sustain similar comprehensive, equity-focused adult attainment efforts.

Evaluation Data Sources

Data collected between early 2018 and mid-2020 inform the findings in this report:

- Grant applications, marketing materials, and other key program documents
- Telephone interviews with state leads at six time points
- Site visits to three states, including interviews with state and institution-level stakeholders and student focus groups
- Surveys of state leads
- Survey of staff at partner postsecondary institutions

Exhibit 2. Strategic and tactical questions guiding Adult Promise design and implementation

Topic	Question
State and institutional policy context	How do adults fit within the state's broader college completion agenda? How does the structure of the state's higher education system shape the initiative?
Outreach and recruitment	How can states find and reach a diverse and dispersed adult learner population? What tools and supports can facilitate adults' application and enrollment?
Supports for adult students	What should states know about adult learners to help them succeed? What supports are most needed to ensure adult student success?
Financial assistance	How can states ensure adequate, sustainable funding for adults? Beyond scholarships and grants, what aid strategies can serve adult students' needs?
Equity considerations	What organizational steps can states take to better reach and support underrepresented and underserved groups? How can states and institutions use data to guide their efforts to address equity gaps? How can states and institutions identify barriers and leverage supports for adult learners of color in the broader system? How can states hold themselves and their partners accountable for shared equity goals?
Crisis response	How are states responding to the COVID-19 pandemic? How has the racial justice movement affected Adult Promise strategies?

[4] In addition to the 11 states included in the evaluation, Oregon was included in several interviews at the request of Lumina Foundation. The three states that received grant funding in 2019 (Arizona, Rhode Island, and Texas) were not included in the evaluation.

State and institutional policy context

Lumina Foundation emphasizes the state as a primary driver of changes sought through Adult Promise, which is reflected in its decision to award most Adult Promise grants to state higher education governing and coordinating bodies (Exhibit A.1 in the appendix). The state and institutional policy context varies across the 11 states, especially along the following four dimensions, detailed in Exhibit 3: (1) the opportunity to serve adults as part of broader statewide attainment initiatives, (2) extent of centralization in the higher education landscape, (3) labor market demands in specific industries, and (4) demographic shifts in the postsecondary population. The remainder of this section delves deeper into questions related to the first two dimensions—that is, how adults fit into broader attainment initiatives and the role of centralization in higher education.

Exhibit 3. Key state and policy contextual factors shaping Adult Promise initiatives

How does Adult Promise fit within the state's broader college completion agenda?
Across the states, Adult Promise built upon or dovetailed with larger state efforts focused on postsecondary attainment and adult student success. Grantee states' approaches involved *enhancing* an existing initiative to include additional components or to reach specific populations; *expanding* an initiative to encompass a broader scope; or *extending* an initiative, moving it forward into a new era.

Indiana and Maine offer examples of enhancement of broader initiatives. In Indiana, the Adult Promise grant funded student supports and coordination among stakeholders to supplement the state's existing adult education initiatives, particularly the Workforce Ready Grant for adults seeking high-value postsecondary credentials. In Maine, Adult Promise was part of the Adult Degree Attainment Partnership, a public-private partnership founded in 2014 to foster opportunities for adult learners. Maine used Adult Promise to go deep in a few communities, with an emphasis on local partnerships to support specific underserved populations, such as immigrants and refugees as well as adult learners from the states' Native American tribes.

Oklahoma used Adult Promise to expand its Reach Higher initiative, which started in 2007 with the FlexFinish program, a statewide initiative to help students with a certain number of college credits

complete a degree in one of a handful of programs. Under the grant, in 2018 Oklahoma added the DirectComplete program, which expanded offerings to focus on a broader group of degrees leading to occupations deemed critical for the state.

In North Carolina, the Adult Promise grant extended and expanded upon Partway Home, an earlier initiative launched by the University of North Carolina (UNC) system to support adult learners. The initiative had been marked by some challenges, especially in reaching its target population and in ensuring that campuses were prepared to serve them. Stakeholders called Adult Promise a "lifeline" for the program, noting that the high-profile grant ultimately helped smooth a transition in UNC system leadership and maintain legislative attention and support for adult learners. Partway Home was initially limited to the UNC system, but the Adult Promise grant began to bridge the UNC and community college systems in their support for adult learners.

How does the structure of the state's higher education system shape the initiative?

The 11 states varied substantially in the degree of centralization in higher education; this influenced the key goals, stakeholders, and implementation of their respective Adult Promise initiatives.

Centralized structure. Although Minnesota and Oklahoma's approaches to Adult Promise differed, both grantees leveraged their centralized structures in launching and installing key components. In the first months of the grant, Minnesota quickly developed, issued, and reviewed essential requests for proposals; selected vendors and institutional partners; and made awards to begin execution of the work. Similarly, Oklahoma convened critical players early on and built lasting partnerships with public education, workforce, and human services agencies, as well as tribal and philanthropic organizations. Although strong centralized structures supported early implementation in both states, this may have led to some later challenges. In Minnesota, early confidence about state financial support for the system gave way to a more cautious approach when expected aid funding was not forthcoming. In Oklahoma, some institutional partners expressed frustration with a "one-size-fits-all approach" to their Reach Higher initiative and with the centrally developed navigator role.

Decentralized structure. According to Washington leaders, the decentralized structure of higher education in Washington contributes to a "programs rich and systems poor" landscape—meaning that although many higher education programs and initiatives exist, they lack alignment or coordination at the system level. Washington's Adult Promise prioritized the development and deployment of an online College and Career Compass portal to serve as a "one-stop shop" for adults and other learners seeking an appropriate postsecondary pathway. At the same time, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) focused early efforts on building institutional buy-in for the tool. WSAC visited dozens of campuses around the state and developed an institutional self-assessment that would culminate in explicit partnership agreements. The resulting agreements articulated, among other things, how institutions interact with the Career Compass tool (for example, by providing data, driving traffic, and following up on student leads).

Fragmented two- and four-year systems. For some states, the relationship between the two- and four-year sectors influenced the design and implementation of Adult Promise. In North Carolina, the four-year university and two-year community college systems operate independently, with little direct coordination; they are sometimes even pitted against each other in competition for state funding, which further complicates collaboration. North Carolina's prior adult attainment initiative, Partway Home, operated

only in the four-year system. Adult Promise plays a potentially important role in bridging the two systems through its extension and expansion of the Partway Home initiative to include community colleges.

Outreach and recruitment

In contrast with students of traditional college age, adult learners cannot be reached through a clear, easily identified set of institutions (that is, high schools), where most students are a more-or-less captive audience. To meet this challenge, Adult Promise states sought to understand and respond to the different types of adult learners and make it easier for them to pursue postsecondary education.

How can states find and reach a diverse and dispersed adult learner population?

Marketing and outreach for Adult Promise differed substantially from what postsecondary institutions typically do to reach students entering from high school. Indeed, in a survey of Adult Promise partner institutions, 80 percent of respondents indicated that their outreach and marketing to prospective adult learners differed from what they used to reach students enrolling shortly after high school. As one program leader put it, "Traditional-age students are focused on dorms and sports. [Adults] have an entirely different access point into the institution." This section presents strategies used by states and their partner institutions to understand and engage the adult learner population.

Seek input directly from adult learners

Through activities such as focus groups, listening sessions, and surveys, Adult Promise states engaged adult learners directly in the development of recruitment strategies. For example, Oregon relied on focus groups to understand barriers to enrollment—whether institutional, financial, familial, or cultural—and developed a marketing toolkit for use across the state. California tested various messages for adult learners, including current and potential enrollees, to determine which resonated most with intended audiences. Some states have also used existing surveys to better understand their adult learners. Indiana conducted Adult Learner 360 surveys with staff at participating institutions.

Some states placed special emphasis on seeking input from adult learners of color. Both Oregon and California explicitly included adult learners of color in their focus groups. Oklahoma used specific meetings and events to engage with adult learners of color; for example, a conference for Adult Promise navigators included a panel of students from diverse backgrounds that provided feedback on the navigators' work.

Tailor outreach materials to the needs of adult learners

It is it critical to get the messaging right when engaging adult learners. Adult Promise states identified several messages that they believed resonated with their target populations by building on information gathered through data collection, practice-based understanding of adult learners' needs, and trial and error (Box 1).

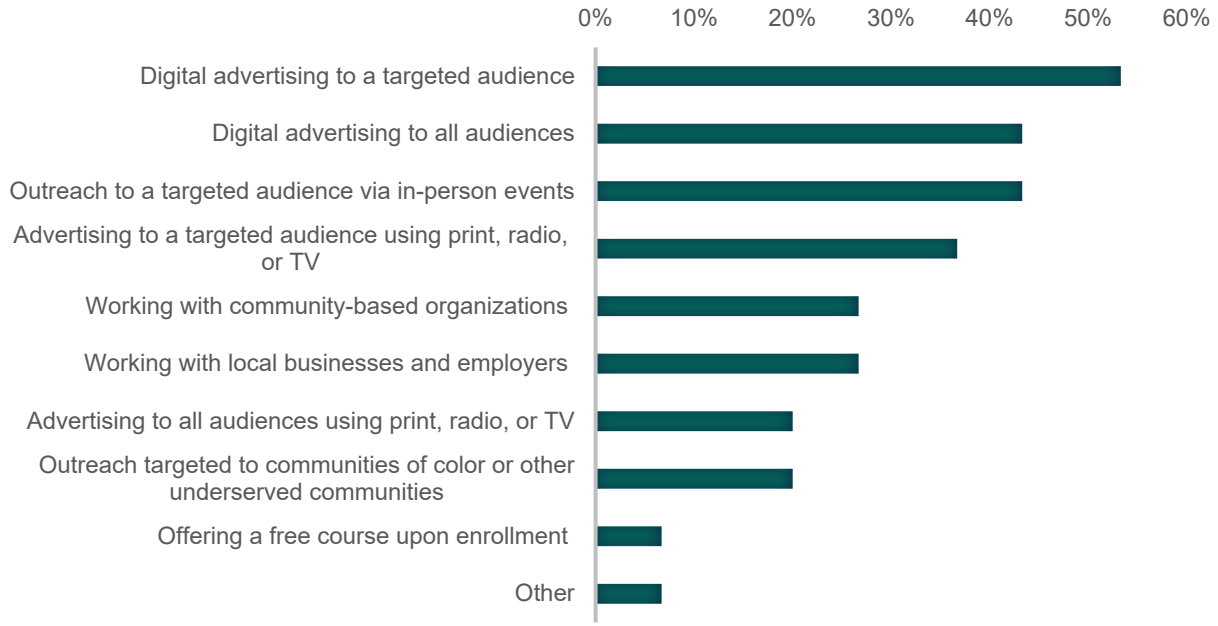
Box 1. Creating effective messaging around Adult Promise initiatives

- Emphasize that the **Adult Promise is not temporary**, which is important to adult students.
- Highlight that adults can **"finish what you start"** and **"build a better life for your family."**
- Focus on **local stories of state residents** who have experiences that could resonate with others in the state.
- Own **learners' unsuccessful attempts at higher education in the past**. Instead of saying, "We want you back," say: "We failed you, **we want to do better**, we want to figure out what success means to you and what to do to help you succeed."
- **Highlight supports to overcome barriers** that are especially salient to adults, such as transportation, child care, job and other commitments, debt, prior negative experiences in college, and prior credits that do not equate to a degree.
- **Identify ways to make college less overwhelming,** such as offering incremental steps and stackable credentials.
- Emphasize the **long-term wage and career benefits**. In a strong economy—which was the case in most states before the COVID-19 pandemic—state-level respondents felt this message was important because it is difficult to convince employed adults to return to college.
- **De-emphasize a guaranteed promise of financial aid.** Considering uncertainty about the specific financial supports that will be available to adult learners, no state explicitly promises full coverage of all tuition and fees, and some specifically de-emphasize financial promises.

Partner institutions echoed the states in emphasizing the importance of tailoring messages to reach adult learners. When asked via survey about the most effective approaches for encouraging adults to enroll, a majority of institutional partners identified digital advertising (such as emails, websites, blogs, and social media) that *targeted specific audiences* as the most effective approach (Exhibit 4). Similarly, about 40 percent of institutional respondents indicated that *targeted* outreach for in-person events was an effective way to engage prospective adult learners.

Most institutions (75 percent) did not tailor their promotional materials more specifically for adult students of color, although some states attempted to do so. Some worked with marketing firms toward this end. Oklahoma reported avoiding stock footage for its marketing materials, instead aiming for images that mirrored the communities they sought to engage, including Native American and Black adults. Nevertheless, tokenism was an important concern, and one state leader cautioned against targeted marketing because it could be off-putting for adults from historically underserved communities.

Exhibit 4. Partner institution reports of the most effective strategies for encouraging adult learners to enroll



Note: N = 33. Respondents could select up to three responses. "Digital advertising" includes using websites, blogs, streaming services, social media, mobile apps, email, or web advertising. An example of an "in-person event" is a college fair. Examples of targeted outreach to communities of color include working with community-based organizations, churches, or individual community leaders.

What tools and supports can facilitate adults' application and enrollment?

Most adult learners are very busy and do not have time for complex or lengthy application and enrollment processes. This section describes tools and supports that can facilitate the process within the constraints of adult learners' lives.

Whether tech-based or traditional, tools make enrollment convenient and efficient

States and institutions have invested in online tools to help streamline their application and enrollment process (examples in sidebar). However, Adult Promise stakeholders also see value in more traditional recruitment approaches that recognize the unique circumstances of adult learners. State and institutional sources cited in-person recruitment events as good sources for adult engagement, noting the importance of holding such events during the evenings and on weekends to accommodate adults' typical work schedules. An example of one such approach comes from Oklahoma City Community College's Reach Higher Day, where the college invited learners to visit on a Saturday when they had staff on site to support same-day registration for the fall semester. Similarly, Madisonville Community College in

Online tools created for adult learners

Washington—College and Career Compass: Online portal providing information, and resources for adult learners and matching feature based on interest and financial need

North Carolina—Wake Tech's Finish First: Helps learners and advisors identify the best path to obtaining a credential

Oklahoma—Show What You Know: Helps learners and advisors identify the best path to obtaining a credential

Kentucky hosted Thursday Night Dinners at which they provided child care and made advisors available so students could go to the registrar, talk to college representatives, and eat dinner with their children.

Navigators and ambassadors offer a powerful way to support adult engagement

Either at the state or institution level, navigators guide students through the enrollment and financial aid process, connect them to other support resources, and can serve as a coach when students enroll. More than 70 percent of partner institutions surveyed noted that providing navigation and enrollment assistance services for adults was one of the most effective tools for getting prospective adult learners to enroll. Similarly, adult learners reported valuing how navigators broke down the system and its processes, showing them how to do things they felt they had not learned while in college the first time (for example, how to schedule courses online). Some states also used more informal channels to engage students through "ambassadors" who are community members with close ties to the populations institutions are trying to engage. Exhibit 5 summarizes Adult Promise states' different approaches to navigators and ambassadors.

Exhibit 5. Overview of Adult Promise navigators and ambassadors

State	Statewide completion navigators	Liaise between partner institutions and the Adult Promise grantee. Help with recruitment and student interaction/follow up. (Oklahoma)
Regional within state	Workforce navigators	In-house navigator at Workforce Tulsa to aid case managers in connecting interested clients to the Adult Promise program. (Oklahoma)
Institution	Navigators	Direct oversight of individual participants at institutions, supporting with recruitment, financial aid, and course registration. (Maine, Minnesota, and Oklahoma)
Community	Ambassadors	Community member who serves as an informal liaison to Adult Promise program. They host recruitment events including one-stop shopping events that provide free child care, free dinner, and representatives from each office needed to register for courses. (Kentucky) Librarians trained to create awareness and engage adult learners in Adult Promise program. (Minnesota)

Supports for adult students

Adult learners can benefit from many of the same supports as their traditional-age counterparts, but targeted approaches that take adults' prior experiences and competing demands into account appeared to be especially important in the Adult Promise states.

What should states know about adult learners to help them succeed?

Adult learners seek higher education for many reasons and bring varied background and experiences with them. States and institutions need to understand why adults start or return to higher education, what challenges they encounter, and how their experiences might differ from those of students enrolling directly after high school. This section highlights lessons that emerged as important in the Adult Promise states.

Adult learners are intrinsically motivated

The professional and financial benefits of additional schooling motivate many adults, yet their desire to learn often serves as their intrinsic motivation. Adult learners want to be role models for their families and communities. For example, a pastor interviewed in North Carolina encouraged the youth at his church to go to college, but he decided to go back to school himself when he realized "children do as we do, not as we say." Since his return to school, six of his family members have gone back to college. Tapping into such intrinsic motivation, some states use emotional appeals to reach adult learners. Oklahoma appeals to adults with language meant to inspire and motivate, such as "New Year, new you" and "Your story is far from over." Indiana uses messages to appeal to personal motivations to return to college, such as "A lot has changed since you left college. Like your reasons for returning."

Adults balance opportunity costs with potential labor market benefits

Adult learners have personal and financial commitments that constrain how they think about higher education. These may include a job, family, housing, car payments, and other debt, whether from education or other sources. Such competing obligations may push them to delay or minimize enrollment. At the same time, adults realize the potential returns of additional schooling, both financial and emotional. Students cite the necessity of credentials, like a bachelor's degree, for career advancement that they anticipate will lead to greater job satisfaction.

Some adults struggle with internal, emotional barriers

Adult students can fear repeating negative earlier experiences in higher education, which may have been marked by unsupportive instructors or advisors. Some adult learners reported feeling isolated and out of place because of their age. Such insecurity can affect their confidence and willingness to engage. Some adult learners said they felt intimidated by younger students who are "quick" (especially with technology) and have a "very nonchalant attitude" toward their schooling. Adult students also sometimes noted that they feel the professors have different expectations of them relative to their younger classmates, expecting adult learners to have more prior knowledge simply because of their age.

What supports are needed to ensure adult student success?

Adult learners may need additional support to ensure that their motivation translates into success. Providing flexibility and individualized support for adult learners can create a positive learning

environment. This section describes the ways that programming can adapt to adult learners' lives and experiences.

Evening, weekend, hybrid, and online course options can help adult learners, but these have drawbacks

Adult learners value flexibility in course offerings. For example, a single mom interviewed in Oklahoma who coaches her child's tee-ball team appreciates Saturday course offerings. Another learner noted that having access to online courses is helpful because she lives 30 minutes from campus and has two children. One learner reported taking both online and in-person classes, selecting in-person options for certain subjects to better grasp the concepts. She appreciated the hybrid online and in-person course offerings. Survey respondents from more than 70 percent of Adult Promise institutions noted that providing online or blended classes was one of the most effective ways to support adult student success.

The Adult Promise grantee states and individual institutions designed and implemented several strategies to support adult learner success. These include, but are not limited to:

- Flexible/rolling enrollment periods
- Online and hybrid course options
- Evening and weekend courses
- Eight-week rather than 16-week courses
- Smaller class sizes
- Central student learning centers with academic resources
- Faculty support

At the same time, flexibility—especially when it involves online platforms—can have drawbacks. Some adult learners lack the digital literacy necessary to navigate online education without intensive supports. Some learners highlighted the flexibility of online courses but felt the courses required more discipline to work independently and stay on task. Learners also missed in-person interactions with classmates, and online platforms and software did not always support smooth virtual interactions with instructors and peers.

Adult students value understanding and individualized support from staff and faculty

Most students, regardless of their age, appreciate when professors know them and treat them as individuals. Adults, however, place special value on faculty and staff who recognize that they have competing priorities or special needs, without singling them out. In one instance, a student arranged with an instructor to bring her grandchild to class, if necessary. In another, students described how a navigator had personalized the assistance offered, based on different levels of comfort with technology. In this case, some students noted that they had a brief meeting with their navigator before enrollment and then registered for their courses independently online. The navigator worked with another group through each step of the enrollment process.

Financial assistance

A cornerstone of Adult Promise is to ensure that students' financial needs are met. Compared with traditional-age students, adult students face unique financial challenges. They may not qualify for certain

types of aid because of their age, prior credits, or degrees. At the same time, they may require different types of financial support, such as child care assistance or debt forgiveness.

How can states ensure adequate, sustainable funding for adults?

States can both provide aid and serve as a coordinator to help institutions and individuals leverage funding from different sources. This section presents the different strategies Adult Promise states used to address the financial needs of adult learners.

Leverage available state and federal aid and design the Adult Promise to complement these resources

Aid for Adult Promise students came from several sources, including federal student aid, state legislative appropriations, and institutional and philanthropic funding (Exhibit 6). In general, states emphasized public sources and sought to maximize students' access to them, often using private sources to fill in gaps. For example, Washington already had the Washington College Grant, but state leaders worked with institutions to leverage it and ensure a full promise package for adult students. In Maine, the grantee partners saw their role as bringing together and leveraging available aid throughout the state, as opposed to creating new offerings. Likewise, Indiana strategically considered the aid available in the state and collaborated across agencies to streamline funding, when appropriate, and address any gaps in eligibility. Although some states were able to rely on a single funding source for adult students, many pieced together funding packages from several sources. About 80 percent of institutions reported that they provided both institutional aid and scholarships for adults, as well as microgrants and/or emergency aid. Nearly all (94 percent) of institutions reported connecting adult students to existing state and federal aid.

Exhibit 6. Examples of financial aid in Adult Promise states

State	Aid available to adults	Type of aid	Funding source	Amount	Eligible uses
Indiana	Frank O'Bannon Grant	First dollar	Legislative appropriations	$950–$9,000 (2018–2019 SY)	Tuition and fees
Kentucky	Forge Your Way Back	Microgrant	Adult Promise grant	Up to $1000	Past fees
Maine	Competitive Skills Scholarship	Not specified	Department of Labor	Up to $6,000/year (FT status) Up to $3,000/year (PT status)	Tuition and fees Wraparound supports, including child care and transportation
Maine	Adult Degree Completion Scholarship	Last dollar	University of Maine system	Up to $4,000/year	Tuition and fees On-campus housing
Minnesota	Minnesota GI Bill	Flexible	Legislative appropriation	Up to $3,000/year (FT status) Up to $500/semester (PT status)	Not specified
Minnesota	Workforce Development Scholarship	First dollar	Legislative appropriation	$2,500/year	Tuition and fees
Oklahoma	Reach Higher: Direct Complete	First dollar	Tribal institutions	$1,000/semester	Any costs
Washington	Emergency Microgrant	Microgrant	Community colleges	Less than $500	Transcript fees Application fees Library fines
Washington	State Board Opportunity Grant	Not specified	Legislative appropriation	Up to $6,750	Tuition and fees ($4,250) Books/supplies ($1,000) Wraparound supports ($1,500)

Source: Authors' compilation of information collected in interviews, documents that state leads provided via email, and publicly available information on state and program websites.

Note: *First-dollar scholarships* can be awarded at any time and do not consider the amount of other aid a student receives. The amount of money awarded through first-dollar scholarships is typically a flat amount per recipient or as specified in the program guidelines. *Last-dollar scholarships* are typically paid after all other financial aid has been awarded. The amount of money awarded through last-dollar scholarships is calculated to cover the gap between already awarded aid and what is required for a student to meet the cost of attendance. *Flexible scholarships* are not designated as first- or last-dollar scholarships and can be awarded at any time. The amount of money awarded through flexible scholarships varies, depending on a student's level of need or available funds.

Beyond scholarships and grants, what aid strategies can serve adult students' needs?

Adult learners' financial constraints go beyond paying tuition. This section considers how creative thinking about the kinds of financial supports adults need can help remove barriers and support enrollment and persistence.

Braid funding from different sources to address different types of costs

Several states braided foundation support, employer scholarships, and other private sources to meet students' needs beyond the costs of education. For example, with funding from the Maine Community Foundation, Maine piloted scholarship programs at two community colleges that can be used to cover housing, child care, and transportation, among other educational expenses. Minnesota identified ways to piece together funding across several programs, including those that provide child care and emergency aid. A key part of making an approach like this work was using navigators or other staff to inform students about available aid options.

Consider smaller amounts that can bridge gaps

A range of other, possibly less costly financial supports may benefit adult students. Although microgrants typically provide less than $500, state stakeholders feel that they can go a long way to help students with unexpected or otherwise hard-to-address costs. For example, Maine used state funds to help adult students with debt forgiveness. Washington used United Way funding for microgrants that cover small-dollar needs for items such as transcript and application fees and library fines, which could pose barriers to entry or reenrollment. Hazard Community College, in Kentucky, used Adult Promise funds to implement a debt forgiveness program for students who have not attended the institution for more than a year and have a past due account balance of $1,000 or less.

Minimize barriers by having broad eligibility criteria for aid and low-effort application processes

Program leaders acknowledged the importance of broad financial aid eligibility criteria and low-effort application processes for adult students. According to program leaders in Indiana and Maine, financial aid with separate applications or renewal applications can have limited uptake when compared to other programs with similar eligibility criteria that require only completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, restrictive eligibility criteria were sometimes strategically implemented to limit the number of students who can apply for a small pool of funds. Project Finish Line in Oklahoma and the Adult Degree Completion Scholarship in Maine limited applications to students who had amassed a minimum number of prior credits, thereby targeting funds for students close to degree completion.

Equity considerations

While equity was an underlying goal of many of the Adult Promise activities described in this report, Adult Promise states also used several strategies to explicitly focus on supporting enrollment and completion among adult learners of color. Given the diversity of the populations across the Adult Promise grantee states, leaders defined and approached equity from different angles. This section discusses how Adult Promise states prioritized equity throughout their work.

What organizational steps can states take to better reach and support underrepresented and underserved groups?

States recognized that they historically did not effectively reach and support adult learners of color. To address this, they worked to develop capacity within their own grant teams and at postsecondary institutions. They also partnered with individuals and organizations that already had credibility in communities of color.

Hire and train staff to engage communities of color

Adult Promise leaders emphasized the importance of hiring people of color and developing cultural competence in their staff. Some states trained staff at the state or institutional level to address diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. For example, Ohio offered equity training for select faculty and staff at each pilot institution. Oklahoma encouraged institutions to train navigators on how to help underrepresented students stay engaged in college. Kentucky developed a certification process for cultural competencies focused on faculty, staff, and administrators. Other states hired staff or volunteers with membership in or close associations with communities of color. Adult Promise leaders described such "boots on the ground" as pivotal to connecting with and supporting adult learners from communities of color.

Build and grow credible partnerships in communities of color

Adult Promise leaders view partnerships with individuals and organizations that have credibility in communities of color as critical to achieving equity goals. Adult Promise grantees typically comprise small state-level teams aiming to reach adult learners statewide, so local partnerships play an important role in outreach and support. Partnerships can be even more important for achieving equity goals because some communities of color have historically been excluded—and, in some cases, alienated—from postsecondary education. To address this challenge, several states worked through external partners. For example, California worked with California Competes (an organization focused on closing equity gaps in higher education), Kentucky partnered with institutions that typically enroll large numbers of Black or Hispanic students, Maine worked with refugee organizations, North Carolina partnered with historically minority-serving institutions and community colleges, and Oklahoma partnered with institutions serving Native American and tribal organizations.

While states recognized the importance of strong partnerships, more than 50 percent of institutions reported that the lack of diverse networks and partners posed challenges when addressing equity issues. In Minnesota, for example, institutions noted that they struggled to develop relationships with communities of color. They decided that they should engage in getting information into the communities, which they do through trainings about MN Reconnect for all librarians in Minnesota in the hopes of increasing program awareness in different communities.

Keys to successful partnerships.

- Intentionality about the assets a partner can bring to work on equity
- Taking time to build authentic relationships with communities
- Active listening

How can states and institutions use data to guide their efforts to address equity gaps?

A close examination of enrollment, persistence, and completion data can shed light on ways that states can provide additional supports to specific demographic groups. It can also inform states on how to set eligibility rules and other policies that might inadvertently exclude or disadvantage some groups.

Disaggregate data to better understand equity gaps

Disaggregated information allows states to use nuanced approaches to identifying and supporting demographic groups with historically lower attainment rates. Ideally, this involves looking beyond obvious distinctions—for example, comparing Black and White students' outcomes—and drilling down to relevant issues for a given state. For example, Hawaii focuses on its Asian and Pacific Islander populations, but recognizes that within this broad group, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have lower average achievement outcomes than Korean and Chinese students. Similarly, Minnesota noted that, on average, its Laotian and Hmong students have lower levels of achievement than its Chinese population.

Fine-grained analysis may be especially important in states—or regions within states—with more racially homogeneous populations. Leaders in Idaho and Maine noted the need to think carefully about setting meaningful goals for specific subpopulations—for example, Hispanic and Native American learners, as well as some immigrant groups—that have small absolute numbers in the state but represent important opportunity groups for increasing attainment. Even in diverse states like Ohio and California, respondents emphasized the importance of a regional approach to data disaggregation because different regions have different demographic makeups, and learners in one region experience different challenges compared with their peers in other areas.

Use data to inform outreach activities and eligibility cutoffs

States can use demographic data and historic postsecondary data to make sure that outreach and enrollment activities do not inadvertently exclude adult learners of color. In Washington, Adult Promise leaders described a process of defining and narrowing their target population based on factors that included age and the length of time since the student last attended college. Concerned about equity implications, the leaders used different eligibility cutoff points to avoid exclusion of adult learners of color—something they reported having seen in other states. By focusing on adults with a certain number of prior credits, a state might exclude many students from underserved communities that did not have adequate access to education in the past.

How can states and institutions identify barriers and leverage supports for adult learners of color in the broader system?

Although most Adult Promise states did not develop programmatic supports specifically for adult students of color, they sought to remove systemic barriers and to leverage existing supports to address equity concerns.

Identify and address barriers that have an outsized impact on adult students of color

Several Adult Promise states revamped institutional or state policies to ensure greater equity in financial aid and to meet the needs of adult students of color. Stakeholders in North Carolina noted that the competing demands faced by adult students—especially those from underserved communities—can make it difficult to maintain a full-time course load, which can threaten financial aid eligibility. To alleviate this challenge, the state made funding for summer courses more accessible, thereby allowing students to stretch out credits over the summer and still qualify as full time. Similarly, North Carolina repealed a state university policy that levied a tuition surcharge on students with more than 140 credit hours. Although the policy's original intent encouraged credential completion, it affected adult students at historically Black

colleges and universities and Native American–serving institutions more adversely than students at other institutions.

Across the states, Adult Promise leaders also noted cultural and historical influences that made students of color reluctant to apply for or accept financial aid or related benefits. In Idaho, leaders observed a hesitancy by Native American students to accept aid from state or federal agencies that they had historically viewed with mistrust. Similarly, the same leaders highlighted reluctance among some Hispanic communities, in particular, to complete the FAFSA out of immigration related fears for themselves and their families should they go "on record." As a possible solution to such financial barriers, some institutions in North Carolina considered incentives such as a free first class to get adult learners through the door, after which institutional staff could work with them to identify appropriate financial supports. Hawaii piloted a similar program with some success, offering a free class to adults who had stopped out and had loans.

Connect adult students of color to targeted funding

In a few Adult Promise states, financial aid options target underrepresented and underserved groups. Given the sensitivity about—and in some cases restrictions on—racial considerations in college admissions and financial aid awards, foundations or other private partners with a special interest in supporting certain communities typically provide such targeted supports. For example, in Oklahoma, Native American students can access tribal scholarships, and the nonprofit ORO Development Corporation offers funding for education and training of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. In Indiana, some scholarships, such as minority teacher awards, target underrepresented groups. In Minnesota, loan forgiveness plans also target underrepresented groups, and the Minnesota Indian Scholarship and the Minnesota GI Bill target Native Americans and veterans, respectively. Other states offer targeted resources, but adult learners do not always know about them and how to access them. To that end, Oklahoma, Minnesota, and Maine use navigators to connect students to targeted funding.

How can states hold themselves and their partners accountable for shared equity goals?

States should not only lay the groundwork for equitable work; they also need to get results. Adult Promise grantees sought to define goals for addressing the most salient equity issues within their states. Although the work starts with setting goals, states then should measure progress against goals and make changes in accordance with their findings.

Set and track clear, measurable, and relevant equity goals

Some Adult Promise states link attainment and equity goals to state performance funding policies, and allocation of financial resources depend on institutions' progress toward state goals. However, in some cases, the performance funding framework does not define groups at a sufficiently granular level for institutions or other stakeholders to use in their own settings. One Adult Promise leader reported that the state framework "left a lot of things undefined," making it unclear how to measure progress. "[I]t just said [they] would close the gaps between minority and white students."

Goals need to account for a state's specific subpopulations. Ideally, these should address the intersection of factors such as race or ethnicity, age, income, and earlier college experience, as well as demographic variation across regions or institutions within a state. After examining the data, some states developed specific equity goals for their Adult Promise program or related completion initiatives, which vary by region or institution. Ohio set overarching state equity goals, while the Adult Promise program articulated

goals specific to Black students. At the same time, leaders encouraged stakeholders in predominantly White areas to look at their own data to set locally relevant improvement goals. The goals for racially homogeneous regions can then address other areas for improvement, such as gaps by gender and socioeconomic status. Ultimately, states or localities should define target populations and set specific attainment goals that make sense in context and avoid exacerbating current inequities.

Crisis response

The Adult Promise grants were nearing their conclusion when the COVID-19 pandemic altered their courses. States had not yet finalized a response to the public health crisis when the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum across the country. Our most recent round of interviews with state leaders, in June 2020, revealed that more than three-quarters reported that the pandemic affected their Adult Promise implementation. At that time, they had not yet processed the racial justice movement, much less integrated its issues into their Adult Promise strategies. States grappled with several prominent issues in the wake of the public health and racial justice crises.

Coordination with other state and institutional leaders

Coordination within states became even more important in the wake of these crises. Several states, including Kentucky, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington, reported working closely with their governor's office to coordinate their response to the crises, particularly around budget changes and requesting additional federal funding (for example, from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security [CARES] Act). States also worked closely with postsecondary institutions, which managed much of the day-to-day crisis response for adult learners. One of the key issues Adult Promise leaders faced was maintaining a focus on adult learners, as institutions now also need to reach and support traditional students in new and different ways.

Organizational and programming shifts to address emerging challenges and needs

Adult Promise efforts have shifted in response to the current public health crisis. Among the 11 states in this evaluation, only Indiana and Oklahoma reported that they have not been forced to deprioritize or postpone components of their Adult Promise work. Because much of the work involves bringing statewide stakeholders together, several states delayed or changed the format of planned stakeholder convenings. Exhibit 7 shows shifts at the programming level that have been made in outreach, marketing, and enrollment efforts and in supports for adult students.

Exhibit 7. Pandemic-related changes in Adult Promise activities

Activity change	Examples
Outreach, marketing, and enrollment	
Revised recruitment approaches	• Indiana and Kentucky reported that their outreach has been limited by COVID-19, but as unemployment rose they broadened their marketing to reach more people and engage newly unemployed adults. • In addition to working with the state unemployment agency to connect with newly unemployed residents, Washington reported that they have also started marketing to noncredentialled parents of current and prospective students and have begun region-specific marketing. • Oklahoma planned to shift from in-person outreach events to virtual ones. • Maine evaluated the potential changing demands of adult learners (for example, for more short-term certificate opportunities).
Outreach to unemployed and underemployed learners	• Minnesota reported that navigators have been doing more outreach to students to discuss unemployment eligibility.
Supports for adult students	
Supports for remote learning	• Oklahoma and Minnesota offered resources to institutions on accommodations and policy guidance for supporting adult learners in the shift to remote learning. • Minnesota and Washington added online learning resources for students to their website hubs. • In Minnesota, leaders noted that because navigators are now working remotely, they can work more flexible hours, which has benefited students with nontraditional schedules. • North Carolina noted the importance of simply checking in on learners to make sure they are okay and keeping current on their circumstances.
More emphasis on "digital divide"	• Several states, including Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, and Ohio, discussed concerns with the digital divide and connectivity issues students face as they transition to remote or online learning. Respondents felt that the pandemic highlighted the need to ensure that everyone has affordable Internet access in their state.
Supports for unemployed and underemployed learners	• Minnesota and Washington added resources on how to apply for unemployment benefits.

Adaptation to greater financial uncertainty

Several leaders voiced concerns about funding as states modify budgets to address the crisis. Hawaii and Ohio expressed uncertainty about how their work will look in the short- and long-term with education landscapes and budgets in flux. Several states, including Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, and Washington, closely monitor CARES Act funding and may reallocate their budgets to account for limited funding from the state and other sources.

At the same time, program leaders were unsure about how rising unemployment will impact adults' interest in and ability to return to school. Leaders from Hawaii, Kentucky, and Maine commented that low state unemployment prior to COVID-19 kept enrollment numbers low, but they expect to see more interest from adults looking for short-term credentialing opportunities to transition to more stable careers amid economic uncertainty. Similarly, Oklahoma was considering how to offer microcredentials that people can use to obtain better jobs.

Initial responses to the racial justice movement

During interviews in June 2020, most states did not report any specific actions or changes in response to the racial justice movement. Several noted that this movement underscored the need for their work and a continued focus on equity in higher education. They hoped that the racial justice movement might raise awareness of systemic racism and inequities and encourage widescale action to address these issues. In the immediate wake of the racial justice movement, respondents said that states and institutional leaders discussed equity more explicitly than they had previously. Several states reported that state or institutional leaders had issued calls for stakeholders to center their work around equity; they also reported more interest in equity issues from state and institutional leadership. In North Carolina, the university system's Board of Governors started an equity subcommittee. Minnesota expects its governor to issue an equity agenda.

As conversations in states shifted toward a more explicit focus on equity, early responses focused on building upon or revisiting existing initiatives. Examples include:

- Oklahoma and Minnesota reported that institutions **reviewed their policies and procedures** with an eye toward equity and identifying practices that have historically disadvantaged students of color (for example, FAFSA applications). This reflects earlier work, particularly in North Carolina, to identify and address policy barriers with a disproportionate impact on students of color.
- Oregon and Washington both **reviewed and revised their marketing materials and toolkits**, particularly with regard to their messaging to and around people of color.
- Maine and Oklahoma implemented **cultural diversity initiatives and implicit bias trainings** prior to the recent protests and continued that work. Kentucky plans to recommend such trainings for faculty, staff, and administrators; Ohio planned equity training for staff.

Looking beyond Adult Promise

The ongoing public health and racial justice crises will continue to shape adult learner initiatives in several ways as the Adult Promise grant period ends and states shift from crisis response to a longer-term vision of recovery and reinvention. States will need to consider a few factors, in particular, as they seek to ensure that adults remain an important part of achieving their attainment goals:

- **Uncertain economic and policy context.** Economic shocks and rising unemployment will mean that the number of adult learners might grow, as will their needs for financial aid and other support. This is apt to occur even as states are forced to adjust to decreased or unstable funding streams. At the same time, the focus on adult learners will compete with other priorities for policymakers' attention. To encourage legislative focus and funding amid a competitive higher education landscape, adult attainment initiatives need *state and institutional champions*.
- **Online programming.** There is substantial variation across states in what the 2020–2021 academic year will look like, depending on the status of the pandemic and on state and local responses to it. Plans for the academic year need to accommodate the likelihood of remote or hybrid learning, as well as virtual meetings and conferences. Technology is a promising approach to reach and maintain engagement with adult learners, even outside the current situation, but adults' effective online participation requires *careful consideration of digital literacy, internet access, and personal skills and comfort*.

- **Equity focus.** Plans will also need to incorporate an enhanced focus on equity, particularly seeking out and listening to voices from communities of color. Some states have built solid foundations for this kind of engagement and partnership, which will continue to shape their work. Others will need to enhance their equity work and more thoroughly embed it throughout their adult attainment strategies. Adult Promise grantees can learn from one another about how to grow and deepen their commitments in this area. Promising approaches to support adult learners of color rely on *strong, authentic partnerships with communities of color*. Moreover, state-level initiatives can potentially *model, support, and encourage an equity focus throughout postsecondary education*. In any case, states and institutions need to go beyond intention; they must *track and measure the effectiveness of strategies* to engage and support adult learners of color.
- **Recognizing and addressing adults' particular needs.** Adult attainment efforts should be multipronged, supporting adults from outreach to completion. *Direct engagement of adults* can help stakeholders understand the nuanced experiences, interests, motivations, and needs of adult learners and can help institutions create effective engagement and support strategies. At the same time, it will require *coordination among state and local stakeholders* to address the wide range of adult learners' needs.

APPENDIX

Exhibit A.1. Overview of Adult Promise grantees and activities by state

	Key Adult Promise activities
Cohort 1 (2017)	
Indiana: Indiana Commission for Higher Education	
Target learners: Adults with some college, no degree	Developed website; advertising campaign; implemented Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Adult Learning survey, Adult Learner 360; created capacity-building subgrants
Sites: 3 community colleges	
Maine: Maine Development Fund	
Target learners: Adults who are first-generation, living in rural areas, or have low income; military veterans; parents	Developed Hub website; advertising campaign; hired and trained 400 navigators (see Exhibit 5 for more information about navigators); assembled resource materials for the Navigator Network; developed trainings on financial aid for academic advisors and nonacademic support providers
Sites: University of Maine System and Maine Community College System	
Minnesota: Minnesota State System	
Target learners: Adults who are Native American, Hispanic, or have low income	Roadshow to recruit partners; social media marketing campaign; institutionalized a referral program within student services to connect students with navigators
Sites: 4 community colleges	
Oklahoma: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education	
Target learners: Adults with some college, no degree; adults who are Native American	Refined and disseminated marketing materials; developed "Show What You Know Oklahoma" website; implemented program to provide family-friendly enrollment activities; trained and implemented navigator role at the state and institution levels; offered coaching seminar for college completion across all campuses
Sites: 16 institutions	
Washington: Washington Student Achievement Council	
Target learners: Adults with some college, no degree; unemployment beneficiaries	Marketed the College and Career Compass website; launched microgrant pilot program (through Greater Spokane Incorporated)
Sites: 40 institutions	
Cohort 2 (2018)	
North Carolina: University of North Carolina and the North Carolina Community College System	
Target learners: Adults with no education beyond high school or with some college and no degree; Adults who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American	Scaled efforts to identify and recruit students using the Finish First NC data tool; created a website focused on North Carolina adult learners; built online modules for students, faculty, and staff to expand credit for prior learning assessment (PLA) policies, practices, and development; completed CAEL self-assessment and training with college personnel with ~10 institutions
Sites: 15 community colleges	
California: Foundation for California Community Colleges	
Target learners: Adults with some college, no degree; adults who are Hispanic	Completed a landscape analysis; completed interviews and focus groups for a report on promising practices
Sites: Statewide community colleges	
Hawaii: University of Hawaii system	
Target learners: Adults with some college, no degree; adults who are Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, of Filipino	Advertising campaign for "stopped-out" students; math supplemental instruction for students who were close to degree completion due to math requirement but failed multiple times; developed the Standardized Testing and Reporting Program, which shows how credits earned can apply to different high demand degrees
Sites: University of Hawaii institutions	
Idaho: Idaho State Board of Education	
Target learners: Adults with some college, no degree, living in rural areas; adults who are Native American and Hispanic; military veterans	Advertising campaign through local libraries; developed crosswalk of military prior learning assessments to general education and common-indexed courses; leveraged the PLA crosswalk for the governor's statewide digital campus website
Sites: 11 rural counties	
Kentucky: Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education	
Target learners: Adults with no prior college experience; adults who are Black, Hispanic, or have low income	Advertising campaign; built ambassador program through the Graduate! Network; offered subgrants to 3 colleges
Sites: 3 community colleges	
Ohio: Ohio Department of Higher Education	
Target learners: Adults with no education beyond high school or with some college and no degree; Adults who are Black	Institution specific advertising campaign; equity trainings at pilot site
Sites: 5 institutions	

Exhibit A.2. Data sources for the current synthesis

Deliverable	Date	Focus area	Primary data source
Formative Feedback Memo 1	April 2018	Baseline program implementation in Cohort 1 states	State presentations during the January 2018 Adult Promise Pilot Program convening; document review of grant proposals; email updates from state grant leads
Formative Feedback Memo 2	July 2018	Early program implementation in Cohort 1 states and implementation readiness in Cohort 2 states	June–July 2018 interviews with state grant leads
Formative Feedback Memo 3	October 2018	Marketing and outreach strategies and program rollout in Cohort 1 states	September 2018 interviews with state grant leads
Formative Feedback Memo 4	February 2019	Financial aid and program funding sources in Cohort 1 states	January 2019 interviews with state grant leads
Formative Feedback Memo 5	May 2019	Partnerships and equity issues in Cohort 1 and 2 states	April 2019 interviews with state grant leads
Formative Feedback Memo 6	August 2019	Racial equity issues in Cohort 1 and 2 states	July 2019 interviews and online questionnaire with state grant leads
Implementation Brief 1	December 2019	Public brief on equity issues in Cohort 1 and 2 states	April 2019 and July 2019 interviews and online questionnaire with state grant leads
Formative Feedback Memo 7	February 2020	Deep dive into implementation and context, partner and student perspectives in North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Washington	October–November 2019 site visits (interviews with leaders and staff at grantee and partner organizations, focus groups with adult learners) in North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Washington
Not yet available	June 2020	Grant wrap-up and sustainability, COVID and racial justice crisis response	June 2020 interviews with state grant leads