



## Adult Education and Literacy - FY22 Grant Plan Narrative

**October 14, 2021**

1. Every supervisory union and school district was required to submit recovery plans to the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE). Was your organization asked to participate in the planning?
  - If so, what was the outcome of your participation? i.e., how is this informing the delivery of Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) services, especially for High School Completion Program (HSCP) students?
  - If not, how will you work with your HSCP partner schools to understand their recovery plans and how HSCP students may benefit from their services?

Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE) was not invited to participate in the COVID recovery planning of the 12 separate supervisory union districts in our tri-county service area. We will obtain copies of district recovery plans for their high school aged students, review the local plans and make connections with the school personnel with whom we already work most closely to discuss how we can collectively best serve HSCP students in alignment with their local plans.

2. Address each of the three outcome areas by describing your plan to provide effective services that will meet the recovery needs of your students by answering the four questions for each area:

### Outcome focus area 1 – Social emotional functioning, mental health, and well-being

- What have been challenges in the past 18 months?

The widespread challenges to mental health have been [well-documented in the news media](#) during the pandemic, as has the significantly increased demand for services throughout the state and beyond. Our teachers have noted the impact on students, such as some students' expressions of feeling depressed, isolated, and anxious about the future. Our student enrollment had dropped in FY20 Quarter 4 - FY21 as individuals observed stay home orders or quarantine requirements, took on additional responsibilities at work and home, were feeling unwell, and/or did not feel ready yet to engage in social interactions including entering our learning centers.

- What strategies to address these challenges were effective and how will you build on successes?

CVABE certified its staff in Adult Mental Health First Aid in partnership with trainers and support from Washington County Mental Health Services. This equipped us with good

information and confidence in providing referrals. We have engaged in follow-up conversations with mental health professionals as needed to support our students and ourselves. For some of our younger adult students we also made connections and worked with high school counseling offices. We will further implement teacher and learner education regarding stress and cognition and ensuring that teachers and learners attend to the impact of stress on learning by employing coping skills and referrals to outside supports.

- **What new strategies do you plan to implement in FY22?**

For FY22 in addition to the above, we will create and post physical displays in our 6 learning centers in collaboration with our designated mental health agency/agencies. The displays can include [simple ideas](#) with handouts for promoting mental health and general well-being as well as where to call or contact for local professional assistance. We can rotate articles from the issue of the *Change Agent* magazine related to this topic of Mental Health, and work to provide appropriate virtual access to these materials for our remote students. In this historical moment it may be that the stigma surrounding mental illness is [somewhat diminished](#). It is an opportunity to help educate students on existing resources and ideas, refer to our qualified health care providers in the community, and importantly, to maintain boundaries and the focus necessary within lessons for achieving the academic outcomes with which CVABE is specifically charged.

### **Outcome focus area 2 – Student engagement**

- **What have been challenges in the past 18 months?**

In FY20 Quarter 4 – FY21 CVABE assisted many fewer students, with less intensity than previously, due to some of the factors named in Focus area 1. Our students were not all able to access devices and connections universally for remote learning when that was the only allowable service option. Understandably so, our younger student demographic was not referred to us in FY20 through early FY21 as high schools were urged to serve them flexibly in house.

- **What strategies to address these challenges were effective and how will you build on successes?**

In 2020, CVABE learned how to engage students remotely through video connection and specific approved learning platforms, and we will continue to provide those service options for those who will benefit. Some lessons were held outside which will continue while possible. CVABE teachers sent emails, calls, notes, and/ or texts to re-engage students and to share resource flyers from our partners, and we have an Outreach Director. Ongoing outreach in our service area includes promoting and maintaining strong connections with our public school partners. CVABE continued to conduct its outreach remotely to partners, hang flyers in local communities, run updates on social media including Front Porch Forum, and run radio ads. We adapted our language for relevance in the pandemic and we inserted program flyers in the large food box pickups. We suspect that this mitigated against a possible further decline in enrollment in FY20-21. In Washington and Lamoille Counties our numbers seem to be picking up, and overall we seem to be on target to achieve our mid-year benchmark of 180 students. We will continue

engaging with our high school partners, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners, etc. for support with student technology needs; we have established a relationship with a corporate donor which allowed us to distribute more devices to students than we would otherwise have done.

- **What new strategies do you plan to implement in FY22?**

In FY22, with our staff at nearly 100% vaccination rate, we do not anticipate full program-wide pivots to remote learning for any length of time. We are allowing small learning groups to resume which allows for more contact time and intensity. For students seeking a “hybrid” option, we are offering a mix of remote and in-person study to students. Direct synchronous instruction is supplemented with asynchronous practice and study.

### **Outcome area 3 – Academic achievement and success**

- **What have been challenges in the past 18 months?**

Our federal measureable skill gains dropped in FY21. Our overall reflection on using Zoom instruction as a universal and required approach for all students, as the pandemic response required for portions of FY20 Q4 – FY21, is that the Zoom approach helped many students to maintain their levels and not lose their academic skills, but we didn’t help show growth with all students using that modality, especially with some students with lower Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs), as much energy/ time was expended on using the technology itself. CVABE is required to baseline assess students at entry and there is a shift occurring in which a greater proportion of students enter the program with lower EFLs (Adult Basic Education students composed 46% of our students in FY19, 50% in FY20, and 60% in FY21). As a resulting situation, our numbers of completers were lower. But also, we are finding students with intermediate skills on our baseline instrument can be successful on the GED test, even though those completions will not show on our federal outcomes. Adult learners are budgeting their time for education amongst a raft of other priorities, so it is understandable that they may seek the fastest route to completion, which may be the GED. However, it is also challenging to see students forego the high school completion program and the wonderful opportunities it can afford to them when they are skill ready as determined by their success on the nationally normed GED assessments.

- **What strategies to address these challenges were effective and how will you build on successes?**

We are able to utilize distance learning not as an emergency, but with forethought and with possible in-person practice of the technology to build student confidence in what to do to address common problems and troubleshoot without getting as frustrated. That is tremendously helpful. We presented certain online learning platforms to students to engage them for extra practice, and we will continue to present those judiciously as part of an array of blended approaches to teaching and learning to alleviate barriers and build intensity of service.

- **What new strategies do you plan to implement in FY22?**

While bearing in mind that the barriers to participation and learning faced by AEL students can be complex, within educational research it is said that teacher quality is a main predictor of

student achievement. CVABE has taken care to attract the best candidates to fill vacant teaching positions, based on strong preparation and experience teaching at the elementary through post-secondary levels. We will fully train, support and orient this new cohort of adult educators. As a team we will review our curricula and teaching materials for adherence to standards and for effectiveness.

- While addressing the academic achievement and success outcome, include plans and strategies to meet performance targets and benchmarks as outlined in grant agreements (i.e., MSG, 50% progress assessment rate, etc.).**

We discuss the performance targets and benchmarks as outlined in AOE grant agreements as a regular aspect of our all-CVABE staff meetings which are about every month. We review our current performance, the work yet to be done, and how to get there. Additionally, this is reviewed in monthly supervision including decisions about when to progress assess to meet the 50% rate. We have an outreach plan and strategies as described previously to reach our overall numbers of students served. We have a minimum standard of at least 2 hours contact time per week with our students (many are on one-on-one appointment schedules) to help students reach their goals.

### **3. Describe plans to recruit targeted populations in FY22.**

- Include a description of coordinated marketing and strategies to recruit additional potential distance learning students.**
- Targeted populations include: English Language Learners (ELLs), adults with low literacy levels, and individuals with barriers to employment.**

CVABE continues into the FY'22 program year with dedicated staffing and a healthy amount of financial resources to engage in regular and ongoing outreach and recruitment of AEL students. Although outreach was hampered during the COVID-19 shut-downs, we are now able to reengage with our community partners, and have ramped up all marketing and outreach efforts. We will focus on AEL targeted populations of students including individuals with barriers to employment and English language learners with low literacy.

Our approach to marketing and recruitment of target students is two-tiered. The first is to directly outreach to our target demographics. We understand, however, that our most effective recruitment comes through our community partners, and that is where we place the most focus. It is necessary to engage in both tiers.

Our direct outreach to target populations is through radio ads, presence at community events (if and when available during COVID), and targeted marketing.

We will continue with 12 months of regularly updated radio advertising with Great Eastern Radio and Radio Vermont. The stations have listener reach throughout and beyond CVABE's service area. Based on radio station research, our ads are run on the stations most listened to by our targeted audiences. We change our ads four times per year (fall, winter, spring and summer) and

as rule they are aired 24 times between 6AM and 7PM. We will also send the ads to other local radio stations that will run them as Public Service Announcements (PSAs) during non-prime time listening hours.

We will continue to engage in the targeted marketing campaign that we began last year. We created a special flyer that was distributed to every food shelf in our service area, as well as to Capstone and Salvation Farms, the organizations putting together food boxes. These flyers are distributed in every food drop. The radio advertising and targeted marketing directly address those with barriers to education and low literacy levels.

As our community partners are integral to outreach, during the year, CVABE will regularly collaborate and reach out to employers and the numerous community agencies, non-profit organizations, etc. (Vermont Department of Labor, Voc. Rehab, Capstone, corrections, family centers, Head Start, mental health, housing and refugee groups, libraries, food shelves, churches, homeless shelters, health care providers, hospitals, immigrant organizations, ELL teachers at schools, etc.) in our service area for effective outreach.

CVABE will continue to participate in local workforce training team efforts along with WIOA and one-stop partners in the area, Creative Workforce Solutions and Vocational Rehabilitation's (Voc. Rehab) Business Account Managers, Voc. Rehab Core Team, and the Working Communities grant groups in the Lamoille and Barre areas. We will use our networks above to continue to provide relevant services to our workforce development system.

Designated CVABE staff will meet with individuals from these entities to share information about our services, collaborate on co-enrollments and ultimately recruit students in need of AEL services. Opportunities will be arranged for other service providers to attend our regular staff meetings to share information about their programs and discuss recruitment strategies.

Outreach strategies will include face-to face or Zoom meetings, use of our website and social media tools (Facebook and Front Porch Forum), blanketing our communities with flyers and brochures about our services. As safety allows during this time of COVID we will have displays at job fairs and other key events. We will continue with our well-established and targeted paid radio advertising.

CVABE is a primary partner in the Barre Working Communities Challenge (BWCC), competitive grant funded by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (Boston Fed). Among a variety of financial supports, Boston Fed supports economic well-being in local New England communities. The aim of this challenge is to effectuate systems changes so that we can reduce poverty among single mother head of households by 15%. This is a collaboration between businesses of all sizes, economic development groups, non-profits, State agencies, educational organizations (CVABE, Community College of Vermont [CCV]) and other interested parties. Based on the *Bridges to Success* model that provides a wide range of support services for minority and socioeconomically

disadvantaged students who need assistance in getting through college, we are developing models of long-term systems change that are transferrable and scalable. Our work in the partnership gives unprecedented access to many partners and allows us to disseminate information on our services.

We are a secondary partner in the Lamoille Working Communities Challenge (LWCC), also funded through a competitive Boston Fed grant. The goal of the LWCC is to, "*... reduce the barriers to employment that weaken our economy and our community. This grant will strengthen and improve the infrastructure that allows people to access our existing network of workforce resources. Reducing systemic barriers will support businesses and workers and build a healthy community in a post-COVID economy.*" As education and literacy levels are a barrier to employment, our participation is integral to the success of the program.

Through aggressive outreach, marketing and strategic partnerships, our goal is to meet and hopefully exceed our 360 student target number for FY'22 with a focus on reaching and helping residents who are most in need – those who are unemployed and under-employed, and in need of academic and technical skill development/credentialing to earn a livable wage and to meet the more rigorous demands of advanced employment.

**4. The WIOA grant application requested metrics under Consideration 10.b. Please revise your response and submit.**

**Explain how the program will show evidence of success for a specific, implementable plan ensuring that all Vermont adult education students are introduced to the following opportunities in their region and/or state:**

- i. Career Technical Education including Adult career and technical education;
- ii. Postsecondary education; and
- iii. Employment.

**Provide analysis of key metrics that will be used to determine success of this plan.**

Metrics include current status and targets. For example, "our program will increase the number of AEL students who participate in CTE or Adult CTE by 30% from 10 in FY21 to 13 in FY22"; "the number of eligible students who obtain industry recognized credentials will increase by 30% from 30 in FY21 to 39 in FY22" and "the number of students obtaining/retaining their employment will increase by 20% from 104 in FY21 to 125 in FY22."

We propose these metrics, which are reasonable as long as our partners are able to provide the opportunities.

- Our program will increase the number of AEL students who participate in CTE or Adult CTE by 50% from 2 in FY21 to 4 in FY22;
- Number of eligible students who obtain industry recognized credentials will increase by 27% from 11 in FY21 to 14 in FY22;

- Number of students obtaining/retaining their employment will increase by 20% from 147 in FY21 to 176 in FY22.

**5. Describe Integrated Education and Training program plans and strategies.**

CVABE continues its partnership with Capstone Community Action/VT Foodbank for IET programs providing basic skills and computer instruction to students while they were engaged in the workforce education and training program called the Community Kitchen Academy in Barre to earn IRCs and entry-level kitchen skills. Students receive support with digital, math and basic literacy while learning practical kitchen skills, and employability skills and support, plus ServSafe credentialing.

In addition, we will revisit offers to collaboratively plan with our CTE centers for additional adult IET programs.

**6. Describe Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program plans and strategies (if applicable).**

CVABE receives \$4,490 for the purpose of IELCE. CVABE recruits and provides individualized lessons and small group classes focused on English language acquisition through increased proficiency in the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing in combination with the development of US citizenship skills and the development of work readiness skills for improved employment. We expect to serve at least 60 ELL learners in FY'22. We recruit from local schools, faith communities, refugee action networks, restaurants, farms and other employers. CVABE makes IET available to interested ELL students, and in past reports has described difficulty with organizing group IETs given the wide array of career interests and backgrounds of our ELL students. We will be ready to consider very small scale programming to meet individuals' needs.

**7. Describe professional development plans for FY22 and include any requests for specific topics for statewide AOE-sponsored events.**

- Improving collections of worthy open educational resources for curriculum and teaching materials as we orient and train an influx of new teaching staff.
- Better organize, resource and standardize our approaches to career exploration.
- Focus on gains in National Reporting System Level 3 students (request for statewide professional development)

**8. Describe up to two targeted areas of technical assistance that you would like to request from the AOE.**

504 plan development and writing (this falls under both technical assistance request and a request for statewide PD) only if the AOE would expect AEL staff to perform this function.