



Vermont Adult Learning
FY22 Grant Plan Narrative
October 15, 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?**

No, our organization was not asked to participate in the planning.

If not, how will you work with your High School Completion Program (HSCP) partner schools to understand their recovery plans and how HSCP students may benefit from their services?

Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) remains committed to working with our HSCP partners in their recovery plans for the continued benefit of students. Each VAL Regional Director will proactively reach out to our high school partners to discuss their recovery plans and how both HSCP and other Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) students factor into their plans. In addition, VAL educational advisors will continue to maintain regular communication with school personnel to ensure we are aware of any resources that might benefit our students.

- 2. Please address each of the three outcome areas by describing your plan to provide effective services that will meet the recovery needs of your students.**

Answer these questions for each area:

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

Social/Emotional Challenges:

Students experienced exacerbated stressors in housing, food, health care, etc. Many of our students struggle with health issues that make them more vulnerable to COVID, increasing their anxiety. Many are front line workers who needed to continue, or even increase, what were often already challenging work schedules even as they worried about the impact COVID could have on them and their families. Overall, we saw many more students struggling with anxiety. While

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students remained committed to their education plans, they struggled with the emotional challenges wrought by the pandemic. When meeting with students, staff frequently reported needing to take time to help students process these emotions/challenges before students were able to focus on instruction or other education related topics. Some students turned inward, isolating themselves and becoming uncommunicative, requiring staff to reach out repeatedly to keep them engaged in their studies. Other students sought enhanced frequency of meetings AND, if they did not have technology, VAL raised funds to get that technology in their hands.

Academic Challenges:

Shifting to remote teaching and learning presented new stress for staff and students, impacting mental health. Staff observed that students---even while attending a virtual class---seemed less focused. Fears of COVID kept many from accessing in-person services even when we made them available. While some students thrived with online learning, others struggled with it or chose not to take advantage of it at all. In general, students seemed to progress more slowly academically during this time.

Student Engagement Challenges:

As noted above, the social/emotional turmoil of the last 18 months had a heavy impact on student engagement, with some students dropping off completely despite extensive attempts by VAL staff to keep them engaged. Others were engaged and continued their studies, but as described above, the backdrop of stressors brought on by the pandemic, reduced the level of engagement as they were forced to focus on basic needs. At the same time, some students thrived as remote learning reduced or eliminated barriers such as transportation, scheduling challenges, childcare needs, etc.

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

Social/Emotional Strategies: VAL dedicates time to supporting the social/emotional functioning, mental health and well-being of students via outreach, deep listening, and frequent communication/engagement. For example, our Franklin/Grand Isle Learning Center staff recognized that students' needed the opportunities to talk about and process their experiences amid COVID-19. They allowed time at the beginning of each meeting for this. Investing this time up front, deepens relationships and paves the way to a clear mindset, ready to learn.

Student engagement: VAL educational advisors and teachers worked hard to stay connected with their students, using everything from old fashion mail and dropping packages of study materials off at students' homes to What's App and video conferences, to stay in touch and help students continue their learning. They made it a priority to check in with each and every student to find the best ways to stay in touch and to identify any barriers to their continued participation and help them address them. When they found students struggling, they referred

them to community partners (e.g., designated agencies, food pantries, Vocational Rehabilitation (VocRehab), Rutland Mental Health--JOBS Program, etc.) to address barriers and/or needs. We found regular check-ins were extremely important and helped us address needs in a timely way so students could stay engaged.

VAL also offered FLEXIBILITY in time and space by meeting with students outside our normal hours and/or online or in-person but outside. We provided flexible ways to access learning materials, mailing them directly to students and providing technology (ChromeBooks, hot spots, etc.) and technical support so they could access the instructional materials digitally. VAL also launched its Online Learning Center, which provides virtual classes taught by a VAL instructor. This expanded the types of courses we could offer students, particularly in the smaller learning centers. These virtual classes also reduced or removed barriers around transportation and childcare for many students, as they no longer needed to leave home and travel to a VAL Learning Center for classes. Celebrations, such as graduations, "Student of the Month" highlights, and Student Profiles via VAL's social and traditional media are fun ways to promote engagement and recruit new students. A hands-on, activity-based science class offered at the Windsor Learning Center has proven very popular and is in its fourth iteration. National Adult Education Honor Society pursuit and recognition as well as student-written articles in **The Change Agent** bolster student engagement.

Academic Strategies: VAL developed a robust digital learning kit (e.g., Online Learning Center, IXL Platform, Burlington English, Nearpod, etc.) reinforced with quality professional development to ensure these new tools were implemented appropriately. VAL launched Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for Teaching and Educational Advising, connecting staff across the agency to learn together. VAL hosted (and continues to host) weekly professional development sessions, teaching staff how to use new digital learning platforms.

We will build on successes by continuing and adjusting the aforementioned strategies to meet changing student needs.

c. What new strategies do you plan to implement in FY22?

New Social/Emotional Strategies: VAL staff are designing a new, in-person class, based on a class we held in the past called Explore Your Potential. This 90-minute, activities-bases, weekly class for new students, aims to support social/emotional growth while enhancing student retention and success by fostering community among learners. Class content includes success-promoting topics such as decision-making, problem-solving strategies, and capitalizing on one's learning style.

New Academic Strategies: VAL is refining our Online Learning Center, building a comprehensive program, leveraging skills of all VAL instructors while

presenting a robust, yet flexible, curriculum. Students have the choice of pursuing their studies in-person, online or via a hybrid model. We are assessing new students' digital skills early in the onboarding process and helping them get up to speed, allowing them to take full advantage of online options.

New Student Engagement Strategies: VAL will provide more flexible pathways for students, a proven strategy to enhance student engagement. VAL will present students a "Menu" of learning options, such as choices in format (online, hybrid, and/or in-person) and structure (classes, independent study with learning software, and/or independent projects), giving them choices and control in designing their education. VAL anticipates building on proven strategies for student engagement via fun classes, celebratory activities and formal acknowledgements of academic achievement referenced above. The Online Learning Center's expansion will offer more engaging learning, including opportunities for students to join classes with students from across our service area.

- d. **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.).**

Academic: VAL offers TABE Academy and courses that focus on skill gains. Nearpod is a new tool to VAL that allows us to create highly interactive virtual classes that include quizzes that are more like games, embedded activities, etc. Nearpod can be used synchronously or asynchronously, allowing students who miss a class to complete it at a later time. LACES, a database specifically designed for adult learning programs, includes a variety of views and reports that will help us more easily track whether students are receiving instruction in the areas they most need it, which students are ready for progress assessments, and other factors that can contribute to demonstrated academic improvement.

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

- a. **Include a description of coordinated marketing and strategies to recruit additional potential distance learning students.**

VAL is coordinating with Vermont's three other AEL providers. We are working together to create a distilled list of key marketing messages to inform our recruitment efforts across print, social media, partner and in-person recruitment efforts. These key messages are:

- Adult Education and Literacy services change people's lives, helping them to build assets for personal success.
- Success looks different for every student, and every student's success stems from a shift in mindset.
- Our work often involves changing expectations so that students can see their own potential. We expect students to succeed, and we know that everyone needs help and encouragement to achieve their goals.

- Our students are at the center of our work. We help students to dream about a future they never thought possible, believe that they can achieve that dream and learn skills and behaviors that lead to success
- We tailor services to meet their distinct needs and goals.

In addition, VAL's Development & Communications Director coordinates Online Learning Center (OLC) marketing with VAL's OLC Director. Strategies include regularly promoting the OLC and other AEL services via: VAL Website (e.g., Homepage Revolving Headlines, OLC listing on Services page); Social Media (e.g., postings and paid ads on Facebook/Instagram, stories on Blog; Tweets via Twitter; News Releases to print media; Flyers; Profiles of Students; and Word of Mouth in response to student inquiries.) VAL continues to develop a schedule of online courses designed for skill building for specific NRS levels (2-3, 4, 5), GED, employment, personal finance, and English Language Learners. VAL's Online Learning Center has developed a [Student Course Catalog](#) using Google Sites. The link is distributed to current and prospective students, and partners (such as Community College of Vermont, VocRehab, Migrant Ed, etc.) This catalog also includes information about VAL's services and locations.

VAL's Marketing and Public Relations Plan is included at the end of this document beginning on page 10.

b. Targeted populations include: English Language Learners (ELLs), adults with low literacy levels, and individuals with barriers to employment.

VAL's website is readily available for swift translation from Afrikaans to French to Polish to Zulu. VAL maintains a digital Portfolio of Branded Materials that staff can print on-demand to ensure up-to-date information and to prevent wasted paper. Specific Recruitment Materials in the Portfolio include: Profiles of students in HSCP, ELL and Workforce Development programs; List of Programs, Program Description Sheets, etc. Please see the Marketing Plan and Strategic Plan for Outreach and Marketing at the end of this document for more information.

In addition to our other efforts, we continue to work closely with a wide range of other organizations that work with these target populations to ensure they are aware of our work and will refer clients to us when appropriate. Our ELL advisor in Chittenden County, is a leader in coordinating ELL services among organizations that provide English Language instruction in Chittenden County. This includes the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV) and U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). ELL staff also regularly meet with UVM's Migrant Education Program to discuss how they can better collaborate and support each other. Frequently this means making referrals to each other's programs.

4. **The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (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:**
- **Career Technical Education including Adult career and technical education;**
 - **Postsecondary education; and**
 - **Employment.**
 - **Provide analysis of key metrics that will be used to determine success of this plan.**

Every VAL student is assigned an educational adviser who meets with them regularly throughout their time with us. From the very first meeting, advisers begin to work with students to discover their career interests and talents. Throughout their studies at VAL, advisors continue to help students explore their career options and introduce them to Career Technical Education (CTE), post-secondary, and employment opportunities related to their career goals.

According to the Student Outcomes (Goals) Report, 123 VAL students identified a goal of entering post-secondary education or job training and 8 of those students achieved that goal (6.5%). We will increase that to 15% in FY22. According to the same report, 7% of students with the goal to obtain a job, met that goal while 27% of students with the goal of retaining a job, met that goal. In FY22 we will increase those by 10% to 8% and 30% respectively.

It is more difficult to measure the number of students who participate in CTE since that can take several different forms. Students who are in HSCP and co-enrolled with a high school can participate in CTE through the high school. Unenrolled HSCP students may take daytime CTE courses, in which case the town pays for that, or evening courses, in which case the cost is covered under HSCP. Other VAL AEL students have also taken CTE courses paid for using other funding sources. In short, we do not have historic data to guide us in setting a target for this metric. A review of FY21 HSCP invoicing shows about 8 students taking courses at CTE centers (not counting Ed to Go classes). Other funding paid for at least one other student to attend CTE courses. We will track this more closely in FY 22 and we would expect to have about 20 AEL students who participate in CTE courses.

5. **Describe Integrated Education and Training (IET) program plans and strategies.**

As the COVID-19 Pandemic wanes, VAL is seizing opportunities to design, deliver and grow IET programs to address significant workforce shortages.

Energy Works: Green Jobs, Green Outcomes (Current):

Plan: VAL launched this 2-year (multiple cohort cycles) program with a pilot group in September 2021. The program prepares Vermonters, with a focus on low-income

individuals, for well-paying careers in weatherization, solar panel installation, and heat pump installation while also expanding access to these sustainable energy sources to low-income households. The sessions vary in length to match the level of training required for the job. While we initially expected an even mix of the three types of training, recent developments at the state and federal level have made it clear that weatherization is a priority so we will be focusing on weatherization training. We expect to run six weatherization sessions in FY22, starting in September and running roughly every other month, and at least one heat pump installation training. Participants in the weatherization program will earn the Building Performance Institute's (BPI) Building Science Principles certification. Participants in the heat pump and solar panel programs will also earn certifications; we are working with employers and others to identify the best options for these certifications. While our pilot group did not include all the required components of an IET, we are working to build those into subsequent sessions.

Strategies: Collaborate with partners (i.e., Vermont Department of Labor, VocRehab, Energy Efficiency VT, local employers, etc.) to provide wrap-around support and access to high-demand, well-paying jobs.

Leadership Champlain (LC) Project: Upskilling Employees, Strengthening Employers (October 2021-July 2022):

VAL submitted a successful proposal to the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Champlain initiative.

Plan: A Leadership Champlain Team will conduct a needs assessment to identify Chittenden County employers interested in exploring workplace-based educational opportunities (ELL, basic skills, high school completion, etc.) to strengthen, grow and retain their workforce.

Strategies: VAL will learn suggested strategies and interested employer contacts in July 2022 when the LC Team completes its work.

VAL's IET programs integrate opportunities to earn educational credentials (e.g., high school diploma, GED, etc.) alongside job training.

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

All of VAL's ELL classes integrate civics and citizenship education with English literacy. We use Burlington English (BE), an online educational program that integrates civics training and workforce preparation training into the teaching English Language. With the launch of our Energy Works program in the fall of 2021, we will have an IET program to connect with our ELL classes by the end of the fiscal year. While that program is currently being piloted in Rutland, it is open to students from throughout Vermont and we are working with our partners to develop online and hybrid versions that would make it more accessible for students from other areas. We are also working to expand it to other areas, particularly Chittenden and Franklin Counties where there has been a great deal of interest from employers and workforce development groups. Weatherization seems to

be a statewide priority so we will probably focus on that area initially but hope to include all three areas of the Energy Works program eventually. We are currently seeking funding to support this expansion and may be able to move forward expanding the program as early as spring of 2022 if our efforts to secure funding are successful. In addition to these programs, we have recently submitted a proposal to UVM medical Center to run a health care IET program specifically for ELL students. Based on our experience supporting students in LNA courses, we feel a pre-LNA course is important to give ELL students the foundational language skills and basic health care background they need to be successful in LNA courses. Many ELL students quickly fall behind if they do not have this background on day one of an LNA course. The UVM Medical Center program will have two tracks- one for students preparing to go into an LNA course and one for students who want to become Personal Care Attendants (PCA). These courses are designed to provide industry-specific skills while enhancing students' ability to speak English.

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

VAL has established three Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): advising, teaching, and ELL. These groups meet every one to two months (varies between groups and from season to season) to provide staff with support and professional development. Each PLC is developing (or has developed) goals and a schedule for the coming year. For instance, the Instructional PLC has set these goals:

- Create a safe space where thoughts, concerns, and ideas are shared.
- Provide opportunities to collaborate on curriculum.
- Strengthen our teaching practices (both remote and in-person)
- Provide an opportunity for instructional insight to be shared with the leadership team

Below are some of the goals the Advising PLC has set for FY22:

- Strengthening referrals to community partners and creating a statewide referral network for our students.
- Learn more about / implement elements of appreciative advising
- Widening our understanding of career clusters / career pathways
- Develop more positive specific / asset-based language
- Strengthening student engagement/retention

In addition, VAL has established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee whose work includes creating professional development opportunities.

Some topics that we would like to see offered as AOE-sponsored statewide professional development include:

- Special Education for adult Educators: What we need to know about 504 plans, including training on how to write them. Also, we understand there are some changes in special education happening and we would like to know more about those and how they may (or may not) affect the students we work with.

- Managing online classes: We have come a long way in the last 18 months in terms of providing distance learning, but we know there is more to learn. In particular, we would like to learn more about setting expectations in the online classroom with adult students.

8. Describe up to two (2) targeted areas of technical assistance that you would like to request from the AOE.

VAL requests technical assistance with:

- a. What services school can/should be providing to HSCP students, both co-enrolled and unenrolled, so we can better advocate for our students.
- b. Regular, maybe quarterly, check-ins with written guidance on the various metrics we are being measured on/data we need to collect, both existing and, especially, some of the newer ones (career services data, employment/post-secondary surveys, etc.)

Vermont Adult Learning --- Marketing and Public Relations Plan

This plan is realized by VAL’s Development & Marketing Director in consultation with our Development & Marketing Advisory Team and Leadership.

Objectives

- Promote clarity of our message in all communications (print, electronic, social media, etc.) across the agency
- Build on existing capabilities and reputation, serving a broader base of clients
- Raise profile among prospective clients, donors, legislators, government partners, educators, media and the business community
- Partner with cross-sector allies to add value to services while promoting collaboration
- Implement a public relations plan integrating traditional PR and social media
- Recruit students/participants
- Enhance services for New Americans

Obstacles

- Economic uncertainty threatens traditional funding streams and donor support
- Public perception of ELL/non-traditional students may reflect misunderstanding
- Agency culture is not naturally focused on marketing and PR --- folks are busy “doing the work” of teaching, advising, testing, transitioning, etc.

Critical Success Factors

- Buy-in from Board, Leadership, Staff
- Ample Resources
- Generating Compelling Content (Qualitative & Quantitative---RBA)
- Staffing

Target Audiences

Target Audiences:		
Students	Donors	Media
Alumni	Legislators	Business Community
	Gov’t Officials	Partners

STRATEGIES

Public Relations

Implement a series of *proactive* and *reactive* strategies, raising agency profile in publications and within organizations of greatest importance to our work.

Tactics:

- **Media Kit:** Develop paper and electronic versions, reflecting agency’s new branding.
- **Press Releases:** Develop and distribute press releases leveraging agency successes and other news-worthy angles. (Quantify? One per month?)
- **Donor Advocacy:** Proactively cultivate relationships with prospective donors; deepen and broaden relationships with existing donors; foster opportunities for service, connection and giving; host informative events

- **Op-Ed Pieces, Letter to the Editor, Story Pitches to Regional Publications (e.g., *Seven Days*)**
- **Legislative Advocacy:** Proactively meet with legislators; monitor and react to legislative activity; lend expertise and testify at hearings; host legislative breakfasts
- **Government Agency Advocacy:** Proactively meet with officials; monitor and react to policy initiatives; lend expertise and testify at hearings; host informative events
- **Community Partner Advocacy:** Proactively meet with partners to foster awareness of our services; build relationships
- **Recruitment & Hand-off Strategies:** Research best practices to develop formalized, measurable recruitment strategy with added protocol to ensure smooth hand-off to regional office staff for follow-up.

Marketing Collateral: Build on the existing base of supporters

Tactics

- **Materials (e.g., Rack Card):** Identify pieces, create and finalize, and produce paper and electronic versions. Materials should tell agency story and indicate what makes agency uniquely qualified to provide services it does. *Common Design & Core Elements; Individualized to Offices
- **Success Stories:** Develop a standard approach to telling stories of student successes in print, on website and via social media.
- **Website**
 - Update website per the following key initiatives:
 - **User-Friendliness:** Identify what students and staff need/want on site
 - **Search-engine optimization**
 - **Press:** Post press releases, press kit info and press inquiry contacts
 - **Donors:** Ease of access to giving; insure functional
 - **Marketing:** Make agency literature available for download
- **Conferences/Speaking Engagements**
 - Support, cultivate and encourage staff/student participation in conferences (publicize it every time anyone participates.)
 - Actively seek out speaking opportunities
 - Booth at Expositions and Conferences
 - Promote agency spokespersons as issue experts to reporters and editors covering a specific event or conference. (Who are out in-house experts on what topics?)
- **Implement proactive social media program:**
 - Create a SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY (Human Resources is working on this.)
 - Regularly engage Facebook, Instagram Twitter, etc.
 - Assume a phased approach to the use of social media with initial focus on most promising channels. Upcoming: Create Blog. Explore YouTube?
 - Leverage any external involvement by agency executives with proactive social media communications targeted at people following the applicable event
- **Establish editorial calendar program**
 - Develop and send pitches (approximately 75-100 words) to editors, suggesting stories that align with publication's editorial slant while benefiting our agency
- **Radio & Video**
- **Photo Library** with a professional
- **Materials** – uniformity in our messaging (envelopes, email signatures, letterhead, etc.)