

A grayscale photograph of a man with short, light-colored hair, smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a dark-colored crewneck sweater. His right hand is raised to his face, with his fingers resting against his temple and cheek. He is holding a dark pen between his fingers. The background is out of focus, showing some indistinct shapes and colors.

The Adult-Ready Playbook: User's Guide

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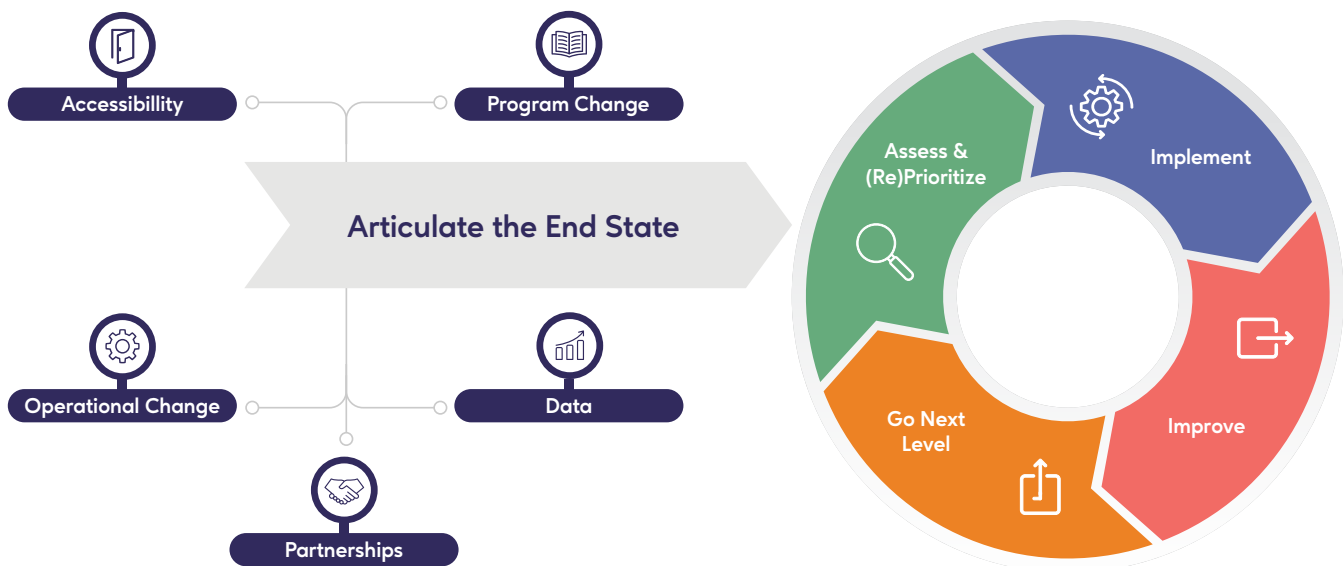
The *Accelerating Recovery through Credentials* Adult-Ready Playbook puts forward both a framework for comprehensive improvement as well as strategies and examples for implementation. The intent of this User Guide is to provide tools for leaders to begin the process to operationalize implementation. The User Guide helps pull together the frame of the five priority Action Guides with a process of visioning, self-assessment, and planning for continuous improvement.

Adult-Ready Transformation through Continuous Improvement

Effective, transformative change that improves enrollment and outcomes for post-traditional learners starts with establishing a desired end state. For higher education institutions and systems, this requires understanding how current strategies and programs to better serve post-traditional learners fit into a larger, more holistic vision for change. Generally speaking, there has been a fragmented approach to serving post-traditional learners, with serial boutique programs that help a limited number of students in narrowly defined ways. These programs are valuable and offer strong foundations for efforts to move forward, but are only pieces in a bigger picture. This playbook puts forward the idea that comprehensive improvement requires purposeful actions across multiple dimensions.

To act on that vision requires an iterative approach with a mindset of continuous improvement, strategically choosing which priorities to address immediately and which to take on at a later date. Transformation will take multiple iterations to achieve; it will require an ongoing process of assessment and action. This iterative approach should not be synonymous with incrementalism. Rather, it is an ongoing improvement effort that moves at a deliberate pace.

Adult-Ready Continuous Improvement Process



Articulate the End State

Establish a vision and common language for how your institution or state wants to serve post-traditional learners in the future. What are the desired goals for enrollment and completion for this population? How does this align with the institution's or state's current strategic priorities? How does this align with economic needs in the community? How can this vision be best articulated in a student-centered way? How can you leverage Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) or American Recovery Plan resources to jump start the processes? Use the five priorities for adult-ready transformation, identified below, to guide your vision-setting process. Transformation can only be achieved when each one of these five priorities are meaningfully addressed.

RESOURCE #1:

Priorities for Adult-Ready Transformation

The five priorities for Adult-Ready Transformation — Accessibility, Program Change, Operational Change, Data, and Partnerships — set a framework for how institutions and systems can go about comprehensively serving post-traditional learners. The five priority areas were developed after conducting research on best practices, interviewing leaders, and engaging subject matter experts. Field-tested strategies to achieve each of these priorities are provided and further unpacked in the five Action Guides for Adult-Ready Transformation. Together, these five priorities and accompanying strategies capture what it will take for institutions and states to serve post-traditional learners effectively.



ACCESSIBILITY: Post-traditional learners effectively access and move through postsecondary programs. Strategies to achieve this priority are:

- Ensure institutional and state aid works for post-traditional learners;
- Use financial levers to increase postsecondary engagement and progression for key post-traditional populations; and
- Conduct comprehensive outreach to all post-traditional learners.



PROGRAM CHANGE: Post-traditional learners thrive and feel engaged within postsecondary classrooms. Strategies to achieve this priority are:

- Deliver program content in adult-friendly ways;
- Design programs for flexibility and convenience; and
- Develop pathways that leverage and support all skill and preparation levels.



OPERATIONAL CHANGE: Post-traditional learners easily navigate postsecondary advising and administrative systems. Strategies to achieve this priority are:

- Create a one-stop student experience; and
- Develop efficient systems for tailored student advising.



DATA: Post-traditional learners are authentically measured through data and used as a subject for ongoing improvement. Strategies to achieve this priority are:

- Strengthen data measurement and collection systems to better monitor and evaluate adult learner outcomes.



PARTNERSHIPS: Post-traditional learners seamlessly interface between higher education systems and trusted community/industry partners. Strategies to achieve this priority are:

- Engage employer and workforce systems to promote relevance; and
- Partner to provide critical wrap-around supports.

Assess & (Re)Prioritize

Once the vision is set, it's time to assess what progress has already been made toward that vision. Begin by assessing the current state of affairs at your institution or in your state. What strategies have been implemented? Have those strategies been achieved at scale? What has been the return on investment for post-traditional student enrollment and success? **After initial action has been taken to implement, improve or go next level on each of the priorities and strategies, return to this step.** Each year, schedule time to step back and reflect on progress. How can we improve upon this strategy? What new strategies can be implemented that take the transformation efforts to the next level? Understanding the successes and areas for growth can help leaders prioritize the next iteration of transformation.

Use the Adult-Ready Self-Assessments described in brief below and provided in full later in the playbook to guide your assessment of current practices and to serve as a basis for creating a comprehensive vision for adult-friendly transformation in your institution or state. Then use the assessments periodically during the transformation process to assess where your state or institution stands on the strategies and actions within the five priority areas in order to determine next steps.

RESOURCE #2:

Adult-Ready Self-Assessments

Two Adult-Ready Self-Assessments — [one for institutions](#) and [one for states](#) — are provided to identify assets and strategies to build upon, improve processes, and determine which strategies to prioritize next. These self-assessment tools are based upon the five priority areas for action. They are designed to help leaders 1) reflect on the degree to which strategies implemented to date have been achieved at scale, and 2) identify which strategies and actions to deploy next.



Take Action

Once the vision has been set and the current state assessed, it is time to take action. The five Actions Guides — Accessibility, Program Change, Operational Change, Data, and Partnerships — are based on the five priorities for adult-ready transformation and can be used in your iterative process to choose which priorities, strategies and actions to address immediately and which to take on at a later date.



To Implement

Don't spend too much time developing a comprehensive overarching plan for action, get started on a select few priorities and strategies identified through the self-assessment right away. **The actions that should be prioritized for implementation should be both high-impact and foundational to the work – that is, provide a base from which other actions can be taken.** Use the Case Studies provided in the Action Guides to build upon lessons learned from the field. For leaders launching a strategy for the first time, focus on how the case study sites got started on their work. For those seeking to scale a strategy they have been implementing for a while, check out how featured sites have achieved or are working to scale to inform your efforts. By focusing action on a few manageable strategies and priorities as a starting point, institutions, systems, and states can take on high-impact strategies while also earning some early wins.



To Improve

Whether a strategy has been achieved at scale or is still in its nascent stages, there is always opportunity to add on and improve. **Consider ways to strengthen the existing strategy, or, if the desired end state for that strategy has been achieved, take on additional priorities or strategies.** Draw insights from the examples provided in the Action Guides to shape how you approach improvements.



To Go Next Level

In the next iterations, think bigger and bolder about the systems that need to shift in order to get more adult learners to and through postsecondary education. These bigger and bolder reforms require more champions and more commitments. They will take more time and energy to achieve, but will also guarantee better outcomes for post-traditional learners. While it will take multiple iterations, it is critical that all five priorities for transformation are comprehensively addressed. Without one or the other, true change cannot be achieved.

RESOURCE #3:

Action Guides for Adult-Ready Transformation

For each of the five priorities for adult-ready transformation — [Accessibility](#), [Program Change](#), [Operational Change](#), [Data](#), and [Partnerships](#) — an Action Guide has been developed that further unpacks the strategies outlined for each priority area into specific actions to implement, improve, and take these strategies to the next level. In each Action Guide you will find case studies from the field, supplemented by additional state, system and institutional examples. These guides are intended to provide a one-stop-shop for higher education policymakers and leaders to explore how the field is tackling the five priorities to better serve post-traditional learners.



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