# 2024-25 Distance Education Policy

# AEFLA & AELA Grantees

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### Rationale

To align with instructional priorities outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the needs of adult learners across the state, the Office of Adult Education Initiatives (AEI) has drafted the following distance education policy based upon National Reporting System (NRS) guidelines.

The NRS defines distance education as a formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period with instructional support provided through communication via email, telephone, email, or other online technologies and software. It provides an opportunity for programs to increase their capacity to equitably serve all learners and overcome common barriers to participation, e.g., non-traditional schedules, childcare, transportation, location, etc.; however, it is also sufficiently different from traditional classroom instruction that it requires programs to consider implementation processes, technology access, and instructors' capacity to develop new skills. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors and administrators attend training before the implementation of distance education activities and adoption of digital learning platforms.

The adoption of a statewide distance education policy is intended to allow adult education programs a means to accurately document and deliver services to learners using flexible instructional models. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to AEFLA- and AELA-funded programs on how to apply for, classify, track, and report allowable distance education hours for digital learning activities.

### Requirements

AEFLA- and AELA-funded programs approved to provide distance education must:

1. **Follow Mandatory Assurances**
   1. The distance education courses and activities are identical to traditional face to face instruction at the program in terms of the quality, rigor, and breadth of academic and technical standards.
   2. The program ensures timeliness of its responses (synchronously or asynchronously) to learners’ requests by placing a requirement on response time of no more than 24 hours within the program’s operational schedule.
2. **Provide and Report Distance Education Instruction**
   1. Programs must indicate which AEI approved distance education platforms they plan to implement at the beginning of each grant cycle and anytime thereafter to add an approved platform or propose a new one. Selections will be indicated during the initial grant application period and then again during subsequent continuation applications.
   2. Grantees must complete the [online AEI Distance Education Application](https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/97aae68d53464b3e960d383943f81da2) for any proposed platform not on AEI’s Approved Distance Education Platform list. The online application is also available on [AEI’s Distance Education Policy webpage](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeadult/grantees/handbook/distance-learning).
   3. AEI will approve or request application revisions as necessary. AEI may reject any application(s) where the required description or evidence is insufficient, the platform is not accessible to all learners, or the resource does not support CCRS and/or ELPS -aligned adult education instruction.
3. **Administer Assessments**
   1. NRS-approved pre- and post- assessments used to measure educational gain of distance learners for NRS reporting must be delivered in person or following the test publishers’ guidelines for remote assessment and must follow the test administration requirements outlined in the state Assessment Policy. Distance learners participating in AEFLA programming or in AELA programming using NRS assessments should be post-tested after the same amount of instructional time as other learners unless otherwise indicated in the local Assessment Assurances. Instructional hours to determine post-test eligibility can be a combination of in-person contact hours, distance contact hours, and proxy hours. Time spent completing homework and other supplemental activities that support understanding and learning but are not instructional in nature cannot be included in reportable proxy hours.
   2. For NRS reporting purposes, AEFLA learners will be reported as “distance learners” at the end of the program year when 50% or more of the learner’s total instructional hours are recorded as distance learning. All other learners will be reported as traditional learners.
4. **Measure Instructional Hours for Distance Learners**
   1. Local programs can only report distance education instructional hours earned from AEI approved distance education platforms and live, remote distance education classes.
   2. For the minimum hours requirements AEFLA learners must meet to become NRS participants, the contact can be any combination of in-person contact and contact through telephone, video, teleconference, or online communication, where participant and program staff can interact and through which participant identity is verifiable.
   3. For AEFLA, as well as AELA programs tracking attendance in CCRS- and ELPS-aligned classes, the program must decide how distance hours are tracked and reported in LACES depending on the model(s) approved for each distance learning platform or instructional tool.
   4. For AELA programs tracking attendance in workshops with non-CCRS and ELPS-aligned instruction, the program must decide how distance hours are tracked and reported in LACES depending on the model(s) approved for each distance learning platform or instructional tool.

Two models for tracking distance learning proxy hours are available:

* + 1. Clock Time Model
       1. Distance education proxy hours are assigned based on the elapsed time that a learner is connected to, or engaged in, an online or stand-alone software program that tracks time. The software has business rules in place to time out/log out learners after a specified period of inactivity. Hours must be reported at the daily level. No more than 8 clock time model hours a day may be recorded for distance learners. Partial hours must be reported in 15-minute increments.
    2. Learner Mastery Model
       1. Distance education proxy hours are assigned based on the learner passing a test on the content of each lesson or unit of instruction. Learners work independently with instructional materials and activities and take a test when they are prepared. A high, or passing, percentage of correct answers (typically 70%-80%) earns the credit hours attached to the material covered in the instructional unit. Learner mastery credit hours must be verified by an external vendor and not by local grantee program staff.

Only programs with approval from the AEI Office to report mastery model instructional hours may do so in LACES. Hours may be reported in aggregate but must be reported no less than every 89 days.

* 1. **Code Instructional Hours in LACES for Reporting**
     1. Programs are required to record all in-person and distance education hours in LACES.
     2. All AEFLA and AELA class distance education hours must be recorded coded in LACES according to the delivery mode (synchronous or asynchronous), the approved proxy hour model and the subject area.
        1. Instruction - Distance Learning – Subject Area
           1. Must be selected in LACES for all distance education contact hours delivered live, such as when an instructor and learners are video conferencing via platforms like Zoom, WebEx, Google Meets, etc. This also includes any meetings, coaching, and learner support provided through telephone, video, teleconference, or synchronous online communication, where participant and program staff can interact and through which participant identity is verifiable.
        2. Instruction -Distance Learning – Async.- Subject Area
           1. Must be selected in LACES for all distance education clock time hours and learner mastery hours where a learner is completing learning on their own without an instructor present. This includes all instructional hours earned on AEI approved learning platforms providing asynchronous instruction.
     3. All AELA workshop distance learning hours must be coded in LACES as “Workshop - Distance Learning” or “Workshop – Distance Learning – Async” using the same criteria listed above.
  2. **Record Instructional Hours Regularly**
     1. Record Clock Time Model distance proxy hours in LACES at the daily level and no less than one week after instruction takes place (see the state Assessment Policy). Partial hours must be reported in 15-minute increments only.
     2. Record the Learner Mastery distance proxy hours associated to a lesson or unit as a cumulative number in LACES on the date the learner completed/mastered that unit of instruction. Programs must ensure the aggregate hours are reported in LACES no less than every 89 days. Partial hours must be reported in 15-minute increments only.

1. **Ensure Accessibility** 
   1. Grantees must ensure that all online courses and digital learning websites are accessible. As defined by the ADA under Title II: [web accessibility](https://www.w3.org/WAI/) means that websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. More specifically, people can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web. [Course accessibility](https://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/1/ada-compliance-for-online-course-design) as indicated by EDUCAUSE, means that an individual with a disability is given the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. A person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability.

### Definitions

**Digital Learning:** Instruction and learning take place with digital tools. May occur in person, online, or through blended learning.

**Digital Literacy:** The skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information; and developing digital citizenship and the responsible use of technology.

**Distance Education:** A formal learning activity where learners and instructors are separated by geography, time, or both for the majority of the instructional period. Instructors support distance learners through communication via telephone, e-mail, or other web-based technologies or software.

**Models**

**Distance or Virtual Learning**: Instruction that occurs outside a physical classroom with the use of digital tools, whether for synchronous or asynchronous learning. May include delivering instruction, tutoring, mentoring, and motivation. Instructors may support their learners both in and outside of class via virtual learning communities, telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, or other technologies and software.

**Synchronous Remote Learning:** Instruction that occurs in a synchronous, online environment, such as classes delivered via Zoom, Cisco WebEx, Google Meet, or another similar platform.

**Blended Learning**: Learning that occurs in both online and in-person spaces. Online instruction must match in-person instruction in terms of the quality, rigor, and breadth of academic and technical standards.

**HyFlex Learning**: HyFlex stands for hybrid flexible and allows learners the choice to attend in-person synchronous instruction, online synchronous instruction, or asynchronous online instruction such as viewing a recording of the synchronous class and completing assigned activities. Learners have agency to shift between participation modes as needed.

**Learner Types**

**Distance Learners:** For NRS reporting purposes, learners who receive the majority of their instructional hours (50% or more) through distance learning.

In-person contact hours and distance learning contact and proxy hours will be recorded separately. The determination of the learner’s status as a traditional or distance learner will be made at the end of the program year and will be based on which category of hours comprises over 50% of the learner’s total instructional time. The learner’s hours in both traditional and distance situations will be included in NRS reports, according to the [Technical Assistance Guide for Performance Accountability under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.](https://nrsweb.org/policy-data/nrs-ta-guide)

**Traditional Learners:** Learners who receive the majority of their instructional hours (50% or more) through in-person instruction.

**Instructional Hour Types**

**Contact Hours:** Synchronous time spent instructing the learner. Instructional hours include live, remote classes and any other two-way interaction between instructor and learner by telephone, video, teleconference, or other online communication where learner and program staff are able to interact and through which learner identity is verifiable. Contact hours must be coded in LACES as “Instruction-Distance Learning-Subject Area-Sync.”

**Proxy Hours:** Asynchronous time a learner spends independently engaged with distance education instructional activities that provide College and Career Readiness Standards and/or English Language Proficiency Standards aligned adult education content, such as using an approved distance education platform. Proxy hours can include approved independent instructional activities in a computer lab, instructional activities assigned out of class, or supplemental instructional activities. Proxy hours must be coded in LACES as “Instruction -Distance Learning – Async.- Subject Area”

**Supplemental Activities and Homework:** Refers to activities that support understanding and learning but are not instructional in nature. They may review content already discussed, be used as formative assessment, or may not have feedback as part of the completion process. Completing supplemental activities and homework, whether online or through hard copy materials, does not count toward instructional time and cannot be entered in LACES as instructional hours.

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