Michigan Learning Evolution and Academic Restructuring Network (MI-LEARN) Design Lab Participant Information and Invitation

.

Introduction

Colleges and universities in Michigan and across the country were built to serve recent high school graduates. As a result, the dominant structures and systems of postsecondary education create barriers to adult learners who bring different needs, circumstances, and expectations to their learning experiences. Institutions of higher education in Michigan will not be able to thrive in the future, nor will Michigan be able to achieve its Sixty by 30 attainment goal or develop all of Michigan's talent, without better meeting the needs of adult learners.

The Michigan Center for Adult College Success (MCACS) is excited to announce a new opportunity for colleges and universities seeking to design innovative, data-informed improvements that address systemic challenges impacting adult learners. The Michigan Learning Evolution and Academic Restructuring Network (MI-LEARN) Design Lab will support a cohort of institutions to design and implement high-impact, evidence-based, and systemic improvements that specifically speak to the needs of adult learners. Participating institutions will develop, refine, or scale strategies that enhance persistence, retention, and credential completion for adult learners. Areas of focus will include components, such as: credit for prior learning (CPL), competency-based education (CBE), and accelerated pathways to credentials. In addition to providing support for improvements in the focus areas of CPL,CBE, and accelerated pathways, MCACS will also provide tailored data insights to participating institutions.

This program will support MCACS's mission of building a skilled workforce by enabling institutions to tailor promising practices and evidence-based innovations to meet the specific needs of adult learners. (Although adult learners are technically described as those 25 and older, for the purposes of this design lab, we will be including ages 21 and older).

Overview of Design Lab Opportunities

This opportunity is ideal for institutions with limited capacity (including human and technical resources). The process is designed to add capacity through a structured planning and implementation process. Participating institutions will receive:

- high-quality, tailored technical assistance including data analysis support, access to valuable expert practitioners, nationally recognized organizations, and structured peer networking opportunities (virtual and in-person)

- dedicated support over a 10-month period to engage in rapid prototyping of a meaningful improvement strategy

- strategic thought partnership and grant proposal development support (designed to position institutions to identify and pursue potential funding sources for implementation of the improvement strategy)

- opportunities to elevate the profile of institutional efforts in statewide and national settings.

In addition, participating institutions will be provided with valuable student progression data and analysis support. Knowing that many institutions are stretched thin when it comes to institutional research capacity, MCACS is well-positioned and committed to providing data related services and support to all the institutions participating in the MI-LEARN Design Lab. Participating institutions will not only receive valuable data and analysis support, they will receive guidance and support to engage in data-informed curricular design and instruction.

The MI-LEARN Design Lab launches on February 5, 2025 and will run for 10 months. Interested institutions should submit the MI-LEARN Design Lab invitation forms by 11:59 PM on January 24, 2025, via email to TheCenter@talentfirst.net.

- **Due Date:** January 24, 2025
- **Notification of Application Response:** No later than January 31, 2025
- **Webinar:** December 16, 2025 from 12-1pm ET
- **MI-LEARN Kick-off:** February 5, 2025 from 1:30-3pm ET (virtual)

Eligibility and Overview
Who is eligible?
Eligibility for the MI-LEARN Design Lab includes public and independent universities, community colleges, and tribal colleges in Michigan serving adult learners—defined as individuals with a high school diploma or equivalency who are one year or more removed from high school. Participants from our previous MI-RAISE Design Lab may also join us for this new cohort. Participating institutions will bring a team of at least four individuals from at least two areas of the college or university.

What innovations will be considered?
The MI-LEARN Design Lab seeks ideas rooted in promising, evidence-based practices, designed to increase student success, reduce disparities in opportunities and outcomes within the adult learner population, and strengthen partnerships with organizations and employers invested in adult learner success. Specific innovations for the MI-LEARN Design Lab include:

- Implementing, refining, or scaling credit for prior learning (CPL): Empower adult learners by recognizing and applying their prior knowledge and experiences toward credentials of value.

- Designing or implementing competency-based education (CBE) pathways: Create self-paced, accelerated, work-based, or project-based learning environments that enable adult learners to progress based on demonstrated mastery.

- Accelerated or flexible course and program formats: Offer flexible scheduling options, such as 7- and 8-week course formats, and design programs in high-demand majors to accommodate adult learners' needs.

- Major/degree retention and throughput analyses: Conduct in-depth analyses of pathways from enrollment through graduation to identify and address barriers to adult learner success.

- Project-based and work-based learning opportunities: Integrate practical, hands-on learning experiences that align with adult learners' career goals and provide real-world value.

Institutions will focus on strategies that align with their unique contexts while promoting recruitment, retention, and completion for adult learners.

MI-LEARN Design Lab: Experience and Expectations

The MI-LEARN Design Lab will provide a comprehensive 10-month program designed to support institutions in addressing challenges and creating systemic improvements for adult learners. The program combines technical assistance, data-driven insights, and collaborative design to ensure actionable outcomes. Participating institutions will engage in the following activities and receive robust support to enhance their capacity and outcomes, including:

1. Design and Technical Assistance Workshops
- Institutions will participate in virtual (~2-3 hours) and in-person (~6-8 hours) workshops led by national experts, strategic partners, and the MI-LEARN team.
- These sessions will provide tailored guidance to support the design, planning, and implementation of innovative strategies.

2. Adult Learner Needs Assessment
- Conducted by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), this assessment uses tools like the Adult Learner 360 (AL360) and the Building the Talent Gap Employer Survey to evaluate institutional strengths and challenges.
- Paired questionnaires for adult learners and faculty/staff will enable a gap analysis, highlighting strengths, challenges, and disconnects.
- Each institution will receive a detailed report with recommended strategies for improvement, supporting accreditation activities, benchmarking, and the creation of tailored action plans.

3. Institutional Capacity Assessment
- Institutions will assess their capabilities to support adult learners effectively, focusing on staffing, technology, and resource allocation.
- This assessment will identify capacity gaps and prioritize areas for improvement, ensuring interventions align with institutional strengths and constraints.
- Results will inform a tailored action plan to guide implementation.

4. Cohort Model for Plan Development
- Institutions will engage in facilitated group sessions to refine implementation plans and improve curriculum delivery and data systems.
- Collaboration within the cohort will enhance the development of targeted solutions for adult learner success.

5. Identification of Targeted Instructional Reform
- Institutions will identify specific reforms, such as redesigning course formats, implementing flexible scheduling, developing competency-based pathways, integrating Credit for Prior Learning, or creating career-aligned pathways.
- This reform will be the focus of targeted technical assistance, allowing institutions to prototype and scale strategies to improve recruitment, retention, and completion outcomes for adult learners.

6. Individualized Coaching
- Regular coaching will provide customized support to address institution-specific challenges, refine implementation strategies, and ensure alignment with evidence-based practices.
- Coaching will also support the development of a comprehensive implementation plan.

7. Development of a Full-Scale Implementation Plan
- Each institution will create a detailed plan for the selected instructional reform, including timelines, key activities, milestones, outputs, and outcomes.
- The plan will include an analysis of potential costs and identify funding sources to ensure sustainable execution.

8. Grant Writing and Implementation Design Support
- Institutions will receive support to identify, develop, and submit grant proposals, with a focus on scaling curricular innovations to reach more adult learners.
- This assistance will ensure institutions are well-positioned to secure funding for their improvement strategies.

Institutions participating in MI-LEARN will work closely with MCACS, the Education Strategy Group, Sova Solutions, coaches, consultants, and external partners to refine and implement their initiatives.

Institutional Commitments
Participating institutions must also agree to:

- **Attend the MI-LEARN Design Lab kick-off on February 5, 2025 from 1:30-3pm ET.**

- **Form a cross-functional design team** that includes at least one member from the executive leadership level, one senior faculty member or individual with direct responsibilities for teaching and learning practices at the institution, and internal research staff or institutional research member who will participate in four MI-LEARN cohort meetings and additional small cohort meetings to analyze data, identify barriers, collaborate with peer institutions, and develop/refine targeted innovation.

- **Engage in analysis of adult learners and retention/graduation gaps across cohorts and majors to pinpoint obstacles and refine proposed solutions.** This will include participation in four MI-LEARN cohort meetings and additional small cohort sessions over the course of 10 months. Teams should anticipate dedicating an estimated 6–8 hours per month to activities such as data review, barrier analysis, and solution development, with guided support from MCACS coaches and external partners. Tasks will involve reviewing institutional data provided by MCACS, collaborating with peers to identify trends, and translating findings into actionable insights to inform the development of targeted innovations

- **Design a scalable implementation plan focused on a targeted systemic improvement to enhance adult learner success, ensuring it can be expanded to benefit more students across programs and pathways.** Participating institutions will develop a detailed and evidence-based implementation plan that identifies specific systemic challenges impacting adult learners and outlines a clear strategy to address them. The plan will include measurable objectives, timelines, and key milestones for implementation, along with defined roles and responsibilities for team members. Institutions will also identify potential barriers to scalability and propose strategies to overcome these challenges, such as adjustments to policies, resource allocation, or faculty and staff training. Ultimately, the implementation plan will serve as a roadmap to create sustainable, scalable improvements that can be adapted and expanded to benefit a broader student population across various programs and learning pathways.

Invitation

Invitation Submission

Participating institutions must submit the responses to invitation questions with the completed cover page, institutional leadership letter of support, and assurances. The outline for your submission can be found on page 5 and must be submitted by **11:59pm on January 24, 2025** via email to TheCenter@talentfirst.net. Specifically, each application must include the following:

- Cover Page – Organizational Information (1 page, template)
  - o Organization name
  - o Organization address
  - o Staff member responsible for leading the MI-LEARN participation
  - o Design team members (name, job titles, emails), representing different areas of the institution (ex. academics, student affairs, workforce development, enrollment management, etc.). Minimum of 4 members
- Letter of Organizational Support (1 page max)
  - o Letter of support from the organization's president or other senior leadership
- Responses to Invitation Questionnaire (2 page max)
  - o Demonstrated need for the innovation
  - o Description of the different areas of the college/university that will provide input during the design and/or be implicated during implementation.
- Assurances (1 page max)

Proposal Review

Proposals will be reviewed by the MI-LEARN team. The MI-LEARN team does not expect a detailed plan for the curricular innovation in the project narrative, rather, applicants should demonstrate the following:

1. A need for the idea or solution
2. A commitment to increasing adult degree completion.
3. A commitment to the time and resources required to participate fully and meaningfully in the MI-LEARN Design Lab, including working with MCACS, project partners, coaches and TA providers as part of the design and implementation of solutions.
4. An understanding of the organization's own adult learner population. This can be demonstrated by providing statistics on the number of adult learners, their demographics, and their academic success. It should also include a discussion of what challenges or gaps the institution is facing with respect to adult completion, specifically with regards to curricular barriers.
5. A basic idea of what curricular idea the organization would like to investigate during the MI-LEARN Design Lab and ultimately implement with internal and external support. The idea or solution needs to include one or more of the best practices listed above in the section "What ideas will be considered" and tailored to the organization's unique adult learner and curricular context.
6. Support from organizational leadership.

Invitation Form

Cover Page – Organizational Information

(1 page max)

Organization Name:	
Organization Address:	
Institutional Lead: ***Names, Titles, Contact Information, Notation on who is a direct report to the institution executive leadership team.***	
If applicable – **Partner Organizations:** ***Names, Titles, Contact Information***	
Design Team Members: ***Names and Titles***	

Letter of Organizational Support
(1 page max)

Submit a letter of support from the institution's President or other senior leadership. Explain why the institution is seeking to improve adult credential/degree enrollment and completion and commitment to the design and planning process, specifically with regards to curricular innovations.

Invitation Questionnaire

(**2 page max)**

I. Need
1. What challenges or gaps are you experiencing with respect to adult learner enrollment and completion? This could be at the institution level or at smaller entities within the college (e.g., major, department, school).
2. What specific challenges do you face regarding curricular barriers to adult learner completion?
3. What type of systemic improvement(s) are you interested in making? How are these applicable to your unique context?
4. Who are your current and/or prospective adult learners? Include a statistical snapshot of the number of adult learners, their demographics, and their enrollment/retention/completion numbers.
5. What do you need to learn about your current/prospective adult learner population and/or your institutional context in order to create systemic improvements?
6. What innovative ideas or solutions are you considering? Why these ideas or solutions?
7. How does your institution demonstrate a commitment to increasing adult degree completion?
8. Why is your institution well positioned to engage in this initiative and benefit from project activities?

II. Personnel
1. Why was each member of the Design Team selected?
2. What internal and external resources or supports do you plan to leverage during the MI-LEARN Design Lab?
3. How does your institution plan to involve leadership and secure their support throughout the initiative?

III. Curricular Focus
1. What best practices or evidence-based strategies do you anticipate incorporating into your curricular innovation?
2. What is the curricular idea or solution your organization would like to investigate during the MI-LEARN Design Lab?

Assurances
(1 page max)

If chosen, do you agree to participate fully and meaningfully   in the MI-LEARN Design Lab process (i.e., attend monthly meetings, work with coach, third-   party consultants, and subject matter experts, collaborate with other organizations, employers, and stakeholders to refine and develop your proposed intervention)?

Initial here: _____

Do you agree to devote enough staff and resources to meet the goals listed in the section MI-LEARN Design Lab: Experience and Expectations section?

Initial here: _____

Do you have support from the organization's President and other senior leadership?

Initial here: _____

About the Michigan Center for Adult College Success

The Michigan Center for Adult College Success (MCACS) is an initiative of TalentFirst and was created by the state of Michigan to meet the need for a skilled workforce in the state by increasing the number of adults obtaining postsecondary credentials. These credentials open the door to higher-paying jobs, allowing more Michiganders to build better lives for themselves and their families. Michigan's population is aging, and birth rates are declining. The state's residents have lower levels of education and skills compared to neighboring states and the nation overall. With over 350,000 job openings, many requiring a postsecondary credential, upskilling Michigan's adult population is a priority.

For more context on the current state of workforce development and adult education in Michigan, please read the Center's Landscape Analysis.