

Overview

- Operating an Aspire program requires the local staff to review the needs of the community and decide on what services are needed.
- Indicators of Program Quality (IPQ) — all funded Aspire instructional programs operate within a framework of program quality, a set of standards that reflect effective and efficient program performance.
- Improving an Aspire program is important to continuously better serve students.
- Collaborations require consistent effort in order to be sustained. Programs should collaborate with the stakeholders and communities they serve to develop and maintain partnerships that prove effective for all involved parties: students, adult education programs, the business community, social services, One-stops, postsecondary education institutions, the advisory committee, and others.
- The Program Improvement and Consultation Plan (PICP), Desk Review, and On-Site Reviews are designed to assist Program Managers and local programs with improving student achievement and program outcomes.

Operating and Maintaining an Aspire Program

Indicators of Program Quality (IPQ)

All funded Aspire instructional programs operate within a quality-driven framework that reflect effective and efficient program performance. Indicators of quality include:

1. Student Achievement
 - Students demonstrate progress toward attainment of literacy skills, including reading, writing, and speaking in English, and computing and solving problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family and in society.
 - Students transfer learning from the classroom to the rest of life; articulate what they know and are aspire to do in relationship to their goals; demonstrate increased proficiency in the use of multiple skills that allow them to be placed in postsecondary education or training; gain unsubsidized employment or retain employment; or earn secondary school diplomas or Ohio High School Equivalency Diplomas or HSEs.
2. Physical Environment
 - The program is housed in a safe, age-appropriate and student-friendly learning environment that is in good condition and properly maintained with adequate space and equipment. Buildings are readily identifiable as instructional sites and posted signage is present.
3. Program Planning and Administration
 - The program planning and administration process is based on a written plan, the grant(s), implemented and guided by evaluation.
 - All staff paid from Aspire funds are formally evaluated, in writing, on a yearly basis to include evidence of staff observations.
4. Curriculum and Instruction
 - The program has a written curriculum and plans instruction matching students' needs and learning styles.
 - Assessment results are used to guide development of individual learning plans.
 - All programs have a written curriculum that is adult appropriate and is built on a strong foundation of research and effective educational practice.
5. Professional Development
 - The program has an ongoing professional development process linked to a

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- professional development plan that supports program and organizational goals.
 - Program determines individual and program professional development needs.
6. Support Services
 - The program provides a system for support services that promotes students' achievement of goals.
 - Program staff possesses the knowledge and skills necessary to make appropriate, informed referrals to support services offered within the program and in the community to reduce student barriers.
 7. Program Promotion and Recruitment
 - The program successfully recruits from the populations in the community identified in the AEFLA, Title II of the WIOA as needing literacy services. *(Additional resources for developing a Data-Driven Recruitment plan are available in the PD system under [“Other professional development options: - Supplemental and complementary courses”](#). Data-Driven Recruitment is listed in the Program management section.)*
 8. Transitions
 - The program provides Aspire transitions services that facilitate students successfully progressing to postsecondary education, training, and/or employment.
 - The program provides instruction aimed at addressing the gaps in knowledge and skills needed for success in postsecondary education and the workplace (e.g., integrated education and training (IET), algebra, advanced and writing, critical thinking).
 - The program provides support in the areas of career assessment and advising.

Policies

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Policies

The most current versions of policies are maintained on the State Aspire Website. An important role of the program administrator is to ensure that all staff are knowledgeable about and following Aspire policies.

Program Planning

Once an organization receives an Aspire grant, the following are suggestions to assist in starting a program. There is no specific sequence to these items. These items can overlap, and programs should revisit each as adjustments are made in program services and operations.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is used to determine the characteristics of the local community. Based on the data, the adult education program can determine the scope of the program, including the number and type of services and classes to offer, class locations, schedules, staffing, instructional materials, and training needs.

Programs should review the needs assessment as described in the application and determine whether a revised needs assessment of the target population is required. Methods for assessing need might include data from government reports, surveys, and public comment. Data collected from the target population should include but not be limited to the following:

- number of years of prior schooling
- educational needs (e.g., ESOL, ABE, high school equivalency, work skills development, citizenship)

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- demographics, including employment status; social economic status; ethnicity and race; age; marital status; number of children; availability for instruction (i.e., days of the week, hours of the day)

Personnel

Each program should have clear expectations of its staff consistent with its philosophy, mission, goals, and standards for program quality. Guided by these expectations, the program should develop a specific staffing plan. Minimum qualifications for both instructional and non-instructional staff should be clearly outlined. The local program is required to keep personnel records, including time and effort documentation, for all paid Aspire staff in accordance with local human resource procedures and grant requirements. Records must include verification of qualifications and professional development for all staff. Programs are required to keep written job descriptions of all paid and volunteer staff, both instructional and non-instructional. Annual written evaluations to include frequent classroom observations are also required.

Sites and Class Schedules

Locations for classes should reflect the results of the needs assessment and Aspire advisory committee suggestions. Suitable sites should provide easy access to students and be in compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Indicators of Program Quality (IPQ).

- Programs might consider entering into a service contract agreement with participating sites. The program and each site should meet before the beginning of classes. If the adult education program is using classroom space in a school, the teachers whose classrooms are being utilized should be included in such meetings so all parties will agree on how to share the spaces. Programs should expect to invest time on an ongoing basis with each site.
- Another consideration is that many schools and buildings have regular hours of operation. This includes janitor hours and timers on heating and air conditioning. If the adult education program is providing classes at off times, arrangements need to be made for such matters.
- It is recommended that program administrators provide representatives of their sites (e.g., principals, librarians) and partners with annual or semi-annual updates of the size and scope of the classes at that site, including student retention.
- The class schedule should reflect the results of the needs assessment and advisory committee input. The more intensive the classes (more contact hours per week), the higher the probability that students will achieve their goals. Program administrators should develop annual calendars of classes and sites with all partners in consideration of each site's hours of operation and annual calendars. Some schools close during holidays and summer months, but programs should not close longer than four consecutive weeks. The class schedule should take these fluctuations into account.

Books and Materials

The choices of instructional resources are a matter of identifying materials that best meet student needs and should be based on students' achievements on the assessment tests. The educational resources should be defined by the scores each student obtains on the standardized tests used for placement.

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The variety of instructional resources that may be used in the educational process is diverse and can come in many different formats. Regardless, instructional resources should be aligned with the Ohio standards and benchmarks. Resources such as Eureka! are available through the OLRC. The Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) has additional resources.

Programs may not require students to purchase textbooks, but it is a good practice to ask students if they would like to purchase a textbook in order to write in it and keep it.

Communication and Recruitment

Programs should design communication and recruitment strategies to match the target audience so that services are attractive and accessible to those most in need. Efforts should be made to communicate the value and purpose of the program to the community and learners. Strategies that maximize personal contact with prospective students and invite participation from the adult learners generally have the most impact.

Managing an effective Aspire program is much easier when you share experiences with other providers. Programs and staff should become familiar with each other regionally and statewide. Visiting other Aspire programs may provide insight into new ways of operating the program. Other program administrators are invaluable sources of information.

Advisory Committees

While not required, it is a good practice for Aspire programs to establish and maintain advisory committees. The committee should be composed of a broad spectrum of community representatives, including former and current students. Programs are also encouraged to include WIOA partners, affiliated school districts and subcontractors. The committee should review the activities of and make recommendations for planning, implementing, and evaluating the Aspire programs.

Agendas for these meetings may include topics, such as:

- the approved grant application
- conducting a needs assessment (or discussion of the results)
- agreements between partners
- professional development
- class locations and schedules
- recruitment of students
- student and program performance
- program services

Record Keeping and Reporting

Programs must maintain accurate program, staff, and student data records, including but not limited to:

- enrollment information
- placement and progress testing
- contact hours/attendance
- retention rates
- high school equivalency completions
- exit follow-up information
- certification of teachers

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- fiscal personnel

The Ohio LACES data management system stores collected student and program data. Programs have quick access to important information for each student, staff, class, and site in order to provide ongoing evaluation and make adjustments and corrections as needed.

To engage in a process of continuous program improvement, administrators should conduct regular and ongoing systematic support, observation, and evaluation of each teacher at each site. In the grant application, each program should describe how it will administer ongoing monitoring, correct deficiencies, and provide continuous improvement.

Retention

Intensity and duration of instruction affect achievement of students' goals. The type of class that is most effective depends on student needs, literacy levels, and curriculum offered. In general, classes offered for more hours in a week and more weeks per year are more effective for student goal achievement and retention. It is important that students participate long enough to ensure accuracy and reliability of posttest assessments administered to them to measure educational gain. Guidelines are available in the Aspire Assessment Policy.

Multilevel classes affect the instructional environment and student learning gains. Although teaching multilevel classes is challenging, many programs organize classes in this way due to limited resources or low enrollments at some levels or sites. Multilevel classes with a large number of low-level learners may face student advancement challenges. Instruction is difficult when students' literacy levels are too diverse within classes to be adequately addressed by staff or when programs have too many such classes. It is best to have instructors who can organize materials and instruction at several levels. Many times, all students can be exposed to a new topic. The differences lie in the depth of the presentation and expected knowledge.

Student interest affects the instructional environment and learner gains. Maintaining student interest and motivation is key to student success.

Managed enrollment

Managed enrollment affects programs that have had an open enrollment structure. However, with the emphasis on accountability and more intense instruction, managed enrollment improves registration and retention. Managed enrollment is defined as classes where a student may enter an instructional program only during specific enrollment periods, attend specific classes for the duration of class terms, continue in the same classes for subsequent terms only by re-enrolling, and miss no more than a prescribed number of class sessions within terms.

Improving an Aspire Program

Evaluation of Aspire information will assist administrators in continuously improving their Aspire programs. When needed, the state Aspire staff will work with local programs in developing program continuous improvement plans.

Ohio Aspire's Monitoring System consists of four parts:

- Program Improvement Consultation Plan (PICP)

- Data Monitoring
- Desk Review
- Risk Assessment

Program Improvement Consultation Plan (PICP)

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Required Documents -> PICP

The Program Improvement Consultation Plan (PICP) is a prescriptive performance improvement tool resulting from a collaborative process designed to assist local program administrators as they examine data and select and implement strategies for program improvement.

The primary objectives of the PICP are to 1.) assist programs in analyzing data and to perform a gap analysis to identify program improvement efforts and 2.) identify strategies, resources, and tools to support successful student transitions to postsecondary enrollment

Data Monitoring

In order to ensure programs are working towards their proposed targets, Aspire Program Managers review program data monthly including, attendance, assessment, and enrollment.

Local Program Desk Review

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Accountability -> Desk Review

Aspire programs are evaluated annually using Ohio's Aspire Desk Review process. The Desk Review should be seen as an opportunity to identify areas of strengths. Programs can then develop plans leading to the attainment of better program outcomes and continuous improvement. Depending on the outcomes and ratings on the Desk Review, Program Managers may develop an improvement plan in conjunction with the local programs.

Risk Assessment

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Policies -> Risk Management

Risk Management is an audit requirement for all agencies receiving federal funds (2 CFR 200.331). The purposes are: (1) Pre-Award - to determine whether an organization is managerially and financially responsible and capable to carry out the Aspire grant award, and (2) Post-Award – to determine the appropriate monitoring of the Aspire grantee.

Local Program On-site Review

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Accountability -> Program Review Instrument

Federal guidelines require the state to review Aspire- funded programs.

There are two primary benefits for conducting an on-site review:

- For state Aspire program managers, reviews provide an opportunity to visit programs and interact with students and staff while meeting federal requirements.
- For local programs, the review process is an opportunity for both professional growth and continuous program improvement.

The local Program Review Instrument consists of four content areas, which represent components of program accountability (i.e., IPQ, Local Program Data Certification Checklist):

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1. Administration
2. Local Program Data Certification Verification
3. Staff Development
4. Student Experience Model

Accountability

Grant Obligations and Considerations

ohiohighered.org/aspire/grants -> *Instructions and General Information*

ODHE, as the state fiscal agent, is authorized to ensure grantee compliance with all federal and state requirements. One way of ensuring compliance is through formal grant obligations and considerations, which are agreed to upon application for an Aspire grant.

Sharing the grant document with all staff assists them to better understand their connection to the performance outcomes as outlined in the grant.

LACES

LACES is the database system designed to collect student, site, and program data for local, state, and federal reporting and accountability. All required information collected on the Student Registration Form, Progress Form, and Exit Form must be entered into LACES. The LACES Manual provides information to efficiently use the system.

LACES provides the data used to complete the APR and conduct state-level data matches on the federal and state Core Indicators of Performance (CIPs). It is important for all staff to be familiar with the performance targets or new Minimum Performance Levels (MPLs) each year. The first staff meeting annually is a good time to review this information.

Measurable Skill Gain (MSG)/Minimum Performance Levels (MPLs)

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> *Accountability -> Ohio Aspire Approved Minimum CIP*

Each spring, the state Aspire program negotiates with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) and establishes Ohio's performance indicator for Measurable Skill Gain.

In preparing state-proposed levels of performance for MSG and the CIPs, considerations are given to levels of completion reported for literacy levels of other states. In addition, state and local performance data on MSG and CIPs for past years are reviewed. The levels of performance in the plan establish a baseline of performance data for the state to use in promoting continuous improvement.

In the process of completing the Aspire Desk Review, a program is rated on each CIP by comparing the MPLs and the program's actual performance level. This comparison provides a rating for the local programs based on the achievement levels for the EFLs as determined by standardized assessments and the follow-up measures, such as employment, entering postsecondary education or training, obtaining an HSE. The local program Desk Review is explained in further detail on the following pages.

Required Documents and Information

Aspire Grants

Local programs are required to keep their Aspire Grants current in the online and CCIP systems. When budgetary and programmatic changes are necessary, both CCIP and the revised grant must be submitted to the regional program manager for approval.

Annual Performance Data

LACES data should be kept current throughout the program year. For federal and state reporting purposes, a snapshot of local program data is taken annually. Prior to the snapshot, programs must complete necessary data error checking in LACES.

Data Certification Checklist

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Required Documents -> Data Certification Checklist

The Data Certification Checklist provides local programs with a guide to the policies, processes, and materials that need to be in place to verify the level of implementation of the NRS data quality standards. Programs are to use this checklist to rate their implementation of the data quality standards in their data collection procedures. Programs are also to describe details of their data collection policies and procedures for some standards. The administrator of the program must certify the checklist and it must be submitted to the state Aspire program at the end of August each year.

Final Expenditure Report (FER)

Ohio Department of Education Grants Management [Quick Reference Guide](#)

The Final Expenditure Report (FER) closes each project year by reporting that funds have been expended in compliance with the approved budget. The FER is reported in the CCIP system and completed by the treasurer or chief financial officer. Programs with a corrections education component are required to submit a corresponding paper FER to the Aspire office.

Memorandum(s) of Understanding

An MOU must be filed with the Ohio Department of Higher Education state Aspire office for any agreement that involves a fiscal arrangement or purchase service contract (e.g., transfer of funds to a sub-contracted entity).

Programs may also send other non-required MOUs. An MOU establishes a clear understanding of how a partnership will function and clearly defines the role of each partner.

Personal Confidentiality Statement (PCS) Form

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Required Documents -> Personal Confidentiality Form

Aspire program administrators are responsible for keeping confidential student information secured and inaccessible to those not approved. One of the requirements to ensure confidentiality of student-identified information is to have current, signed Personal Confidentiality Statements on file with the state Aspire office. The statements constitute an agreement between the local Aspire program and the state Aspire office of the conditions surrounding the use of data and receipt of data match records provided by the state office.

Program Operation

End-of-Year Financial Reports (formerly called Schedule A)

ohiohighered.org/aspire/reference -> Required Documents

The financial reports require information reported annually to our federal funder, the U.S. Department of Education. The reports include: (1) Maintenance of Effort - for Ohio Aspire programs to achieve and maintain the federally required maintenance of effort, the state must document all local programs' non-federal/non-Aspire state expenditures and local in-kind contributions that support the delivery of Aspire services. (2) Career and Training Services – per WIOA guidelines, state workforce agencies must report the costs of career and training services incurred with Aspire/WIOA grant funds. (3) OhioMeansJobs centers (One-Stop) infrastructure costs.