The Policy Environment Scans are intended to serve as discussion guides for state teams as they begin the process of developing a policy agenda. The scans should be used to assess the current state- and system-level policies impacting the ability of institutions to support their ABE students from enrollment to graduation. Each of the assessments is focused on one of five categories: Data and Analysis, Program Redesign, Aligned Expectations, Assessment and Referral, and Finance. Teams do not need to address every question in detail, but should use the question to identify areas where there are policy barriers or opportunities. We recommend providing the assessments to team members ahead of time, and discussing the questions over multiple meetings.

We encourage that teams use the assessments to evaluate existing policies, missing policies, and existing policies that are, in fact, barriers to change. In some cases these may reflect policy areas that are formed at the institutional level, in others they may reflect under-developed policy areas that have not been clearly articulated by the state or system office. Additionally, the policy work plan will likely include policy development that may need legislative work, or policy development that states can complete within the purview of their current policy authority as governing or coordinating board/system.
ASSESSMENT #1: DATA AND ANALYSIS

States and systems need to set specific goals and benchmarks for ABE students around persistence, progression, and credential attainment linked to labor market demand. To succeed in this endeavor, states must make commitments to support postsecondary data collection, disaggregation, analysis, reporting and use. This data system should be integrated with other critical state databases (e.g., adult education data, Unemployment Insurance, etc.) and should be reported in a publically accessible format. Additionally, policies must be in place to ensure that data collection is used to inform program offerings and design, and to ensure that college staff receive appropriate data training.

Examples: Setting goals and benchmarks for adult learner transitions; alignment of data systems to measure student progress from pre-college programs to post-secondary career pathways to employment; linking data to selected models (I-BEST or I-BEST like) to connect adult learners to career pathways resulting in a credential; comparison studies to test new program effectiveness; labor market analysis; and public reporting of data.

1. Has the state's governing authority for ABE (hereafter “state”) set clear targets and goals for completion for ABE students (i.e., credential, degree, or transfer)?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

2. Has the state's governing authority set clear targets and goals for completion for community college students? Are there goals for retention or skill advancement?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

3. Does the state's community college data system link to the adult education data system?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

4. Does this link to the K-12 data system?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

5. Does the state's ABE or community college data system link to the four-year college data system?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

6. Does the state's ABE and community college data system link to the workforce data system (WIA Title I)?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

7. Does the state’s community college data system include ABE student placement scores?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:

8. Do the community college data system’s reports allow for comparisons among peer institutions to identify institutions that are achieving the best results with high-priority student subgroups?  
   - yes  
   - no  
   Additional Details:
9. Does the state disseminate data/reports on student outcomes to a variety of stakeholders at least annually (e.g., trustees, college leaders and faculty, policymakers, business leaders)?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

10. Does the state set and report on intermediate measures that identify key academic achievement points or predictors of long-term success at least annually? Are these measures tied to performance incentives?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

11. Can the state's community college data system compare the persistence and completion of those who entered via ABE vs. those who participate in developmental education to those who test into, but do not enroll in, developmental education?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

12. Is the state Unemployment Insurance system linked to the postsecondary data system to allow for data tracking on graduate job placement and wages? Are there other ways in which adults are tracked into the labor market, in particular to ascertain the economic outcomes of the state investment in education and training for adults?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

13. Is the state engaged in ABE initiatives that include progress measures? What data is collected to track progress?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

14. Has the state established any performance measures or reporting requirements that are common to multiple funding streams, such as adult education, workforce development programs, postsecondary institutional funding, student aid, TANF, etc.?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

15. Does the state track postsecondary education performance, such as persistence, time to degree or certificate, graduation rates by age, race/ethnicity, income, employment, and earnings of graduates, etc.?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:

16. Has the state received a longitudinal data grant? If so, how will it be used to support integrated pathway efforts?  □ yes  □ no
Additional Details:
ASSESSMENT #2: PROGRAM REDESIGN

States must enact measures to encourage institutions to implement new practices and designs aimed at improving the success rates of students enrolled in adult education. Without clear incentives or support, many colleges may consider new programmatic approaches and student support strategies as too risky or complicated to pursue on their own. States must also provide guidance around the types of redesign models that work, and how best to implement these models. For example, I-BEST and Breaking Through have both collected extensive examples of successful redesign options that should be helpful while undergoing this process.

Examples: Promoting evidence-based integrated and dual-enrollment models; incentivizing credit-based instruction and policies to ease non-credit to credit acquisition; scaling comprehensive career pathways; technical and infrastructure support for innovative course delivery, including hybrid models; and wraparound student support services.

1. Does the state provide funding to encourage institutions to be innovative with integrated instructional models and test new strategies for improving outcomes for ABE and community college students? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

2. Aside from funding, does the state provide other incentives/resources to encourage institutions/ABE programs to be innovative and test new strategies for improving outcomes for students (e.g., data analysis, competitive awards)? How do education and training institutions pay for curriculum development, strategic planning, etc.? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

3. Does the state incent institutions to develop plans for improving student outcomes in ABE or other connected community college programs? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

4. Has the state taken concrete action to move away from systems based on traditional, semester-length courses to allow for proficiency-based innovations such as self-paced options or the modularization of courses? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

5. Does the state disseminate the best available research on innovations’ impacts on student outcomes through conferences, etc.? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

6. Does the state collect and analyze data on student outcomes for new in-state programs, practices, or strategies (e.g., a specialized study of a college’s pilot of modularization)? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

7. Does the state support professional development activities that help ABE and community college faculty transition to new and evidence-based curricula, structures, and delivery models (e.g., modularization)? If so, how? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:
8. Does the state have a plan for sustaining innovations that research shows are working? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

9. Student support services:
   a. Does the state provide or fund career, academic, and financial aid counseling for adult students, especially those that are nonresidential, that attend part-time? Are ABE students eligible for these services? If so, how? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

   b. Does the state have any special programs or policies in place to provide extra support (case management, tutoring, peer support, assigned counselors) to groups that may be at risk for not completing education and training programs, such as ABE students? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

10. Are there funds dedicated to developing physical infrastructure in ways that support high demand fields? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

11. Does the state provide ABE programs or postsecondary institutions with additional funding when enrollment grows? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

12. How are occupational credits funded vs. academic ones vs. developmental ones? (i.e., are there structural disincentives to focus on workforce development and/or on lower-skilled students?)

Additional Details:

13. Are there specific financial incentives for institutions to serve low-skilled adults? Disincentives? Are there unintended consequences for adults, especially working adults with lower skills, of the state funding structure for postsecondary institutions? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

14. Does the state support academic and occupational programs at employer or other satellite sites? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

15. Has your state identified high-demand high-growth occupations that are linked to career pathways? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

16. Does the state mandate or provide any assistance with career pathway development? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:
ASSESSMENT #3: ALIGNMENT

Traditional ABE programs often fall victim to considerable system misalignments that begin at the state level and filter down all the way to college-level programs. To address these, states need to implement efforts to align strategic priorities across education and workforce agencies, and to develop shared goals and initiatives. Policy efforts focused on bridging entry, exit, and content standards for adult education; remedial education; and workforce development and occupational programs are critical for improving the progression of ABE students. Additionally, policy should take into account the curricular connections between pre-college and college-level courses to ensure that graduates from one area can move seamlessly into the next.

Examples: Aligning standards and GED curricula and pre-college programs with college readiness; aligning non-credit to credit programs; establishing state-wide post GED college ready benchmarks; promotion of industry recognized credentials; and promotion of National Career Readiness Certificates.

1. Does the state integrate college readiness into GED instructional curriculum? If so, how is this assessed? □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

2. Are there policy goals to promote alignment between K-12, ABE programming, developmental education, and college readiness? □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

3. Are innovations designed to improve college readiness (e.g., dual enrollment, summer bridge, or early college high schools) supported through statute, funding, or other policy supports? □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

4. How does the state align policies to support educational access and advancement for low-skilled individuals?
   a. Does the state currently align entry, exit, and content standards for adult education; college remedial education; workforce development (including WIA); noncredit and credit-bearing occupational programs, at least within specific occupational or sectoral clusters? □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   b. Does the state promote articulation and transfer of credit between adult education, college remedial education, workforce development, noncredit and credit-bearing occupational programs? If so, how? □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

5. Goals and initiatives
   a. Does the state set goals for awarding postsecondary credentials in areas of economic importance to the state? □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
b. Does the state set goals for reducing skill shortages in targeted economic areas, such as health care?
   □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

c. Does the state have any initiatives to organize workforce development opportunities by regions and sectors (e.g., through skill panels, career pathways, regional skill alliances, sector initiatives)?
   If so, how many? Do these cover the spectrum of adult skill levels from adult education and ESOL to bachelor’s degrees? How many employers are actively involved in these initiatives? □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

6. What incentives does the state create for adult education, workforce development, economic development, and postsecondary agencies and institutions to increase the numbers of students who transition successfully between components of workforce development job advancement services?
   Additional Details:

7. Does state postsecondary education funding encourage or require creation of bridge programs?
   □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

8. Does funding support or encourage customizing college remedial education and English language instruction to the content of particular postsecondary occupational programs? □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

**ASSESSMENT #4: ASSESSMENT, REFERRAL, AND PLACEMENT**

There are multiple points in the ABE to postsecondary student pipeline in which poorly defined or poorly assessed diagnostic criteria can have significantly detrimental effects on student success. Policy efforts aimed at standardizing assessments, cut scores, and placement criteria can go a long way toward ensuring that students end up taking appropriate courses and remain enrolled. Additionally, it is the interventions associated with the cut scores that are most critical. Targeted assessments aligned with college readiness can lead to significantly accelerated pathways for low-skilled adult students.

**Examples:** Dual enrollment for adult education and college programs; cross-walking assessments for basic skills and college; and making adult education a placement option for some developmental education students.

1. Does the state have any policies which help to place ABE students into the appropriate program, such as a cut score “floor” or cut score range? □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:
2. Does state policy outline a cut score floor for students entering developmental education (below which they are directed to enter ABE)?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

3. Does state policy require all entering students to take assessment tests for placement into ABE or college courses?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

4. Does the state specify permissible assessment tests?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

5. Does the state’s assessment/placement policy for postsecondary education take into account other student performance measures (e.g., high school transcripts, non-cognitive/affective measures such as study skills, computer literacy)?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

6. Does state policy require institutions to use common cut scores or ranges to assign students to certain ABE or developmental ed courses?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

7. Does state policy allow students to take ABE or technical courses at the same time that they take college courses?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

8. Does the state’s assessment/placement policy allow for certain exemptions and some level of local autonomy?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

9. Does state policy require that placement/assessment tests be made available in advance to students who want to familiarize themselves with and prepare for these tests?  □ yes □ no  
   Additional Details:

10. Does state policy direct institutions to offer alternatives to ABE for students who place near the college cut score?  □ yes □ no  
    Additional Details:

11. Does the state make GED testing available for those students who think they are ready even without enrolling into the program?  □ yes □ no  
    Additional Details:
Targeted financial aid and institutional funding policies at both the college and individual levels can have a significant impact on student success. For low-skilled adult students, many of whom work and juggle family responsibilities in addition to attending college, financial aid must be flexible and support student acceleration strategies. For the college, state funding formulas need to incentivize student progression and completion, but not by encouraging the production of lower-quality credentials.

**Examples:** Alignment/“braiding” of funding from adult education, community college, workforce, TANF, employer and other funding streams to strengthen implementation and outcomes; working on Pell eligibility for ABE students.

1. Does the state invest in ABE? If yes, how much? What is the average investment per student?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

2. Are there policies which permit “braiding” of state funds as co-investments into ABE?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

3. Is there a state performance funding system that specifically rewards institutions for students’ progression through ABE into college-level coursework in a timely manner? Does the funding mechanism reward job placement?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

4. Is there a state performance funding system that specifically rewards institutions for student persistence and retention?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

5. Is there a state performance funding system that specifically rewards institutions for improved completion rates of ABE students?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

6. Is the state trying to increase the uptake of federal financial aid (e.g., support for financial aid staff, system-wide protocols for supporting student applications)?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

7. Do state financial aid policies provide support in addition to tuition and fees?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

8. Is the state’s need-based aid program supportive of ABE students?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:

9. Does the state conduct research on the effect of financial aid receipt on persistence and completion?
   - [ ] yes  [ ] no
   
   Additional Details:
10. Does the state give guidance to institutions for interpreting federal financial aid requirements in ways that allow for integrated or non-sequential course-based strategies?  □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

11. Does the state market financial aid services and funding to low-skilled individuals?  □ yes □ no
   Additional Details:

12. How does the state make education affordable for low-skilled workers?
   a. Does state policy for adult education allow for academic goals other than the GED, such as meeting entry requirements (e.g., specific COMPASS or ASSET scores) for specific occupations, occupational areas, or postsecondary education and training programs? If yes, describe.  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   b. Does state policy allow and/or encourage use of vocational/ technical education funds for credit-bearing college programs?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   c. Does state policy allow and/or encourage use of WIA adult training funds for credit-bearing college programs?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   d. Does the state spend TANF funds on the direct costs of education and training for adults, either through contracts or by paying tuition and other education expenses?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   e. Does state policy allow and/or encourage use of TANF education and training funds for credit-bearing college programs?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   f. Does the state provide incentives for adults to invest in their own skill upgrading such as Lifelong Learning Accounts, Individual Development Accounts, state matching funds for 529 contributions by low-income adults, or others? If yes, describe.  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

13. Financial aid for adults
   a. Does the state provide any student aid targeted specifically at adults?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

   b. Does the state provide any non-merit student aid that is open to adults in occupational certificate and degree programs?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
c. Does the state provide any aid to students attending less than half time?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

14. Income support to offset reduced work hours (TANF, UI, TAA, WIA)

a. Does the state allow adult education to count as a core work activity for TANF? If yes, describe under what circumstances it counts.  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

b. Does the state allow job training to count as a core work activity for TANF? If yes, describe under what circumstances it counts.  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

c. Does the state allow postsecondary education and training to count as a core work activity for TANF? If yes, describe under what circumstances it counts.  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

15. Child Care for Adult Students (TANF, CDBG, others?)

a. Do TANF recipients receive child care subsidies for hours spent in class and/or practicums/internships? If yes, under what circumstances?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

b. Can adult students receive state or federally funded child care subsidies, such as CDBG, for hours spent in class and/or practicums/internships? If yes, under what circumstances?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

c. Can adult students receive WIA funds for child care expenses not covered by CDBG?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

16. Other indirect educational expenses (transportation, uniforms, tools, supplies)

a. Does the state provide any financial aid for other indirect expenses of education and training?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

b. Does the state allow TANF to be spent on aid for other indirect expenses of education and training?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:

c. Does state policy allow WIA funds to be spent on aid for other indirect expenses of education and training?  □ yes  □ no

Additional Details:
17. Leveraging investment by businesses in skill upgrading
   a. Does the state provide tax credits to employers for employees’ college costs?  
      □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   b. Does the state require employer match for customized training or incumbent worker training grants?  
      If yes, describe.  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   c. Does the state provide other incentives for employers to provide tuition assistance or other aid to  
      employees for upgrading their skills? If yes, describe.  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

18. State incumbent worker/customized training funds
   a. Does state policy encourage or require that lower-skilled workers, lower-income adults, particular  
      racial/ethnic groups, or geographic areas be included in the training?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   b. Does the state ensure that state funds are not simply supplanting employer funds in these programs?  
      If yes, how?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   c. Does state policy set any job quality standards (target wages, benefits, hours, etc.) for the jobs that  
      incumbent worker/customized training funds may be used to prepare adults for?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:

19. State economic development funds
   a. Does the state target economic development funds on low-income geographic areas or low-income  
      and/or low-skilled populations? Racial or ethnic groups?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   b. Does the state have mechanisms to connect its economic development and workforce development  
      investments?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   c. Do state economic development policies include job quality standards?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
   d. Do state economic development policies include any local hiring agreements for investments in low-  
      income geographic areas?  □ yes □ no
      Additional Details:
e. Do state economic development policies include upward mobility for low-income adults among their aims? If yes, how is it operationalized? □ yes □ no

Additional Details:

20. Does state policy limit the number of ABE levels per student that the state will fund? □ yes □ no

Additional Details: