

7.1 Provide a brief story of student success that illustrates the power of ABE programming to make positive change for the individuals and communities served. (Be sure to obtain student permission for any personal information or work included.)

Adara's story is a testament to the transformative power of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programming and its ability to create lasting change for individuals and the communities they serve. Adara first enrolled in classes at Lakes Area Adult Education (LAAE) in 2010. Between 2010 and 2014, her attendance was inconsistent,



and she eventually stopped attending in April 2014. Adara returned briefly in 2017 but recommitted fully to her education in 2019, bringing with her a renewed focus and determination. Through the support and guidance of LAAE instructors, Adara worked hard to achieve her goals. Her perseverance paid off when she graduated in February 2020. But her story didn't end there.

Adara recently returned to LAAE to share her incredible accomplishments. After earning her high school equivalency, she pursued higher education and graduated with a nursing degree in December 2024. She is now a registered nurse (R.N.) and has secured a position as a traveling nurse in Northern Minnesota. In addition, Adara earned a full scholarship to continue her education at Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Adara's success exemplifies how ABE programming provides not only the foundational skills needed to achieve academic milestones but also the confidence and tools to pursue higher education and career opportunities. Today, as a traveling nurse, Adara makes a meaningful impact in healthcare settings across Minnesota, embodying the effect of ABE on individuals, families, and communities. Her journey serves as an inspiring example of how dedication and support can lead to incredible achievements and lasting change.

7.2 Describe the most pressing challenges the consortium is currently facing. Include any ideas for addressing these challenges, but note that it is acceptable to acknowledge and describe challenges even without a proposal for addressing them.

### Challenges Facing the Consortium

#### Challenge 1: Limited Resources and Funding

One of the most pressing challenges the consortium is facing is the limitation of financial and material resources. With increasing demands for services, programs, and support, the current funding levels are insufficient to meet the

needs of our learners and staff. This constraint affects the ability to provide quality training, upgrade technology, and support innovative programs.

- Potential Solutions:
  - Pursue additional grant opportunities and explore partnerships with local businesses or organizations to supplement funding.
  - Develop fee-based programs for those who can afford them while maintaining free or low-cost options for underserved populations.

### Challenge 2: Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff

The consortium is experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified educators and staff, partly due to limited salaries and professional development opportunities. This challenge can lead to increased turnover rates, which may disrupt program continuity and impact student outcomes.

- Potential Solutions:
  - Advocate for increased funding to offer competitive salaries and benefits.
  - Invest in professional development and mentorship programs to support staff growth and satisfaction.
  - Foster a positive work culture through team-building activities and recognition programs.
  - Increase program visibility in the community to raise awareness of our work and how we help individuals achieve their goals, which may assist in recruiting teachers and volunteers. Platforms for outreach include Facebook, district newsletters and updates, school board updates, community education newsletters, and newspaper articles.

### Challenge 3: Student Enrollment and Engagement

Post-pandemic shifts have significantly impacted student enrollment and engagement. Many students face barriers such as transportation issues, lack of access to childcare, or competing priorities like work or family responsibilities. Additionally, maintaining engagement in online or hybrid learning environments has proven challenging.

- Potential Solutions:
  - Increase outreach efforts in underserved communities to raise awareness of consortium services.
  - Offer flexible learning options, such as evening classes or hybrid models, to accommodate diverse schedules.
  - Provide support services like transportation assistance to reduce barriers to attendance.
  - Implement instructional strategies that allow students to achieve early success, such as diving in and preparing for at least one test area right away and focusing on one or two content areas at a time. This approach has proven effective in boosting student engagement and motivation.

- Explore potential partnerships with local childcare centers that could provide drop-in care while students attend class.
- Evaluate and expand access to high-quality online learning platforms to support the option of studying from home.

#### Challenge 4: Evolving Educational Needs

The skills and knowledge required in the job market are rapidly evolving, creating a need to regularly update curriculum and resources. However, adapting programs to align with these changes is resource-intensive and time-consuming.

- Potential Solutions:
  - Connect with an advisory board of local employers and industry representatives to provide insights into emerging workforce needs.
  - Leverage partnerships with local colleges and training providers to co-develop programs.
  - Connect with all local area Chambers of Commerce to provide insights into local workforce needs.
  - Explore opportunities to collaborate with Detroit Lakes High School and the Area Learning Center to share resources, align programming, and support transitions for learners interested in career pathways or technical training.

Acknowledging these challenges is an essential first step toward addressing them. While some solutions may require long-term efforts, they provide a roadmap for building a more sustainable and effective consortium. Collaboration among stakeholders will be critical to overcoming these hurdles and ensuring the consortium can fulfill its mission.

**7.3 Explain if, when, and how the consortium addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), including but not limited to racial equity. Consider the following:**

*What definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion is the consortium using to guide its work? What is the consortium's vision or strategy for addressing issues of equity? How is this vision or strategy shared amongst providers, staff, and students? If a vision doesn't exist, how and when will one be developed? How do you implement and measure the effectiveness of your DEI strategies?*

The consortium defines diversity as the representation of different backgrounds, identities, and experiences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, language, disability, socioeconomic status, and more. Equity is the fair treatment, access, and opportunity for



all individuals, ensuring that systemic barriers are actively addressed. Inclusion is fostering an environment where all individuals feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute. These definitions are foundational to the consortium's DEI efforts and guide decision-making at all levels.

### *Vision and Strategy for Equity*

The consortium's vision for equity is to create an educational environment where all learners have the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed, regardless of their circumstances or identities. This vision is rooted in understanding and addressing disparities in access, outcomes, and representation within our programs.

The strategy includes:

- Ensuring diverse communities are aware of and can access programs by providing materials in multiple languages, partnering with community organizations, and addressing logistical barriers like transportation.
- Integrating materials and teaching strategies that reflect and respect the diverse cultures, languages, and experiences of our students.
- Providing ongoing professional development to help staff recognize and address bias, use inclusive teaching strategies, and understand the systemic inequities that affect learners.

### *Sharing the Vision*

The consortium communicates its DEI vision and strategy through:

- DEI policies and guidelines are shared with all providers and staff.
- Staff meetings, webinars, and collaborative discussions to align staff and stakeholders with DEI goals.

### *Implementation and Measuring Effectiveness*

- Implementation:
  - Incorporate DEI goals into strategic plans and operational decisions.
  - Establish partnerships with local organizations serving underrepresented communities.
  - Provide equitable resources, such as scholarships, child care support, or assistive technology.
- Measuring Effectiveness:
  - Analyze enrollment, retention, and achievement rates disaggregated by demographics to identify inequities.
  - Use direct student and staff input to assess experiences and perceptions of inclusivity.

By embedding DEI principles into all aspects of its work, the consortium strives to create a supportive and equitable environment where everyone can thrive. While challenges remain, this ongoing commitment to DEI ensures that progress is continuous and impactful.

**7.4 Describe any professional development focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that the consortium has sponsored and/or participated in.**

*How do you determine who participates in DEI training? How is the consortium implementing and applying lessons learned from DEI PD participation?*

*Professional Development Sponsored or Participated In*

The consortium has actively engaged in various DEI-focused professional development (PD) opportunities, including:

- Attended Summer Institute and participated in seminars on topics such as racial equity in education, implicit bias, and culturally responsive teaching practices.
- Offering staff access to online DEI courses and resources, such as webinars on accessibility, inclusive leadership, and trauma-informed practices.
- Integration into Practices and Policies:
  - Curriculum Development: Incorporating culturally responsive materials and teaching methods into lesson plans.
- Ongoing Reflection and Feedback:
  - Sharing best practices among staff.
  - Using student and community input to evaluate the effectiveness of DEI initiatives and inform future training needs.

*Determining Participation in DEI Training*

Participation in DEI training is guided by the following principles:

- Universal Access: Training opportunities are offered to all staff, from instructors to administrators, ensuring broad exposure to DEI concepts.
- Targeted Participation: Specific DEI sessions are tailored to roles that directly influence policy, curriculum, or student interactions, such as program managers, hiring committees, and instructional teams.
- Needs-Based Approach: Participation is often determined based on identified needs, such as gaps revealed in student feedback, staff surveys, or disparities in program outcomes.

By prioritizing DEI-focused professional development, the consortium ensures that staff are equipped to create inclusive environments and address inequities effectively. This ongoing commitment reinforces the consortium's mission to support all learners equitably.

**7.5 How does the consortium use an equity lens to examine and adjust its policies and procedures?**

The consortium applies an equity lens to policies and procedures by examining how decisions impact different student populations, particularly those who have historically faced barriers to educational access and success. This process involves evaluating whether policies promote fairness, remove systemic obstacles, and create opportunities for all learners to thrive.

1. The consortium collects and analyzes data on student enrollment, retention, completion rates, and access to resources, disaggregated by

race, socioeconomic status, disability, language proficiency, and other key demographics.

- This data helps identify disparities in educational outcomes and informs necessary policy adjustments.
2. Existing policies are assessed to determine whether they disproportionately disadvantage specific student groups.
    - For example, if attendance or participation requirements negatively impact adult learners with caregiving responsibilities, the consortium considers flexible learning options, such as hybrid or asynchronous classes.
  3. The consortium seeks input from students, staff, and community partners, particularly those from underrepresented groups, when revising policies.
  4. Funding, instructional materials, and support services are allocated based on student needs.
  5. The consortium applies an equity lens to staffing policies by implementing practices that promote diverse hiring, an inclusive workplace culture, and ongoing DEI training.
  6. Job descriptions, interview processes, and hiring criteria are reviewed to eliminate bias and ensure inclusivity.
  7. Policies are not static; they are revisited and revised based on new data, feedback, and emerging needs.

**7.6 What is the procedure for reporting discrimination or other equity concerns in your consortium? How are staff and students made aware of these procedures?**

**Procedure for Reporting Discrimination or Equity Concerns**

Lakes Area Adult Education (LAAE) has a clear and accessible process for reporting discrimination, harassment, or other equity concerns to ensure a safe and inclusive learning and working environment. The reporting procedure follows these steps:

1. Concerns can be reported directly to human resources, the Community Education Director, or the Lead Instructor/Program Coordinator.
2. Upon receiving a report, personnel will conduct a timely and impartial investigation.
  - The process includes interviews with relevant parties, review of policies, and assessment of potential violations.
  - If discrimination or inequity is found, corrective actions may include policy adjustments, mediation, disciplinary measures, or additional training.
3. Reports are handled with strict confidentiality and protection to encourage reporting without fear of consequences.

4. After investigation, the complainant is informed of the outcome and any corrective actions taken.
5. The consortium evaluates systemic concerns identified through reports and makes necessary policy changes to prevent future incidents.

*How Staff and Students Are Informed About These Procedures*

1. The discrimination reporting policy is included on the school district website.
2. Employees receive DEI and anti-discrimination training, including how to recognize, prevent, and report equity concerns.
3. Periodic reminders at staff meetings or via email remind staff of their rights and reporting options.