

Adult Education and Literacy  
Texas Workforce Commission  
COVID-19 Response FAQ Sheet

**Note:** This FAQ as well as other updates on Adult Education and Literacy activities can be found at the AEL/TWC Coronavirus Update at <https://tcall.tamu.edu/COVID-AEL.htm>

**Using this Document**

This is a large document. To quickly find answers, please use the table of contents below or search the document for keywords by typing **Ctrl + F** on your keyboard for the “Navigation” menu. Then type the term you are looking for.

**I. GENERAL TWC QUESTIONS 4**

**Contacting TWC AEL Staff ..... 4**  
**Privacy Awareness for Staff and Students ..... 4**  
**Updating and Promoting AEL Services..... 5**

**II. FISCAL/GRANT QUESTIONS 5**

**Paying Staff ..... 5**  
**Time-and-a-Half Policies ..... 7**  
**Working Remotely ..... 7**  
**Costs Related to Cancelled Conferences..... 8**  
**Costs Related to Rescheduled Conferences (NEW) ..... 8**  
**Travel Insurance ..... 10**  
**Instructor Use of Time ..... 10**  
**Managing Consortium Grant Costs ..... 11**  
**Lapsed Instructor Contracts ..... 11**  
**Clearing Supplies and Protective Equipment ..... 11**  
**Financial Reporting..... 11**  
**Loaning Laptops/Computer Equipment to Students ..... 12**  
**Rent on Idle Facilities ..... 14**  
**Mental Health Counseling Costs ..... 14**  
**Additional Funding to Cover Unplanned Costs ..... 15**  
**Online Subscriptions and Licenses ..... 15**

Laptops and Related Computer Supplies.....	16
Prior Approval.....	16
Digital Signature Software.....	17
<b>III. <a href="#">PERFORMANCE</a></b>	<b>19</b>
Performance Considerations Resulting from COVID-19 Pandemic .....	19
Grant Extensions .....	20
Need for Planned Gap .....	20
Data Entry / Reporting .....	20
Contact Time for Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Students.....	21
New Students and Enrollment Targets.....	21
Performance for Students with Incomplete Information .....	22
Continuing Certain Students in TEAMS.....	23
TEAMS Access (NEW).....	23
TEAMS Outages.....	23
<b>IV. <a href="#">DISTANCE AND REMOTE LEARNING</a></b>	<b>23</b>
Beginning Distance Learning.....	23
DL Module Participation.....	24
DL Plan Dues Dates.....	24
Approved DL Curriculum.....	24
Distance Learning MOUs .....	24
What is Remote Learning.....	25
Synchronous Instruction.....	25
Using Academic Packets .....	25
Changing Class Names .....	26
Direct Contact Hours and Proxy Hours .....	26
Documenting Distance and Remote Hours.....	27
Hours for Conference Calls .....	28
Minimum Minutes for Calls .....	28
<b>V. <a href="#">TECHNOLOGY</a></b>	<b>28</b>

Instructors with Limited Online Access .....	28
Approval of Apps for Proxy Hours.....	29
<b><u>VI. PROGRAM OPERATIONS</u></b> <b><u>29</u></b>	
Orientation .....	29
High School Equivalency .....	29
Evaluation Survey.....	30
<b><u>VII. MONITORING</u></b> <b><u>30</u></b>	
Current Monitoring Activity.....	30
Monitoring and Incomplete Information (NEW).....	30
<b><u>VIII. PERSONALLY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION (PII)</u></b> <b><u>30</u></b>	
<b><u>X. INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING</u></b> <b><u>32</u></b>	
Changing Programs of Study.....	32
Concurrent Instruction Challenges .....	32
<b><u>XI. SERVING NEW STUDENTS AT A DISTANCE</u></b> <b><u>33</u></b>	
New Students Served at a Distance Definition .....	33
New Student Enrollment Requirements.....	33
New Terms.....	33
<b><u>XII. STUDENT INTAKE/PROFILE FOR NEW STUDENTS</u></b> <b><u>34</u></b>	
New Student Intake Information .....	34
Developing a Student Profile Without a Test.....	34
New Student at a Distance Participant Eligibility.....	34
Determining Eligibility without a Pre-test .....	35
Serving High School Students.....	37
No Need for Specialized Eligibility Forms .....	37
Duration of Staff-Determined Eligibility .....	37
Notating Participant Academic Levels.....	38
Confirmation Email to Students.....	39
Use of Apply Texas .....	39
AEL Enrollment Form.....	39

### XIII. TESTING AND REMOTE TESTING 40

<b>Progress Testing Requirements.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Remote Testing Options .....</b>	<b>41</b>

#### I. General TWC Questions

##### **Contacting TWC AEL Staff**

###### **1. Q) How do I contact TWC AEL? (3/20/20)**

A) TWC AEL and BAEL grant staff are working, but all staff are working from home and some are splitting some time supporting work in the unemployment insurance division. The following contact info can be used to communicate with AEL Texas.

COVID-19 pandemic related information and general questions: [AEFTA@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:AEFTA@twc.state.tx.us)  
(This goes to several TWC AEL staff including Anson Green and Mahalia Baldini)

- Contract management email: [BAEL@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:BAEL@twc.state.tx.us) (3/20/20)
- Program specific email: Email your Program Support Specialist
- Anson Green: 512.348.5874 (text is best!) or [anson.green@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:anson.green@twc.state.tx.us)
- TEAMS questions: [TEAMS.TechnicalAssistance@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:TEAMS.TechnicalAssistance@twc.state.tx.us).

##### **Privacy Awareness for Staff and Students**

###### **2. Q) Under what circumstances may grantees discuss individuals affected by COVID-19?**

*For example, if local staff exhibit symptoms, or even test positive for COVID-19, may other staff members be informed of this? (4/13/20, From TWC Local Workforce Development Board [FAQ](#)).*

A) Grantees must maintain all information about employee, employee’s family members, or student illness as a confidential medical record in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Openly discussing whether an employee’s family members, or student has tested positive or whether an employee’s family members, or student will be tested for the virus is also prohibited under TWC policy. Boards and AEL grantees must remind employees and partners that discrimination or harassment against individuals who are suspected to have tested positive for, or been exposed to, coronavirus, is strictly prohibited.

In the midst of the uncertainty, be honest and transparent (to the extent allowed by law) and remain calm and patient with your employees. Let them know that you are

taking steps to protect their health and safety. On March 21, 2020, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) updated its [Pandemic Preparedness In the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) publication to help employers avoid violating the ADA. In short, the EEOC noted that some rules and procedures that might otherwise raise ADA concerns may be permissible under the circumstances.

## Updating and Promoting AEL Services

### 3. Q) What guidance does TWC have for how AEL providers should market services and classes during the pandemic? (4/10/20)

A) With the need to continue services and expand due to the anticipated increases in services due to growing unemployment, all AEL Providers must update their websites and social media to reflect current and anticipated AEL remote and distance options for customers.

## II. Fiscal/Grant Questions

### Paying Staff

**NOTE:** Multiple questions are answered under this response.

1. Q) Can we continue to pay part-time instructional staff for planning activity as we attempt to transition to virtual classrooms, etc. even though; we are not generating contact hours due to campus class suspensions? (3/25/20)
2. Q) If our school board decided to pay employees during this emergency, do we follow that and pay our staff with our grant? (3/25/20)
3. Q) What if our agency doesn't agree with paying part time teachers if they are not teaching? (3/25/20)
4. Q) Should we use state leadership funds for part time instructors who are not teaching? (3/25/20)
5. Q) Can we pay clerical staff? (3/25/20)
6. Q) Can staff be paid their average working hours? (3/25/20)

A) The OMB Uniform Guidance cost principles that ordinarily govern the allowability of compensation and fringe benefits under Federal awards continue to apply with respect to compensation and leave paid to employees during COVID-19 closures. Refer to the cost principles in Subpart E of the OMB Uniform Guidance. This includes those at 2 CFR 200.430 Compensation—Personal Services and 2 CFR 200.431 Compensation—Fringe

Benefits, as well as those that apply more generally to all costs, including, but not limited to conditions for costs to be necessary and reasonable for the performance of the award and allocable thereto (2 CFR 200.403(a)), conform to limitations or exclusions set forth in these cost principles or the award (2 CFR 200.403(b)), be consistent with policies and procedures that apply uniformly to both federally-financed and other activities of the entity (2 CFR 200.403(c)), be accorded consistent treatment as a direct or indirect cost (2 CFR 200.403(d)), and be adequately documented (2 CR 200.403(g)). In considering whether a cost is reasonable, consideration must be given to factors described in the cost principles, including but not limited to consideration as to whether the entity significantly deviates from its established practices and policies regarding the incurrence of costs such that the deviation unjustifiably increase the award's cost (2 CFR 200.404(e)). Similar provisions exist in the State's Uniform Grant Management Standards (UGMS).

In considering the referenced cost principles, COVID-19 related paid leave that is charged to a TWC grant award must be made pursuant to an official decision by the grantee's leadership that applies uniformly to all activities of that entity. For example, if an entity's leadership officially decides to pay all full-time personnel but not part-time personnel, the TWC grant can be used to pay the grant's allocable share of paid leave for full-time personnel but not part-time personnel. Similarly, if the entity's leadership officially authorizes paid leave for all clerical personnel, the TWC grant can be used to pay the grant's allocable share of those costs, but if the entity's leadership does not approve pay for clerical personnel, such leave would not be allowable to the TWC grant. If an entity has both grant-funded activities and other activities, and seeks to pay COVID-19 leave to the grant-funded personnel only, such leave would likely be unallowable, because it treats grant-related activities different in a way that results in higher costs to those grants than would otherwise occur if they entity treated grant-funded personnel the same as its other personnel.

The amount paid must be consistent with the entity's policies and be uniformly applied to both grant-financed and other activities. If an entity's leadership decides to pay COVID-19 leave to part-time personnel, the amount charged to a TWC grant award for the award's allocable share of such payments cannot exceed what would be reasonable considering the number of hours ordinarily worked by the part-time personnel.

(New Content 4/10/20<sup>1</sup>) “If a grantee or subgrantee does not currently have in place a policy that addresses extraordinary circumstances such as those caused by COVID-19, the grantee or subgrantee may amend or create a policy in order to put emergency contingencies in place for Federal and non-Federal similarly situated employees.”

### **Time-and-a-Half Policies**

- 7. Q) The Board policy for our ISD provides premium pay at time-and-a-half for certain personnel who are required to work during COVID-19. Can the higher rate of pay be charged to the TWC AEL grant? (3/25/20)**

A) The portion of the pay that is allocable to the TWC grant and paid pursuant to established local policy, consistently applied, would be an eligible grant cost.

### **Working Remotely**

- 8. Q) Will TWC reimburse costs through the established grant for staff to work remotely to continue to provide services to our students? (3/25/20)**

A) Yes. The Governor’s Office has encouraged that, “For offices and workplaces that remain open, employees should practice good hygiene and, where feasible, work from home in order to achieve optimum isolation from COVID-19.” Consistent with that message, TWC recognizes the responsibility that a grantee has for the health and safety of the grantee’s personnel and the authority that a grantee’s leadership has, to permit personnel to work from home where feasible.

Additionally, where necessary and reasonable health and safety precautions do not permit normal face-to-face interaction with participants/students, TWC encourages grantees to offer remote access to services where possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from U.S. Department of Education April 8, 2020 Fact Sheet: Select Questions Related to Use of Department of Education Grant Funds During the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 found at <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/factsheet-fiscal-questions.pdf>.

## **Costs Related to Cancelled Conferences<sup>2</sup>**

- 9. Q) If a conference, training, or other activity related to a grant from the Department is cancelled due to COVID-19, may grant funds be used to reimburse nonrefundable travel (e.g., conveyance or lodging) or registration costs that were properly chargeable to the grant at the time of booking?**

A) Yes, provided that a grantee or subgrantee first seeks to recover nonrefundable costs (e.g., travel, registration fees) associated with a grant from the Department from the relevant entity that charged the fee (e.g., airline, hotel, conference organizer). Some businesses are offering flexibility with regard to refunds, credits, and other remedies for losses due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, many agreements or contracts for conferences, training, or other activities related to a grant contain an emergency or “act of God” provision, and the grantee and its subgrantees must seek to exercise those clauses to the extent possible in light of the COVID-19 outbreak.

If a grantee or subgrantee is unable to recover the costs, the grantee or subgrantee may charge the appropriate grant for the cancellation costs, provided the costs were reasonable and incurred in order to carry out an allowable activity under the grant, consistent with the Federal cost principles described in 2 CFR Part 200 Subpart E of the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, And Audit Requirements For Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance). Grantees and subgrantees should not assume additional funds will be available should the charging of cancellation or other fees result in a shortage of funds to eventually carry out the event or travel. Grantees and subgrantees must maintain appropriate records and cost documentation as required by 2 CFR § 200.302 (financial management) and 2 CFR § 200.333 (retention requirements for records) to substantiate the charging of any cancellation or other fees related to the interruption of operations or services.

## **Costs Related to Rescheduled Conferences (NEW)**

- 10. Q) If a conference is postponed, not cancelled, and the individual cannot attend the new date, or the new date falls outside the grant period, may grant funds be used to reimburse nonrefundable travel (e.g., conveyance or lodging) or registration costs that were properly chargeable to the grant at the time of booking? (New 5/1/2020)**

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<sup>2</sup> From U.S. Department of Education April 8, 2020 Fact Sheet: Select Questions Related to Use of Department of Education Grant Funds During the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 found at: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/factsheet-fiscal-questions.pdf>.



The grantee must take the following actions:

- If the grantee cancels its conference registration and associated travel arrangements because the grantee is not available on the new conference date, the grantee must make a reasonable attempt to recover the costs from the entities that charged them. If the grantee is unable to recover the costs, then, consistent with the above-referenced ED Fact Sheet, the grantee may charge the AEL grant for the costs, provided the costs were incurred to carry out an allowable activity under the grant, and are consistent with the Federal cost principles in the Uniform Guidance.
- An AEL grant cannot pay for a grantee to attend a conference that will occur after the AEL grant ends. (The end date is inclusive of any renewals or extensions.) Therefore, if the TWC AEL grant award will end before the conference occurs, the grantee must make a reasonable attempt to recover costs from the entities that charged them unless: 1) the grant is extended to an end date that includes the conference date, and 2) the grantee attends the conference during the extension. TWC may consider extending the end date of the grant award if doing so is necessary to accomplish the grant purpose, and sufficient grant/fund balance and fund life exist for the extension. If the grant is not extended to a new end date that includes the new conference date (or if the grant is extended, but the grantee does not attend the conference), the grantee must attempt to recover conference costs from the entities that charged them. If the grantee is unable to recover the costs, then, consistent with above-referenced ED Fact Sheet, the grantee may charge the costs to the grant, provided the costs were incurred to carry out an allowable activity under the grant, and are consistent with the Federal cost principles in the Uniform Guidance.
- For AEL Local Provider grants, if the grantee will attend the conference before the AEL Local Provider grant ends (inclusive of any renewals), but the specific funding period to which charges were made will expire before the conference occurs, the costs already charged can remain in the funding period from which they were paid, and any remaining costs of attending the conference will be chargeable to a funding period that is available when those conference costs become payable, provided the conference occurs before the AEL Local Provider grant award ends. The Year 1 funding of the AEL Local Provider grant expires June 30, 2020; Year 2 funding of the AEL Local Provider grant is available July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2021; and Year 3 funding will begin July 1, 2020. So, for example, if the grantee will attend the conference before the grant ends: 1) any conference costs that were necessary for the grantee to pay between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019 continue to be chargeable to the Year 1 funding; 2) any

conference costs that were necessary for the grantee to pay between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 can be charged to either the Year 1 funding or the Year 2 funding, provided that sufficient grant balance exists in the selected funding period to cover the cost; and 3) any conference costs that are necessary for the grantee to pay between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021 can be charged to either the Year 2 funding or the Year 3 funding, provided that sufficient grant balance exists in the selected funding period to cover the cost.

In situations where it is necessary for a grantee to attempt to recover conference costs, but the grantee was unsuccessful in its efforts, the grantee's supporting documentation for the conference costs should include a brief description of the steps that the grantee took to attempt to recover the costs. The explanation may be scrutinized by TWC monitors and other external parties as they consider whether reasonable steps were taken to avoid or reduce any conference cancellation costs.

### **Travel Insurance<sup>3</sup>**

**11. Q) If a grantee or subgrantee is planning future travel under a grant from the Department, may it purchase travel insurance with grant funds?**

A) Due to health concerns related to COVID-19, grant-supported travel generally should not be occurring. However, if travel is permitted by Federal, State, and local directives and is the only means to carry out an essential grant function that must be undertaken on a time-sensitive basis during the COVID-19 pandemic, consistent with the grantee's or subgrantee's travel policy, travel insurance is allowable provided the cost is reasonable and allocable to the grant consistent with the Federal cost principles described in 2 CFR Part 200 Subpart E of the Uniform Guidance.

### **Instructor Use of Time**

**12. Q) Our instructor time and effort forms are going to look very different. They will include more classroom prep (filming class lessons for posting/conference call). Is this acceptable? (3/20/20)**

A) TWC does not provide guidance on acceptable work as it relates to staff time and effort. Staff time though should reflect effort that supports or provides AEL activities.

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<sup>3</sup> From U.S. Department of Education April 8, 2020 Fact Sheet: Select Questions Related to Use of Department of Education Grant Funds During the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 found at: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/factsheet-fiscal-questions.pdf>.

## **Managing Consortium Grant Costs**

**13. Q) If a provider is part of an AEL consortium, must the lead agency of the consortium respect and pay the time-and-a-half costs of a provider? Or can the lead agency of the consortium deny the increased payment. Depending on the amount of increase, paying would require the lead agency of the consortium to amend the budgets of one or more of the consortium members. (3/25/20)**

A) Under the OMB Uniform Guidance, “The [cost] principles are designed to provide that Federal awards bear their fair share of cost recognized under these principles except where restricted or prohibited by statute.” (2 C.F.R. § 200.100(c)). Arbitrarily prohibiting a provider from recovering allowable costs would be inconsistent with that provision of the OMB Uniform Guidance. Please contact your TWC Grant Manager if you have concerns about award amounts or other award restrictions.

## **Lapsed Instructor Contracts**

**14. Q) Our part time instructors are contracted; what if their contract is over and they do not have an active class? (3/25/20)**

A) We assume that the grantee’s financial obligation to the instructor ended when the instructor’s contract ended. If that is not the case, please provide additional details to TWC AEL staff.

## **Clearing Supplies and Protective Equipment**

**15. Q) Can Adult Ed providers purchase cleaning supplies and protective gear masks and gloves to address the COVID-19 pandemic? (3/25/20)**

A) Yes. Necessary and reasonable cleaning supplies, and protective masks and gloves that are purchased for use by healthy AEL provider personnel who are reasonably required to have contact with students during the COVID-19 pandemic are eligible grant costs. Contact your TWC grant manager if you need to make a budget change to accommodate the costs.

## **Financial Reporting**

**16. Q) What do we do if the business office is closed and we cannot retrieve financial information to compile the data for monthly activity reports? (3/23/20)**

A) Please contact your AEL grant manager to discuss any needed extensions.

## Loaning Laptops/Computer Equipment to Students

**17. Q) If an AEL local provider has laptops/tablets that it purchased with AEL funds, is it allowable for the grantee to loan those devices to its AEL students? What does the grantee need as far as documentation? (4/10/20)**

A) The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a trend of temporary shifts from in person classroom instruction to distance learning formats. Under the circumstances, an AEL grantee would generally not be prohibited from loaning its existing AEL-funded laptops/tablets to AEL students when: 1) the grantee's AEL classes temporarily shifts to a distance learning format in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2) the shift to distance learning necessitates an AEL's student access to a laptop/tablet to continue participation in the AEL class and the AEL student does not otherwise have access to such resources, and 3) the AEL local provider has existing AEL-funded laptops/tablets that can be temporarily re-purposed because of the pandemic. The change in use of the devices must not negatively impact the grantee's ability to perform the functions for which the grantee originally purchased the devices. The grantee will need to have documented policies and procedures for loaning the devices. This includes a written policy for determining which AEL students will receive devices. Assignment should be based on inability of a student to access the AEL class without receiving the loaned device. Student need determinations should be documented and retained in grant records. The grantee must exercise sound business practices and must continue to maintain effective control and accountability over the devices.

Maintaining effective control and accountability over existing devices that are assigned to AEL students will include actions similar to what would occur when assigning devices to individual grantee employees. For example:

- In that the devices are grantee property, identifying any legal liability that might convey to the grantee and taking appropriate actions. Events to consider might include but are not limited to cybersecurity threats, electrical shock, and property damage resulting from faulty devices. TWC does not provide legal advice to its grantees. A grantee should consult with its legal counsel as appropriate.
- Ensuring that appropriate insurance coverage is in place to cover the use.

- Erasing data before releasing a device to an AEL student, and again “wiping” the device when the student returns it. Safe handling and sanitization of returned devices in the event of the device’s potential exposure to the COVID-19 virus.
- Installing appropriate cybersecurity software on the devices and requiring that the software not be disabled. If possible, restrict the ability to disable the software to grantee personnel having Administrator privileges for the grantee’s software applications.
- Affixing a “Property of [grantee name]” to the device.
- For each device that is assigned to an AEL student, recording the device’s unique serial number and the AEL student to which the device is assigned. Keep this information in grant records.
- Requiring each AEL student that receives a device to acknowledge receipt of the device in writing and to acknowledge in writing that the property is AEL grantee property.
- Recording the beginning and planned ending dates for the AEL student’s use of the device and require the student to acknowledge the dates in writing. The end date can be extended later, if needed. Keep the dates and acknowledgement in grant records.
- Providing each AEL student that receives a device with a written policy that specifies that the student’s permission to use of the device is limited to the student’s participation in AEL activities and advises the student not to store personal information on the device beyond what is necessary to use the device for participation in AEL activities, requires the student to keep the device physically secure and explains how to do so, requires the student to keep cybersecurity software enabled, provides information to help the student identify and avoid potential cybersecurity threats, prohibits the student from loaning or selling the device to others, informs the student of procedures and timelines for reporting loss, damage or theft of the device, requires the student to return the device in good condition on the agreed upon date, and informs the student of consequences for violating the policy. Discuss the policy individually with each student that receives a device. Require the student to acknowledge receipt and discussion of the policy in writing.

Records must be retained in accordance with the record retention requirements that apply to the AEL grant award.

### **Rent on Idle Facilities**

**18. Q) Due to the COVID-19 situation, AEL programs are transitioning some in-person instruction to virtual platforms temporarily. Even though they are moving to virtual classrooms they are still incurring cost associated with rent and utility for classroom space. They still have to cover the space costs, for when they do return to a normal in-person services. Can Grantees continue to charge against their grant for these overhead/maintenance costs while space is temporarily not being used? (4/10/20)**

A) Any such costs that are allocable to and charged to an AEL grant must conform to the cost principles specific to “idle facilities and idle capacity.” In general, idle facilities refer to land and buildings or any portion thereof, equipment, or any other tangible asset, whether owned or leased by the entity, that is completely unused and excess to the entity’s current needs. In general, costs of “idle facilities” are allowable “for a reasonable period of time, ordinarily not to exceed one year” if “they were necessary when acquired and are now idle because of...other causes which could not have been reasonably foreseen.” (OMB Uniform Guidance, 2 C.F.R. § 200.446; UGMS, Part II, Attachment B, Item 25, (b)(2))

### **Mental Health Counseling Costs**

**19. Q) Are mental health counseling costs allowable under the AEL grant? Could we hire a counselor, or contract with one? This would be for mental health counseling for individuals impacted by stressors associated with COVID-19. In this scenario, the school would be offering the service to all personnel and/or students. (4/10/20)**

A) For AEL students—Costs of providing COVID-19 mental health counseling students to AEL students would appear to require prior approval of the Federal awarding agency (see 2 C.F.R. § 200.456—Participant Support Costs), but we anticipate approval to be unlikely because the AEL program does not otherwise contain provisions that provide for using AEL funds to pay for mental health counseling services for AEL students. For AEL Personnel— Where an AEL grantee’s or provider’s entity conducts both AEL and non-AEL activities, COVID-19 mental health counseling costs specifically for the AEL employees only would not be an allowable AEL cost. In contrast, if the entity provides the mental health counseling services to all its personnel (both AEL and non-AEL), the

portion of the cost that is allocable to the AEL program must conform to the cost principles in 2 C.F.R. § 200.437—Employee Health and Welfare Costs, in the OMB Uniform Guidance, which reads:

“§200.437 Employee health and welfare costs. (a) Costs incurred in accordance with the non-Federal entity’s documented policies for the improvement of working conditions, employer-employee relations, employee health, and employee performance are allowable. (b) Such costs will be equitably apportioned to all activities of the non-Federal entity. Income generated from any of these activities will be credited to the cost thereof unless such income has been irrevocably sent to employee welfare organizations. (c) Losses resulting from operating food services are allowable only if the non-Federal entity’s objective is to operate such services on a break-even basis. Losses sustained because of operating objectives other than the above are allowable only: (1) Where the non-Federal entity can demonstrate unusual circumstances; and (2) With the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.”

Similar provisions exist in the state’s Uniform Grant Management Standards (UGMS), Part II, Attachment B, Item 18.

### **Additional Funding to Cover Unplanned Costs**

**20. Q) Will there be additional funding to cover additional costs for online registration support, additional software licenses and messaging application costs? (4/12/20)**

A) A budget request, including funding to AEL providers, is up for consideration by the Commission on April 14, 2020.

### **Online Subscriptions and Licenses**

**21. Q) Regarding online subscriptions, can we purchase licenses ending June 30 or can we do end of year? End of the year or December 31, 2020? (3/25/20)**

A) More information is needed to respond specifically to individual circumstances, but in general, a grantee must limit its use of TWC grant funds to make prepayments to its vendors to what is necessary and reasonable for the performance of the award. If a grantee needs to purchase online license subscriptions to facilitate a temporary shift to a distance learning strategy in response to COVID-19, any prepayments must conform to the same administrative requirements and cost principles that ordinarily apply to TWC grant funds. This includes giving consideration to the entity’s normal policy on making prepayments for its other activities. For example, if an entity’s accounting policies limit

the extent to which it makes prepayments to vendors, those limitations would also be considered with respect to the allowability of payments made with TWC grant funds. Example: If the vendor that provides the license subscription does not require prepayment—for example, if the vendor ordinarily requires payment on a month-to-month basis—and prepayment of multiple months in advance would not result in a substantial cost savings to the program, the prepayment would not likely be an appropriate use of grant funds if the ordinary month-to-month payment will make the licenses available to the program in a manner that meets the program’s service delivery needs. Additionally, no one is certain how long the COVID-19 social distancing and associated distance learning strategies will be called for or remain appropriate. Even if prepayment is necessary and reasonable under a specific set of circumstances, reasonable measures need to be taken to avoid the potential for waste from non-use of purchased licenses if the distance learning need were to end before the licenses expire. If specific guidance is needed for a particular set of circumstances, please provide the specific details of those circumstances to TWC AEL staff.

## **Laptops and Related Computer Supplies**

### **22. Q) Do we have authority to purchase more laptops and related computer supplies to expand our distance education services? (3/23/20)**

A) Yes, on March 19, 2020, TWC removed many limitations related to purchasing laptops, computers, tablets or WIFI hotspots and similar items. Prior approval requirement regarding equipment having a per-unit acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more continues to apply. For guidance, see [AEL Letter 05-20 Modifications to Grants Awarded under TWC RFP 320-18-01, Adult Education 11 and Literacy Service Provider Grant](#).

## **Prior Approval**

### **23. Q) Does the prior approval requirement for computer costs of \$5,000 or more apply to distance learning software too? (3/23/20)**

A) The prior approval requirement applies to any single item that costs \$5,000 or more, not just laptops and related computer supplies.

Under the prior approval requirement for equipment, a grantee must submit [TWC Form 7100](#) to the assigned TWC grant manager before purchasing tangible personal property that has both a useful life greater than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost of \$5,000



or more. For guidance, see [AEL Letter 05-20 Modifications to Grants Awarded under TWC RFP 320-18-01, Adult Education 11 and Literacy Service Provider Grant.](#)

## **Digital Signature Software**

### **24. Q) Can we purchase software to transmit signatures electronically and protected? (4/10/20)**

A) Yes, these are allowable costs as long as they fall under standard purchasing guidelines. There are several ways to conduct digital signatures outside of expensive services. Creating an online enrollment process that utilizes a unique sign on / password would suffice for electronic signature as well. Common software like Adobe Connect Pro has this capability as well.

In the absence of a physical signature, AEL grantees should review the capability to send and/or receive digital signatures using technology acceptable under [1 Texas Administrative Code \(TAC\) 203, subchapter B](#). Digital, or eSignature applications such as DocuSign and Adobe E-signature, comply with state law.

If you are unable to obtain a signature at intake, you should document that in the PASES Tracker and follow-up in the future to obtain signatures for intake documents.

### **25. Q) Can an AEL Provider purchase prepaid phones to support staff or students who either not wanting to give out their personal numbers or use their phone for class participation either because it is being used other multiple family members, or they have limited minutes?**

A) For AEL staff: Prepaid mobile cell phones and top-up credit are allowable costs for staff who are reasonably required to maintain contact with participant during the pandemic. Supporting documentation should include a brief statement to that effect and the necessity to keep the staff's personal phone number private. AEL grantees should contact their TWC grant manager to make a budget changes to accommodate the costs.

For AEL Participants: Before purchasing pre-paid (burner) cell phones for participants, AEL Grantees should consider and exhaust all other options. Decisions should generally be made on a participant-by-participant basis, and the supporting documentation should explain why the participant needs the phone to participate in the AEL program, for example, a combination of the reason that the AEL program requires phone communication, the frequency of phone communication that the program requires for program participation, the circumstances that prevent the participant from engaging in

phone communication (e.g., no access to a phone, a shared phone with limited minutes, etc.), and a determination that the individual is ineligible to receive phone assistance through other public assistance or phone programs. If there is a cost savings in recycling them for future participant use, a system for recovering the phone, sanitizing it and clearing any personally identifying information and data, and “assigning it” to the next participant will need to be set in place. AEL Grantees must follow the same loaning guidelines for laptops/tablets in this FAQ. Please see section: [Loaning Laptops/Computer Equipment to Students](#).

**26. Q) Where can I find updates on funding that the TWC Commission has set aside to support AEL providers during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

A) On April 14, 2020<sup>4</sup>, the Commission approved four projects to immediately support grantees need to expand service delivery to participants at a distance:

1. The Commission rescinded the quarter 3 performance-based funding measure, approved on October 8, 2019, to release approximately \$1 million, or 66.7% of the 3% performance-based holdback included in each grantee’s AEL allocation budget as described in AEL Letter 02-20, Change 1. 2)
2. The Commission expanded the scope of the Workforce Integration and Follow-Up Activities approved on December 17, 2019, and in this letter and attachment. While the distribution amounts remain unchanged from those approved in December, the Commission approved expanding of the scope of allowable expenses under this funding to support the increases in distance and remote learning resulting from school closures. Allowable expenses now include increases in licenses for distance learning and related remote education services, including mobile messaging applications and supplies necessary for the expansion of remote and distance learning.
3. The Commission approved funding to develop virtual learning resources for use in distance and remote learning activities. Both options require increasing funding to the Texas AEL professional development center, the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (TCALL). Curriculum topics to be prioritized include basic education, digital literacy, and the elements of job search and workforce preparation.

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<sup>4</sup> The discussion paper approved by the Commission on April 14, 2020 can be found at <https://twc.texas.gov/materials-april-14-2020-900-amtexas-workforce-commission-meeting> .

4. The Commission approved funding for the Student Support Call Center grant which provides 20- to 30-minute just-in-time, one-to-one virtual math support to AEL participants through telephone conversations, screen-sharing, and a virtual whiteboard. In PY'19, the center assisted in excess of 1,000 students per month. Option one expands the number of AEL participants using the center who are recruited through the AEL grantees and enhances the capacity of the center by including multi-student class services in addition to one-to-one services.

A summary of the approved funding is below.

	Action	Amount
1	Rescinded performance-based funding measure for Q3	\$1,000,000
2	Expanded Workforce Integration / Follow-up Services Grants	\$2,000,000
3	Grant to develop Virtual Learning Resources	\$500,000
4	Student Support Call Center	\$500,000
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,000,000</b>

### III. Performance

**Note:** Testing Questions are in Section [XII Testing and Remote Testing](#).

#### Performance Considerations Resulting from COVID-19 Pandemic

1. **Q) What considerations is TWC giving for performance based on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic? (3/25/20)**

A) TWC understands that performance results for many measures may be impacted by COVID-19, which has closed many schools, halted or slowed enrollments, and paused all proctored performance testing as well as high school equivalency testing center operations.

We anticipate demand for AEL services among existing participants will be impacted and altered as programs move to remote and distance learning options for students with access to online learning. Additionally, demand may begin to increase as a result of growing unemployment. We also understand that there will be delayed data entry beginning in March 2020 and that this delay may continue as a result of school closers.

TWC is operating under the following general principles during this period:

- We understand that performance on many measures is likely going to be impacted by COVID-19 and efforts to slow its spread;
- It is too early to know what that impact is going to be;
- We are going to monitor the situation to determine what the appropriate recommendations are;
- Those recommendations will be informed by what the data shows and that nobody should fail performance solely as a result of COVID-19 and related efforts to slow its spread.

### **Grant Extensions**

- 2. Q) How we should address the potential impact on our contract outcomes caused by delays and closures? Especially as it relates to IET's under Accelerate Texas. We may need an extension. (3/18/20)**

A) This type of situation is impacting training providers and colleges across the state. If you believe a contract extension would support student completion once this closure period is over, please contact your TWC grant manager for an extension. Please also see TWC guidance at:

<https://tcall.tamu.edu/docs/TexasWorkforceCommissionGranteeInformation.pdf>

### **Need for Planned Gap**

- 3. Q) Should programs place students on Planned Gaps if the program is on extended break or modified working schedule? If so, what would those circumstances look like? (3/20/20)**

A) A Planned Gap can be used if the program feels confident it can stay in touch with the student monthly to review planned gap status. See Planned Gap policy in the AEL Assessment Guide. For more information on planned gaps, see [AEL Letter 01-19 - Periods of Participation for Adult Education and Literacy](#).

### **Data Entry / Reporting**

- 4. Q) Will there be an extension to enter 3rd quarter data since some programs still had two weeks left to test and are now on extended breaks? (3/18/20)**

A) Yes, we understand that there will be delayed data entry beginning in March 2020 and that this delay may continue as a result of school closers. TWC expects data entry to continue on a regular bi-weekly schedule, but we do understand that monthly data validation may not be possible and has been extended until further notice. Reports will continue to be ran on the normal schedule and performance will be reflected accordingly with a footnote attribute to the impact of COVID-19 closures and suspension of services.

### **Contact Time for Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Students**

**5. Q) When will direct hours start for new students served at a distance without an approved NRS test? (4/10/20)**

A) Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Students (PASES) who are utilizing remote learning options regardless of if they have a test, will generate direct hours per usual increments and this time should be entered in the PASES Tracker. Any time above 7.5 minutes rounds up to 15 minutes of contact time. We do not know yet how or if these new students will count toward performance.

### **New Students and Enrollment Targets**

**6. Q) Will new students served at a distance count toward our enrollment targets when they don't have an approved NRS baseline/pre-test? (4/10/20)**

**Note:** For testing continuing students who were tested prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, see section [XII Testing and Remote Testing](#) for more information.

A) AEL grantees and providers should know that the most important thing to focus on now is serving students and meeting the needs of new individuals wanting to enter AEL. TWC is still monitoring the situation related to performance and will be making recommendations to our Commission in the future informed by what the data shows. Our commitment is that no grantee should fail performance solely as a result of COVID-19 and related efforts to slow its spread.

That being said, we know that testing and assessment is critical to service delivery in AEL and understanding what a student needs to learn.

During this period providers may support grantee intake, enrollment and service delivery for new students at a distance. The provider must collect the Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Student (PASES) information described in section [X Serving New Students at A Distance](#).

Until NRS approved tests included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide are available for remote testing for ESL and ABE/ASE, TWC is allowing during this period non-NRS approved tests to inform instruction. These tests do not substitute for a baseline/pre-test.

Any test that is delivered online or remotely that shows basic can be used to support placement and instruction. Examples of these tests include but are not limited to the TSIA, GED Ready®, HiSET Interactive Practice Tests and tests included in commercial learning software programs.

## **Performance for Students with Incomplete Information**

- 7. Q) What are the performance impacts if new students served at a distance who do not complete enrollment forms, baseline test, etc. and never make it to face to face service? Will any enrollment credit be given for these students? (4/10/20)**

A) TWC is still monitoring the situation related to performance and will be making recommendations to our Commission in the future informed by what the data shows. Our commitment is that no grantee should fail performance solely as a result of COVID-19 and related efforts to slow its spread.

- 8. Q) I'm worried about persistence problems. With face-to-face intake and orientation, we sometimes have half of the new students persist from one phase to the next. Will that student just not count in the numbers if we are not able to test? (New 4/10/20)**

A) See answer to Section [III Performance; Data Entry / Reporting](#)

- 9. Q) If a program does intake for new students, how much time will programs be given to complete data entry (i.e. contact hours, class assignment, assessment information) for new students which could not be assigned to a class in TEAMS without approved assessment? (New 4/10/20)**

A) TWC expects programs to continuously track and enter data into TEAMS or on the PASES tracker on a regular bi-weekly schedule. We have extended the monthly data validation (March-June) as well as the Q3 Data Sign Off in TEAMS. Our goal is to ensure that all data can be validated and signed off by July 15th for end of year reporting.

## Continuing Certain Students in TEAMS

**10. Q) If a returning student has had a test within the last 365 days, their pretesting is currently waived until proctored testing is back. Does this mean they can be tracked in TEAMS and continue the program like they didn't leave? (4/10/20)**

A) Yes. Participants with complete enrollment processes (form and release of information) and have a viable test (365 days of class registration), can be tracked in TEAMS instead of the PASES tracker. If there is too much time between class registration and the first contact hour, the test may expire (>365 days), at which point, returning student will need to be tracked on the PASES tracker.

## TEAMS Access (NEW)

**11. Q) We have had many issues with accessing TEAMS or getting kicked out. When will this issue be fixed? (5/1/2020)**

A) TEAMS operates on the same system as Unemployment Insurance System. Due to the volume of people applying for unemployment, both websites are affected during peak times. We recommend accessing TEAMS before or after the hours of 0800-1700.

## TEAMS Outages

**12. Q) We have had many issues with accessing TEAMS or getting kicked out. When will this issue be fixed?**

A) TEAMS operates on the same system as unemployment. Due to the volume of people applying for unemployment, TEAMS is affected during peak times. We recommend trying to access TEAMS before 8am (CST) or after 5pm (CST).

## IV. Distance and Remote Learning

**Note:** Testing Questions are in section [XII Testing and Remote Testing](#).

### Beginning Distance Learning

**1. Q) How do I offer distance learning? (3/18/20)**

A) Complete information and policy on distance learning (DL), including approved DL curriculum can be found at: <https://tcall.tamu.edu/dlti.html>.

## **DL Module Participation**

- 2. Q) Is it necessary for personnel to participate in the DL Modules in order to offer DL? (3/18/20)**

A) No, the DL Modules are being waived through May 15th, 2020.

## **DL Plan Dues Dates**

- 3. Q) With the closing of schools in our consortium due to COVID-19 concerns, will we have an extension on submitting our DL Plan or will it still be due on April 15th? Our schools are closing through the end of the month and perhaps longer. (3/18/20)**

A) Yes, the deadline for submitting Distance Learning Plans has been moved to May 31st, subject to change depending on how things progress with closures.

- 4. Q) Does the Distance Learning Plan due date requirement apply to our Accelerate Texas funded programs? (3/18/20)**

A) Distance Learning is not a requirement of the Accelerate Texas grants, and you do not need to submit a DL Plan as an Accelerate Texas grantee. DL Plans are required only for core TWC AEL grantees. ACC is required to participate in distance learning activities and to complete a distance learning plan and has done so. The Distance Learning State Policy can be found on the TCALL website here:

<https://tcall.tamu.edu/twcael/initiatives/dlstatepol.html> and contains the definition of distance learning as it is used in AEL.

## **Approved DL Curriculum**

- 5. Q) USA Learns is on the approved distance learning list, but not in TEAMS. Can it be added to TEAMS? (3/18/20)**

A) Yes, USA Learns is approved and as of 4/7/2020, can now be selected in TEAMS as an approved DL option.

## **Distance Learning MOUs**

- 6. Q) Does AEL Letter 06-17 - Distance Learning Call Center TEAMS data entry apply to other MOU's? Do we need to have a "business agreement in place" to implement distance learning on platforms like google classroom, CANVAS, Skype or Zoom? (3/20/20)**



A). No, an MOU or business agreement is not necessary for implementing distance learning or other remote learning services. AEL Letter 06-17 - Distance Learning Call Center, applies only to the services that were offered by the vendor of the Distance Learning Call Center.

## **What is Remote Learning**

### **7. Q) What is Remote Learning? (3/25/20)**

A) Remote Learning occurs when the student and instructor are separated by distance and therefore cannot meet in a physical classroom setting. The instruction and communication are synchronous. Learning content or teaching is typically transmitted via technology (email, chat, discussion boards, video conference, audio bridge) so that no physical presence in the classroom is required. Contact hours for remote learning are counted in TEAMS as direct hours if they are greater than 15 minutes. Remote learning does not use approved DL Curriculum, otherwise it is distance learning and the hours are counted as proxy hours. Unlike distance learning, remote learning must occur synchronously in real time.

## **Synchronous Instruction**

### **8. Q) What is synchronous instruction? (3/25/20)**

A) Synchronous instruction involves learning where a group of students are engaging with an instructor in learning activities at the same time whether in person or virtual. The instructor and students communicate in real time using web conferencing tools, phone, instant messaging, live chat, webinars, video conferencing etc. Remote or distance learning that does not occur at the same time is called asynchronous instruction (For information on documenting synchronous AEL activities, see Section [Documenting Distance and Remote Hours](#))

## **Using Academic Packets**

### **9. Q) Can we use academic packets or course materials and count the hours as direct hours in remote learning. (3/23/20)**

A) No, unless the work on instructional packets is done in a remote learning context through synchronous in real time instruction. (See Question 1 under Distance and Remote Learning)

## Changing Class Names

### 10. Q) Do we need to edit class name to “remote”? (3/23/20)

A) No, that is not necessary.

## Direct Contact Hours and Proxy Hours

### 11. Q) What is the difference between direct contact hours and proxy hours? (3/18/20)

A) Participants in distance learning must have at least 12 hours of direct contact before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes.

Direct contact hours involve interaction between the participant and program staff in real time. Direct contact hours can be a combination of direct face-to-face contact as well as contact through phone, video, teleconference, or online communication in which the identity of the participant and the amount of time expended on the activity can be verified. Live online discussions, telephone conference calls, and live video broadcasts to remote locations are examples of direct contact hours that are countable under this definition.

In addition to direct contact hours, programs may also report proxy hours to track time participants spend on distance learning activities. Proxy hours differ from direct contact hours in that the identity of the participant and/or the exact amount of time spent on a learning activity cannot always be verified. Proxy hours are tied to an approved curriculum for distance learning and are entered into TEAMS separately from direct hours. All proxy hours must be documented using the method described by the approved distance learning curriculum.”

Using these types of webinar/video conferencing platforms to capture **direct contact hours** also encourages teachers to engage with distance and remote learning students on a regular basis, especially if students cannot attend physical classes.

- Teachers can use the video/webinar conference tools to present a lesson on a similar topic that may have been covered in the DL curriculum modules or teach a separate but complimentary lesson that reinforces the DL curriculum lessons **but does not reteach it.**
- Teachers can use the video/webinar conference tools to check-in to update student goals, etc.
- Teachers can use the video/webinar conference tools to encourage online collaboration and peer support amongst students.

- Finally, most of these conferencing tools have internal tracking mechanisms in place that allow teachers to download a report showing the total amount of real-time expended by each student.

## **Documenting Distance and Remote Hours**

### **12. Q) Without a physical sign-in sheet how do we collect attendance for remote learning such as conference calls with students/ Zoom classes/ YouTube assignments? How do we monitor direct hours with apps and document these hours in TEAMS. What backup documentation would be needed for monitoring purposes? (3/20/20)**

A) Whether it is distance, remote, and app-based, all distance education activities must provide a method for participants and program staff to interact and participant identity must be verifiable as well as track contact hours.

There are multiple ways to document hours and student activity for distance and remote learning. The [State Guidance for Distance Learning](#) from the AEL Assessment Guide provides several options for documenting contact hours when the class is remote or the app or software does not electronically track clock time. According to TWC AEL guidance:

“Direct contact hours involve interaction between the participant and program staff in real time. Direct contact hours can be a combination of direct face-to-face contact as well as contact through phone, video, teleconference, or online communication in which the identity of the participant and the amount of time expended on the activity can be verified. Live online discussions, telephone calls, and live video broadcasts to remote locations are examples of direct contact hours that are countable under this definition.”

Providers must ensure that they update their local standard operating procedures to include acceptable documentation for above referenced non-traditional direct hours that adheres to ‘identity verifiable’ documentation. This could include but are not limited to: roll call document signed by instructors, print outs of who logged into webinars and/or video conferencing, or use of personal log on numbers provided to students (access codes) that can be tracked by facilitators/moderators indicating that the student is participating in the instructional activities. The documentation of participant names should also include class name/number, date, time in/out and instructor name. Please ensure that you are not implementing processes that jeopardize and/or contradict guidance in [TWC WD Letter 02-18](#) on keeping student information confidential. So, don’t use a Social Security Number as a unique identifier for logging into virtual systems, etc.

## Hours for Conference Calls

### **13. Q) Can a conference call with students serve as a form of direct hours? (3/23/20)**

A) Yes, any calls with students related to instruction and support equal to or greater than 15 minutes can be counted toward direct hours. (For information on documenting synchronous AEL activities, see Section [Documenting Distance and Remote Hours](#))

## Minimum Minutes for Calls

### **14. Q) Can direct hours be entered for a phone call without it being a minimum of 15 minutes. I would like to clarify that this could be an accumulation of time (as has been accepted years ago in distance learning). Also, how does rounding work for time? For example, how much time is a call that lasts 8 ½ minutes. (4/10/20)**

A) Direct contact hours involve interaction between the participant and program staff. This can be a combination of direct face-to-face contact as well as contact through telephone, video, teleconference, or online communication, in which the identity of the participant can be verified. Live online discussions, telephone conference calls, monitored labs, and live video broadcasts to remote locations are examples of direct contact hours that are countable under this definition. Cumulation of =>7.5 minutes of time would round up to 15 minutes of contact time.

## V. Technology

Note: Questions on purchasing and allowability related to computers and related supplies is in section [II Fiscal/Grant Questions](#).

### **Instructors with Limited Online Access**

#### **1. Q) Some of our faculty have very limited internet or computer access. What are some ideas to help us help our part time instructors out with technology? (3/23/20)**

A) Resources for free or reduced internet access and related topics can be found under FREE Internet Provider Offers on the [AEL/TWC Coronavirus Update TCALL page](#). On March 19, 2020, TWC removed many limitations related to purchasing laptops, computers, tablets, or WIFI hotspots and similar items. For guidance, see [AEL Letter 05-20 Modifications to Grants Awarded under TWC RFP 320-18-01, Adult Education 11 and Literacy Service Provider Grant](#).

## Approval of Apps for Proxy Hours

### 2. Q) With so many free apps and digital resources becoming available, do these still need to be TWC-approved options to count as proxy hours? (3/23/20)

A) Yes. While students can benefit from a wide variety of distance learning options, in order to collect reportable proxy hours for distance learning, approved distance learning programs must be used. A list of approved programs can be found here:

<https://tcall.tamu.edu/twcael/initiatives/distcurriculum.html>

## VI. Program Operations

### Orientation

#### 1. Q) Will requirements for orientation and on-boarding change? (3/18/20)

A) Requirements have not changed, institutions can conduct these virtually, at their discretion. (For information, see New Students Served at A Distance and Documentation of Hours and Activity for Distance, Remote, and App-based Learning sections)

### High School Equivalency

#### 2. Q) How do I find out if a scheduled HSE tests have been cancelled? (3/18/20)

A) TEA confirmed that HSE testing centers are sending out emails to test takers notifying them of closures. If the individual did not provide an email address when they signed up--they will be responsible for checking test center websites for closure information. Testing centers contact information can be found here:

- HiSET Test: <https://ereg.ets.org/ereg/public/testcenter/search? p=HSE>
- GED Test: <https://wsr.pearsonvue.com/testtaker/registration/SelectTestCenterProximity/GEDTS?conversationId=886058>

#### 3. Q) Can a student take the high school equivalency test online? (3/18/20)

A) Not at this time. All official high school equivalency tests are taken at certified testing centers across the state. We are working closely with TEA and test vendors for options. <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/certificate-of-high-school-equivalency/frequently-asked-questions-about-high-school-equivalency-testing#4>. We are working closely with TEA and test vendors for options.

<https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/certificate-of-high-school-equivalency/frequently-asked-questions-about-high-school-equivalency-testing#4>.

## Evaluation Survey

4. Q) The AEL Intake Evaluation Survey is due March 27. Has that been extended?

A) Yes

## VII. Monitoring

### Current Monitoring Activity

1. Q) Will TWC be monitoring AEL programs during this period? (4/10/20)

A) No. All TWC monitoring activity has been halted. AEL staff will update AEL grant recipients once this status changes. AEL grantees who are consortia should monitor and document areas of compliance that can be safely reviewed able at a distance until onsite monitoring can continue.

### Monitoring and Incomplete Information (NEW)

2. Q) If a program is not able to obtain a signature from the student, what will happen during a TWC monitoring visit? For example, the student moves out of area or changes contact phone number and doesn't notify AEL office nor teacher. Will this be counted as a finding against the program? See also the question 23 Digital Signature Software under Section II [Fiscal/Grant Questions](#). (5/1/2020)

A) We are asking programs to document via 'comments' in TEAMS that this is a new student enrolled under COVID-19 circumstances. We will use the guidance provided in FAQ's as a benchmark for monitoring expectations during COVID-19 timelines.

## VIII. Personally Identifying Information (PII)

1. Q) As far as protecting PII, what is our liability for information students send electronically to us, unprotected? (4/10/20)

A) Grantees must ensure they are adhering to TWC guidance described in [WD Letter 02-18, Handling and Protection of Personally Identifiable Information and Other Sensitive Information](#). It is the Grantees responsibility to ensure they have a safe way to protect PII during its transmittal, transport and storage. Creating systems that protect PII in the absence of external factors is the best solution.

Grantees can refer to the this document which outlines some best practices when working remotely: <https://www.twc.texas.gov/files/partners/teleworking-requirements-and-best-practices-twc.pdf>

**2. Q) Not all instructors may know how to save handwritten forms into password protected PDFs. Some instructors may be sending a picture of the document. Is this ok? (4/10/20)**

A) All information that contains PII must be protected. Providers must find a solution for submission of documents that contain PII that meet standards in WD Letter 02-18. If sending PII-protected eligibility or other documentation electronically is not possible, the following methods are approved until the documents can be obtained:

- **Postal Mail:** The individual can send through postal mail a copy of PII-protected eligibility to the provider. AEL grantees and providers should develop a standard operating procedure for receiving information through postal mail. AEL grantees who are consortia should coordinate their procedures across consortia members.
- **Media Viewing/Transmission:** AEL provider staff may review and/or capture the documentation containing PII, like a driver's license through an individualized secure camera shot, which means viewing or transmitting this information must be done on a one-to-one basis, between the AEL staff and individual, *not through a group session with individuals.*
- **Media Viewing:** Media Viewing means staff view, but do not collect documentation electronically and individually. Staff can facilitate eligibility determination and other documentation though individual media communication, such as through Apple Facetime, WhatsApp, Google Chat, Skype. etc. that is shared between only the staff member and the student.
- **Media Transmission:** Media transmission means staff view and collect documentation electronically and individually. Staff can facilitate eligibility determination and other documentation though individual media communication with the individual and download the information securely in a manner that protects PII as outlined in [WD Letter 02-18](#).

## X. Integrated Education and Training

### **Changing Programs of Study**

- 1. Q) During the COVID-19 pandemic, if students started an IET that was in progress and the class is cancelled and will not resume any time soon due to physical distance constraints, can we enroll the student in an alternate training and not be in violation of the 2 year IET policy that prohibits multiple IET enrollments?**

A) Yes, during these unique circumstances, if a student's IET occupational training is cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances (school or program closures, limited access to facilities, equipment, classroom space etc.), you may work with the participant to find an alternative program of study and continue to serve that participant. Be sure keep attuned to the changing job market and demand and available occupations in conjunction with what the participant is seeking as a best fit.

### **Concurrent Instruction Challenges**

- 2. Q) Can we continue to provide online industry math or business communications classes to our IET students while the hands-on workforce training portions of the IET are not available? Will providing these class with no workforce training component start the 60-hour clock of non-integrated instruction for the IET. Can this be waived until our training classes reopen? Also, should this be waived, can these hours on non-integrated instruction count toward the hours of the program as it were integrated. Or will we have to go back and do more basic education hours concurrently once the students are back in their workforce training classes?**

A) Providers should begin direct services with students as soon as possible even if these hours are not concurrent. Providers should strive to keep all students engaged until onsite classes can begin. Providing standalone basic education and workforce preparation activities, either online or remote, is allowed. Once students begin the workforce training schedule providers must continue to monitor their basic skill needs and apply basic education services as needed. The stand-alone hours provided during this period can be used as part of the program of study and are not required to be repeated.



## XI. Serving New Students at A Distance

**Note:** Performance information for New Students Served at a Distance can be found in the section [III Performance](#).

Information on Testing and Remote Testing can be found in the section [XII Testing and Remote Testing](#)

### **New Students Served at a Distance Definition**

**1. Q) Who are new students served at a distance? (4/10/20)**

A) New students served at a distance also called Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Students (PASES) are individuals who are seeking AEL services and enter at a distance and are unable to complete a pre-test.

### **New Student Enrollment Requirements**

**2. Q) Is it required to enroll new students served at a distance, or can we just work with our existing students? (4/10/20)**

A) No, there is no requirement for programs to enroll new students at a distance, though as procedures become finalized for serving Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Students, providers will be expected to enroll students.

### **New Terms**

**3. Q) What are new terms we should be aware of? (4/10/20)**

A) The following are new terms:

- Pandemic Affected Staff-determined **Eligible Students (PASES)** is the term for new students who are enrolled in AEL services and served at a distance. This term will be used for tracking and reporting performance of this cohort as well as for other purposes
- Staff-determined Eligibility is eligibility made at a distance for individuals entering AEL without an NRS test
- PASES Tracker or “Tracker” is the Microsoft Excel reporting tool used for new students

## XII. Student Intake/Profile for New Students

### New Student Intake Information

**1. Q) What intake information must be completed for new students served at a distance? (4/10/20)**

A) All new students served at a distance must:

- Complete enrollment form including required PIRL elements
- Complete a Release of Information form
- Have a TEAMS participant record and profile
- Complete PASES Tracker when placed into class

### Developing a Student Profile Without a Test

**2. Q) If we are unable to administer an NRS approved pre-test for a new student, how do we complete the student profile? (4/10/20)**

A) A test is not required to create a participant record or a participant profile in TEAMS. An NRS approved test included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide is needed before the individual can be registered to a class. Class level information will be tracked outside of TEAMS for Pandemic Affected Staff-determined Eligible Students (PASES) through the PASES Tracker.

### New Student at a Distance Participant Eligibility

**3. Q) Is the eligibility the same for new students served at a distance? (4/10/20)**

A) Yes, eligibility for AEL services is the same for all students. An individual may be admitted to AEL services if the student criteria listed in [AEL Letter 05-20](#) is met:

- 1) Is sixteen (16) years of age or older<sup>5</sup>
- 2) Who is not enrolled or required to be enrolled in high school under TEC §25.085; and
- 3) Who is one or more of the following:

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<sup>5</sup> For individuals between the ages of 16-18 at intake providers must document and collect the required documentation for AEL participants who are within compulsory attendance age described in AEL Letter 05-17.

- a) basic skills deficient
- b) lacks a high school diploma or equivalent
- c) is an English Language Learner

These items are listed as options in the PASES Tracker.

## **Determining Eligibility without a Pre-test**

### **4. Q) How do I determine eligibility without an NRS pretest? (4/10/20)**

#### **A) Operating Assumption**

Texas AEL is operating from a perspective that anyone seeking adult education services is likely eligible—They either lack a high school equivalency, have limited English, or know they have gaps in basic skills. Because there is no wage or income eligibility for AEL, self-attestation will be an allowable/acceptable approach to make a short-term eligibility determination. TWC AEL staff are reviewing options for distance testing on approved AEL tests. Once testing can resume, short term staff-determination will no longer be allowed.

Options for distance testing on approved AEL tests are becoming available and updates can be found [here](#).

#### **Staff-determined Eligibility**

Providers can assume that most individuals seeking AEL services, believe they are need AEL, and thus most likely meet the eligibility guidelines. Providers must use a combination of student self-attestation as evidenced on the enrollment form, observation when talking to students (for limited English proficiency for example) and other information, including certain non-NRS online test information discussed in this FAQ to make a short-term eligibility determination without an NRS approved tests included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide.

#### **Procedures for Staff-determined Eligibility**

- **Local Process:** Providers should standardize and develop their own procedures for intake and Staff-determined Eligibility determination for new students that are unable to test on an NRS approved tests included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide. These procedures should also include the processes for staff providing intake and transfer of information to protect PII (See [Personally Identifying Information \(PII\)](#) section) for inclusion in the PASES Tracker.

- **Tools for Eligibility Collection:** Providers can use at least three indicators to determine Staff-determined Eligibility for basic skills deficiency or limited English proficiency:
  - **Enrollment form:** For example, educational attainment information provides evidence of skill attainment and needs. Additionally, the information and completeness and quality of information completed by the individual, or the ability of the individual to complete the form independently are good indicators.
  - **One-to-one communication:** For example, spoken or written information, such as email, can provide evidence skills needs.
  - **Non-NRS approved tests:** For example, a placement test in an online software program.

The enrollment form/PIRL elements contains much of the information needed to determine program eligibility this includes:

- Age, listed as the individuals date of birth
- The School Status at Program Entry, Highest School Grade Completed, Highest Educational Level Completed (This can serve as a proxy for basic skills deficiency eligibility and/or lack of high school completion)
- If the individual indicates they are an English language learner (This can serve as a proxy eligibility).

The enrollment form and release of information can be completed and signed online or through a one-to-one interview with the student in a manner that protects PII (see PII section).

Once the enrollment form and release of information is completed and signed, providers should review the information to see if further information or documentation is required from the individual, such as requirements for serving 16-18-year olds without a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

- One-to-one communication should be used to verify information if individual cannot complete the enrollment form remotely or a form that is completed remotely by the individual has multiple mistakes. Additionally, if an individual exhibits signs of limited English proficiency though an interview, that evidence is sufficient for PASSE eligibility.

- Non-approved NRS **test(s)** that can be delivered remotely and that measure basic skills deficiency or limited English proficiency can be used to determine Staff-determined Eligibility. These tests though do NOT replace tests approved in the Assessment Guide for AEL performance accountability.

**5. Q) Will TWC provide a form for self-attested eligibility. (4/10/20)**

A) “Self-attested eligibility,” now called “Staff-determined Eligibility,” does not have a TWC issued form at this time. Programs should continue to include required PIRL elements on all enrollment forms. The information collected on the enrollment form serves as the basis for self-attested eligibility. Other information may need to be obtained for students whose eligibility or out-of-school status is more difficult to obtain.

**Serving High School Students**

**6. Q) Can we serve high school students who have left school due to school closures and would rather get a high school equivalency than do remote learning, wait for school to open or attend summer school? (4/10/20)**

A) If the student has formally withdrawn from school and meets the exemptions/requirements and documentation for serving 16-18 year olds, the provider can enroll the student at a distance. The provider must collect the information outlined in [AEL Letter 05-17, Self-Attestation for Age-Related Eligibility](#).

**No Need for Specialized Eligibility Forms**

**7. Q) Will all new students served at a distance require a special form? (4/10/20)**

A) No, there is not a unique form for Staff-determined Eligibility. All new students served at a distance are required to complete an enrollment form that contains required PIRL elements as well as a release of Information form. This is the same information collected from all students with no modification.

**Duration of Staff-Determined Eligibility**

**8. Q) How long does Staff-determined Eligibility determination last? (4/10/20)**

A) Staff-determined Eligibility is a temporary status for students who are unable to complete a pre-test.

## Notating Participant Academic Levels

9. Q) We need guidance for where staff should notate in TEAMS the participant academic skills/educational level eligibility and determination and the tool/resource used to make the determination. (4/10/20)

A) Completion of an enrollment form that has the PIRL elements will assist grantees in determining the student's eligibility. Optionally, Non-approved NRS test can be used to further assist staff in determining eligibility. You can include comments in TEAMS under the participant record and profile sections to account for specific local actions.

### Option 1

For Corrections and Institutional Funded Program Participants Only	
In Correctional Facility:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
In Community Corrections:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Other Institutionalized setting:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
On Parole:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
On Probation (Community Supervision):*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
<b>Special Program Type</b>	
Family Literacy participant:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
In Workplace Literacy Program(s):*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Participant in Job & Training Program:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
<b>Referral Type</b>	
One-Stop Center Referral:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
TANF Referral:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Referral from College:*	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Additional Information not indicated above:	<input type="text"/>

## Option 2

Street Address		
709 N 11th ST		
<input type="text"/>		
City*	State	Zip Code*
Albany	TX	76430
Mobile Phone	(254) 246-1327	ext. <input type="text"/>
Home Phone	(254) 246-5118	ext. <input type="text"/>
Work Phone	( ) -	ext. <input type="text"/>
Email	fambell4@yahoo.com	
Confirm Email	fambell4@yahoo.com	
<b>Comments</b>		
(Not exceeding 500 characters)		
<input type="text"/>		
<b>Privacy</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Do Not Release Directory Information.		
Yes	Share Data with Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.*	
Yes	Share Data with Texas Education Agency.*	
Save Cancel		

## Confirmation Email to Students

**10. Q) Do students need a confirmation email that they have been admitted to class?  
(4/10/20)**

A) Providers should follow their institutional procedure for confirming an individual has been admitted to AEL services.

## Use of Apply Texas

**11. Q) Is there a way to include AEL programs in the "Apply Texas" enrollment system that the Texas Colleges use at this time? (4/10/20)**

A) No, enrollment must be entered into TEAMS. There is no plan to interface TEAMS with Apply Texas.

## AEL Enrollment Form

**12. Q) Can TWC develop an electronic AEL enrollment form or release the form in in Word?  
(4/10/20)**

A) Currently, TWC does not author enrollment forms. We provide the data elements that must be collected during intake. Grantees are responsible for development of enrollment forms and release of information forms that follow TWC guidance. There are some examples available in the community of practices in TCALL PD Portal that some have found useful. TWC will take into consideration developing a standardized form, but many grantees have expressed their need to develop their own unique forms. We will review current guidance and make adjustments, if needed.

### XIII. Testing and Remote Testing

#### **Progress Testing Requirements**

**1. Q) Is there any possibility that the U.S. Department of Education can waive the progress testing requirements and, if not, how will everyone handle testing? (Modified 4/10/20)**

A) AEL grantees and providers should know that the most important thing to focus on now is serving students and meeting the needs of new individuals wanting to enter AEL. TWC is still monitoring the situation related to performance and will be making recommendations to our Commission in the future informed by what the data shows. Our commitment is that no grantee should fail performance solely as a result of COVID-19 and related efforts to slow its spread.

The U.S. Department of Education has not provided guidance on federal performance. AEL is monitoring test publisher guidance on remote testing and, one available for each test, grantees testing students must follow the remote testing guidelines posted at <https://tcall.tamu.edu/docs/RemoteTestingGuidanceChart-4-7-20.pdf>.

AEL grantees and providers also should note that once a student can be tested remotely or face-to-face, when available, using an NRS approved test included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide, further class contact time should not be included on the PASES Tracker but should be entered into TEAMS as if the student were attending a traditional class. If the student is already on the PASES Tracker, the information can be transferred to TEAMS and the student removed from the tracker.

For individuals unable to pretest on an NRS approved test included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide a provider may follow one of the options listed under the Performance Implications for Serving New Students section in order to better understand the skills needs of the individual.



## Remote Testing Options

2. **Q) Are there any allowable modifications to testing being considered - say remote testing options? Can we pre-test or post-test online using tests like GED READY or Practice HiSET? (Modified 4/10/20)**

A) Yes, Online testing using tests like GED READY or Practice HiSET is allowable for limited, nonperformance related purposes until NRS approved tests included in the Texas AEL Assessment Guide are available under remote testing guidance. These tests, as well as tests associated with online learning software, do not replace testing on NRS tests and may be used only for general placement purposes and will not count toward measurable skill gains performance.