



IET STRATEGIES IN ACTION SERIES

Promising Practices for Regionally Responsive Integrated Education and Training Programs

Integrated education and training (IET) programs combine adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for specific occupations or occupational clusters for educational and career advancement. By integrating these three required components, IET programs accelerate learning so that adult learners can further develop literacy, numeracy, occupational, and workplace preparation skills to advance along their career pathways, and be prepared to enter in-demand careers resulting in good jobs. By definition, good jobs provide workers with important benefits, such as job security, good working conditions, empowerment and representation, and opportunities for skill development and career advancement.¹

This brief highlights how state adult education agencies and local programs have responded to the regional demographic and labor market needs and learners' career interests. Four strategies are introduced in this brief: building regional adult education partnerships, promoting regional IET programs, establishing entrepreneurship IET programs, and creating individualized IET programs.

Local program providers and state education agencies can develop regional IET programs to maximize limited resources and tap into regional labor markets in places with few local, large-scale employers. In addition, providers can create entrepreneurship programs and use an individualized IET program design at the local program level to respond to those same regional demographics and industry conditions. For example, a regional IET program may rely on attendance and recruitment in multiple areas to build a cohort, but an individualized IET program design may allow learners to complete an IET program without a cohort.

The strategies shared here can support the sustainability and scaling of IET programs by building cohorts in innovative ways and dividing IET program development and implementation responsibilities across adult education partners. These strategies are also applicable across diverse regional contexts, and programs based in rural areas may find

*The **ADVANCE IET** project provides training and resources to assist adult educators in developing, strengthening, and scaling IET programs that effectively support adult learner pathways to high-quality careers.*

*This is the fourth publication in a six-part series, **IET Strategies in Action**, intended to provide adult educators with a snapshot of how some IET programs have implemented promising practices to serve diverse learner populations in a variety of settings.*

these strategies to be especially relevant given that these regions may lack large-scale employers centered in one industry or a large population of learners to recruit for a single occupation.

*The **IET Quality Indicators** can be used by states and programs to review existing IET programs and plan new ones, identify priority areas for improvement over time, and develop action plans to incorporate best practice strategies and promote shared learning. The strategies described in the following sections are aligned with the IET Quality Indicators, further highlighting the potential of the indicators to aid career pathway advancement for all adult learners.*

Throughout this brief, we describe how the strategies align with specific IET quality indicators. Exhibit 1 illustrates four strategies that are highlighted in this brief. Two of the strategies correspond to regionally based approaches to meeting regional needs, and two represent programmatic approaches to meeting regional needs.

Exhibit 1. Strategies for Developing IET Programs through Regionally Responsive Methods

Regional Approaches that Meet Regional Needs



Build adult education partnerships within a region to increase students' access to different career pathways and to enhance the sustainability of IET programs. Partnerships among adult education providers within a region can support efforts such as regional IET programs, decrease workload for individual providers, and ultimately lead to more options for students.



Promote regional IET programs to take advantage of potential collaboration among adult education providers in a region. The regional IET approach can be defined as “the practice of shared programming among providers that allows adult learners to enroll in an IET that may not be offered in their home program.”² Implementation practices can vary widely across contexts, ranging from informal sharing of resources to formal memoranda of understanding. Regional collaboration in the formation and implementation of IET programs can support the sustainability and scaling of IET programs, especially in rural areas.

Programmatic Approaches that Meet Regional Needs



Establish entrepreneurship IET programs to foster the development of occupational skills, adult education and literacy skills, and workforce preparation needed for adults to thrive in entrepreneurial career pathways. In locations lacking an ample number of openings in jobs that fit the skills and interests of adult learners who participate in IET programs, entrepreneurial pathways may offer residents an alternative approach to obtaining good jobs. Entrepreneurial career pathways incorporate academic competencies (e.g., critical and analytical thinking, mathematics), workplace competencies (e.g., teamwork, problem solving), industry technical competencies (e.g., financial management, marketing), and a combination of occupation-specific and management competencies.³



Create individualized IET programs to offer one or more of the concurrent components of the IET on an individual basis. The individualized model allows adults to select occupational training and career pathways that best fit their interests and strengths. One of the advantages of the model is that the program does not have to seek out a full cohort of students who are all interested in and suited for a single occupation.

Regional Approaches that Meet Regional Needs

Regional collaboration in the formation and implementation of IET programs can support the sustainability and scaling of IET programs, especially in rural areas. As defined in the [Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans \(EARN\) Spotlight](#), a **regional IET approach** “refers to the practice of shared programming among providers that allows adult learners to enroll in an IET that may not be offered in their home program.”⁴ The subsequent sections address how state education agencies and adult education providers can work toward building a regional IET approach.

In the next section, we first mention an example from Minnesota from the EARN spotlight and then highlight how Kentucky’s strategic partnership coordinator initiative has fostered collaboration among adult education providers. In the final section, we explore how Kentucky’s strategic partnership coordinator initiative has sparked regional IET development and how South Carolina has supported local providers in collaborating to offer regional IET programs in their workforce areas.

Building Adult Education Partnerships within a Region



Regional collaboration among adult education providers differs considerably across states. Some state agencies allocate funding based on regional models; others supply additional funding for individual providers to dedicate time to regional collaborative efforts. For example, as highlighted in an [EARN Spotlight](#), the Minnesota Department of Education funds regional collaboration to develop shared IET programming.⁵ In addition, local providers have initiated cooperative efforts, sharing curricula and other resources. The following examples explore emerging efforts to expand regional collaboration among adult education providers for the purpose of designing and implementing IET.

Kentucky’s Strategic Partnership Coordinator Initiative

In spring 2022, Kentucky introduced a strategic partnership coordinator position to support the 26 adult education programs in 120 counties across the commonwealth. Strategic partnership coordinators assist businesses in learning how IET, workplace literacy, and high school equivalency programs could support their work. Employing a collaborative approach, strategic partnership coordinators facilitate partnerships with employers and local program providers ([IET Quality Indicator #10](#)).

At the state level, the strategic partnership coordinators and other state staff build relationships with unions to create apprenticeship collaboration, workplace literacy, or IET programs for large employers with multiple sites across the commonwealth. They have also fostered collaboration among local IET providers. In western Kentucky, one strategic partnership coordinator held a meeting with all nine program directors in the

region to share successes and challenges related to fostering a regional approach to IET programming. After having established contacts with employers in the region, the strategic partnership coordinator introduced them to workplace literacy and IET programs. Connecting with busy employers can be challenging, so the coordinator's efforts helped decrease the workload of adult education providers.

Promoting Regional IET Programs



In the previous section, we highlighted how state education agencies can play a role in supporting collaboration in a region to build IET and workforce programs. In this section, we look more specifically at how multiple adult education providers can collaborate to offer regional IET programming.

Implementation practices can vary widely across contexts, ranging from informal sharing of resources to formal memoranda of understanding. The following examples illustrate how state-level initiatives can support providers in the development and offering of regional IET programs.

Kentucky's Connection to Regional Employers

Kentucky's approach gives the strategic partnership coordinators the responsibility for leading the development of partnerships between IET providers and employers, which increases the sustainability and scaling of IET programs. For example, one region of Kentucky has a large health care provider with multiple hospitals. The strategic partnership coordinator and state staff have begun to establish a regional approach that offers workplace literacy, bridge activities, and IET programs to meet the hospitals' individual and collective needs. This includes sharing curriculum and planning resources with the adult education providers in the region.

The strategic partnership coordinator serves as the liaison between IET providers and employers, relaying the needs of the learners to the employers and the needs of the employers to the providers. In discussions with health care providers, the strategic partnership coordinator addresses employers' pain points, such as how to support workers' attendance and retention in the IET programs. The strategic partnership coordinator is familiar with how to support workers' participation in programs (e.g., paying the workers to attend training sessions during their normal work hours to mitigate scheduling challenges, removing additional transportation barriers by having classes on-site instead of requiring students to attend classes at a different location, and leveraging internal resources and staff). Rather than each local provider individually holding a conversation with the large health care provider, the strategic partnership coordinator, by being a **centralized voice**, can more effectively reduce barriers to students' participation in the IET programs and address employers' pain points. As recommended by [IET Quality Indicators #10 and #11](#), Kentucky is cultivating a shared

vision and clear roles among adult education providers and state staff in growing employer partnerships.

South Carolina's Regional IET Support

Staff at South Carolina's Office of Adult Education noticed that local adult education providers faced challenges in meeting a state requirement that each program operate an IET. Some local providers lacked the financial and staffing resources to create and run a meaningful IET program. After hearing about these challenges, state staff decided to allow and encourage local providers to collaborate and offer regional IET programs in their workforce areas.

Under this new state guidance, multiple providers, such as school districts and community-based organizations, can work together to establish a shared curriculum for individual cohorts. The students in each cohort attend occupational training at a local community college and are enrolled concurrently in the adult education and workforce preparation curriculum at their respective local programs. For example, in the Catawba Workforce in South Carolina, three providers each deliver the shared curriculum for a health care exploration bridge program that leads to a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) credential. **By being flexible and adapting to providers' and learners' needs**, South Carolina staff have started to address sustainability and scaling goals in the state ([IET Quality Indicator #24](#)). South Carolina will promote this kind of collaboration by requiring the use of this regional model in their next Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) grant competition.

Programmatic Approaches that Meet Regional Needs

Programmatic approaches to meeting regional needs include establishing entrepreneurship pathways through IET programs and creating individualized IET programs. In this section, we spotlight entrepreneurship programs at a public library in Ohio and a school district in South Carolina. We also explore individualized IET program design at a community-based organization in Indiana and a technical college in Florida. In these examples, adult educators provide alternatives to the in-person cohort model to best fit their local labor market, population size, program capacity, and other factors.

Establishing Entrepreneurship IET Programs



Like other IET programs, entrepreneurship IET programs open the door to a career pathway and foster the development of occupational skills, adult education and literacy skills, and workforce preparation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projected a rate of growth for self-employment (7.9%) between

2016 and 2026 that is slightly higher than the rate for all workers (7.4%). This projected growth in self-employment is found in several sectors, including child care, carpentry, construction, and management analysis. The median annual wages for these types of employment range from about \$44,310 for construction laborers⁶ to \$99,410 for management analysts.⁷ For child care workers, entrepreneurship may be a pathway that meets the overwhelming market demand, and entrepreneurship training can support entrepreneurs in navigating the complex childcare systems and regulations.⁸ Furthermore, an increase in the population of immigrant entrepreneurs, currently numbered at more than three million, is contributing to growth in the economy.⁹

In locations lacking an ample number of openings in jobs that fit the skills and interests of adult learners who participate in IET programs, entrepreneurial pathways offer these learners an alternative approach to obtaining a good job. According to the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, small businesses make up the majority of businesses, small businesses with fewer than ten people make up 78.5% of all employers, and in 2019 these small businesses created 1.1 million net new jobs.¹⁰ In the program examples described below, we illustrate how IET providers created entrepreneurship pathways to meet students' interests and needs, aligned them with regional conditions, and in so doing supported them in developing transferable skills for multiple careers.

Cuyahoga County Public Library Entrepreneurship IET Program (Cuyahoga County, Ohio)



In Cuyahoga County, 2024 local labor market data indicate that more than 80% of people in the region are employed by small businesses (businesses with 19 or fewer employees).¹¹ Cuyahoga County Public Library offers an entrepreneurship IET program that includes skill development in financial literacy, bookkeeping, marketing, and social media as well as instruction in how to register a business and how to formulate a guiding vision and related business goals. Students have a variety of experiences: Some have previously owned a small business, others want to develop a broader set of business skills, and still others are just starting the process of creating a business.

The class employs a cohort model and a hybrid mode of delivery, allowing students to attend virtually and/or in person depending on their preference. On average, about 20 students complete the program in each cohort, and virtual attendance has grown in popularity. The library staff currently lead two versions of the entrepreneurship program that are directed toward different student populations. Adult learners enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English language acquisition (ELA) participate in a 12-week entrepreneurship training program. In some cases, students receive payment for

participation through U.S. Department of Labor grants such as YouthBuild which supports young adult learners (aged 19–24). These learners have the option to enroll in an 8-week version of the entrepreneurship program, which is condensed to accommodate the scheduling needs of OhioGuidestone, who runs the local YouthBuild program.

The program recently adopted the [U.S. Entrepreneurship Certification Examination](#), which was developed in partnership with industry and academic experts and is aligned with the National Content Standards for Entrepreneurship Education, Career and Technical Education (CTE) entrepreneurship competencies.¹² This credential aids students in crafting more competitive loan applications to secure grants.

IET participants can receive **specialized mentorship** from a mentor in their field at the [Service Corp of Retired Executives](#) business mentorship program or from the instructor, who is an entrepreneur as well. At the end of the program, aspiring entrepreneurs give a pitch on their business plan and receive feedback from the group and the instructor. This pitch provides a real-world learning experience for students, simulating the sharing of business ideas ([IET Quality Indicator #13](#)) that is part of starting a business.

In addition, the program model offers **flexible learning formats**. Its hybrid nature enables attendance by the many aspiring entrepreneurs who are currently employed and cannot make it to the library for class. This hybrid program design has increased retention, with the vast majority of learners (78%) choosing to attend virtually. The instructor differentiates instruction to ensure that those with more developed business plans and those with less developed plans can benefit equally.

Finally, the entrepreneurship IET program relies on **network building and community engagement**. The IET provider recently developed a connection with a regional bank that provides small business loans and accompanying mentoring for nontraditional business owners. In the most recent cohort, the instructor helped IET participants create their loan applications. The developer and instructor of this program aim to continue growing the community network and even plan to bring together IET alumni for a networking event.

Greenville Lifelong Learning Entrepreneurship Program (Greenville, South Carolina)

This IET program in Greenville, South Carolina, supports multilingual learners in preparing for and expanding their careers as entrepreneurs. When considering which IET program to offer, Greenville Lifelong Learning staff surveyed students to determine which programs would best fit their career interests and offer opportunities for career

advancement. Entrepreneurship was the top response, and since 2020, nearly 200 students have completed the course.

The contextualized ELA class covers design thinking, business planning, finances and resource management, and strategies for small business growth. Previously, the program included QuickBooks Online from Intuit, but for the first time, the program is offering only the U.S. Entrepreneurship Certification Examination. For this cohort, the program will even pay for the exam. In the program's first use of this new certification, seven students took and passed the exam.

Students have different motivations for taking the course, ranging from turning their craft hobby into a career to starting a business importing a product from their country of origin. The continued success of this program depends on maintaining its alignment with students' evolving interests and needs.

Greenville offers each cohort of entrepreneurship students an **adapted design** based on learnings from the previous iteration. For example, during one program offering, staff determined that additional workforce preparation might be beneficial for students, yet they recognized that students are already attending other in-person ELA classes. For these reasons, the staff are making two changes. First, they plan to offer the class in a hybrid format, continuing with the entrepreneurship content in person and addressing the workforce preparation—including the development of digital skills—online. Second, although the course covers the relevant topics, the instructors plan to add linguistic supports for their multilingual students to help them achieve the reading level required for the exam ([IET Quality Indicator #16](#)). The staff plan to continue evolving this course in response to changes in students' business pursuits and needs.

Creating Individualized IET Programs



Individualized IET program design, like entrepreneurship IET programs, can provide a space for cohorts that are comprised of individuals with different goals and experiences. An individualized IET approach is another way to meet students' diverse interests and needs. In the individualized IET program approach, one or more of the concurrent components of the IET are offered on an individual basis. For example, if adult learners enroll in an occupational training class at a community college, rather than receiving cohort-based literacy and workforce preparation, they might be offered individualized, contextualized adult education and workforce preparation. The individualized model can benefit students by allowing them to select occupational training and career pathways that best fit their interests. It can benefit programs by not requiring a full cohort of students who are all interested in and suited for a single occupation. In addition, this model takes into account students' strengths and needs. For example, in an occupational training program for aviation,

some adults may require language support while others may require additional numeracy instruction. As described next, River Valley Resources in Indiana and Haney Success Academy in Florida have designed and implemented programs that apply the individualized IET approach.

River Valley Resources Recovery Coach IET Program (Madison, Indiana)

River Valley Resources staff have designed and implemented a Certified Addiction Peer Recovery Coach IET program in partnership with Mental Health America of Indiana. IET students from around the state attend the occupational training virtually, then complete the contextualized adult education and workforce preparation at the sites of their local adult education providers. Many students are co-enrolled in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I services such as tuition and testing assistance, clothing for the workplace, career coaching and counseling, and employment assistance. Students can attend the workforce training from home if they have access to home internet service, can attend at the sites of their local adult education provider, and can take a Chromebook loan. In the past cohort, 35 students completed the training at eight different local adult education providers. Sixteen of those 35 students earned the Certified Addiction Recovery Coach (CAPRC I) credential, now the [Certified Peer Recovery Coach \(CPRC-A\)](#) certification, and River Valley staff are focused on supporting students in obtaining the certification in future cycles.

The success of this program hinges on revision and integration of multiple voices throughout the process. Staff at River Valley Resources **continually seek out ways to improve** this program and their other IET programs by listening to students and collaborating with colleagues at different adult education programs. Staff have made several changes based on feedback from students, other programs, and the training provider, including modifications to the orientation process, funding documentation, scheduling, and testing. The purpose of using an individualized format is to ensure that students can prepare for the career pathway and the certification exam in the time and space most appropriate for them. In other words, students participate in the virtual training together as a cohort, but the duration, time commitment, and type of support varies based on their individual needs. Because many students who completed the first iteration of the recovery coach IET program requested more review time, staff revised the curriculum to include more time and provided additional materials to support review. River Valley Resources staff have also sought feedback from their peers. They have collected feedback from the other adult education providers that have used the recovery coach curriculum to reevaluate and revise the curriculum. To support continuous improvement, they have engaged in ongoing data collection by surveying students and partners ([IET Quality Indicator #21](#)).

Tom P. Haney Technical College Individualized IET Programs (Panama City, Florida)

At Tom P. Haney Technical College in Panama City, Florida, adult education staff established the Haney Success Academy. Through this academy, students enroll in their CTE course of choice while accessing individualized, contextualized mathematics, reading, and language instruction. The contextualized mathematics, reading, and language instruction is provided in small groups, through one-on-one tutoring, and through independent self-study. The academy staff have supported students in 18 CTE programs, including practical nursing, cosmetology, massage therapy, electrician training, aviation airframe and powerplant mechanics, and welding. The academy uses online software for self-study in mathematics, language arts/reading, and other subjects. In 2023–2024, the staff supported 104 students. Twenty-two students earned industry certification, 43 passed or improved upon relevant standardized tests (e.g., Test of Adult Basic Education [TABE®], GED®), and 13 passed the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) construction mathematics component.

Rather than focusing IET recruitment efforts on students who are already enrolled in the adult education program, the adult education program works closely with CTE program faculty to identify CTE students who would benefit from additional adult education support, such as those who do not have a high school credential. Adult education staff identify students for IET enrollment based on lists of those who lack a high school equivalency diploma or those who score below a certain threshold on the placement exams. Instructors also refer students who struggle with basic skills in class, such as a practical nursing student who struggles with dosage assignments. After assessing the needs of the students, Haney Success Academy instructors meet with them one on one or in small groups based on their mastery of the class material.

[IET Quality Indicator #9](#) explains that providers should hold regular and ongoing meetings with students and other partners to continually adjust their programs. Haney Success Academy instructors consistently meet this recommendation, **maintaining frequent communication with cross-department colleagues, CTE instructors, and students**. The academy instructors even meet with the students and CTE instructors together if necessary. They attend the CTE classes, participate in the CTE canvas course, and maintain connections with the CTE instructors. Academy staff begin their student support (and the contextualized adult education and workforce preparation) by meeting individually with each student. In this initial meeting, staff try to identify CTE classroom needs and outside needs (e.g., transportation and child care needs). Staff review reports from the online software that students use to show their progress and check in with students at least twice a month until they have reached their goals. In the 2024–2025 school year, the program will be expanding to include workforce

development skills for all enrolled students through a software program that includes work essentials (soft skills), money essentials, and computer essentials in the coming school year.

Conclusion

The examples in this brief illustrate how IET providers and state agencies can adapt their IET program design to meet the needs of IET students and employers in each regional context. Entrepreneurship IET programs, individualized IET program design, and regional approaches to IET programs can increase opportunities for adult learners and support IET providers in building sustainable programs. This is especially the case in rural communities, in areas without large-scale employers, or where learners have diverse interests. Moreover, state-led regional initiatives and regional initiatives from local providers can foster more cooperative partnerships among adult education providers, ultimately supporting the sustainability and scaling of IET programs.

Although building IET programs to address regional needs may come with challenges, [the EARN spotlight](#) offers considerations and approaches to overcoming these challenges (see pp. 8–9). This chart may be used with the questions for reflection listed below as program providers and state agencies determine their next steps in designing or implementing these strategies to address regional demographic and labor market needs and learners' career interests.

Questions for Reflection

- Which of the strategies best fit your local labor market, regional context, population size, and program capacity?
- If you are interested in developing or expanding an entrepreneurship IET program, how could you engage with community members to connect learners to networking opportunities and real-world entrepreneurial experiences? How could your entrepreneurship program strengthen your community?
- If you are interested in developing or expanding an individualized IET model, which partners (e.g., occupational trainers, adult education providers), resources (e.g., curriculum, funds), and processes (e.g., tracking of outcomes) would you need to consider?
- When it comes to working with regional employers, what is your role, and what are the roles of your partners? How do these roles affect your process for engaging with employers?

Endnotes

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- ¹² "U.S. Entrepreneurship Certification Examination: Credentials for the Innovation and Gig Economy," Coalition on Adult Basic Education, accessed June 10, 2024, <https://coabe.org/u-s-entrepreneurship-certification-examination/>.

