

## California Adult Education Digital Learning Guidance

### Reader's Guide

## Chapter 2: Ensuring Equity and Access

### Chapter Summary

**Digital Devices and Connectivity** – Access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity is not equal among adult learners. Many rely on mobile phones, which may limit their participation in certain digital activities. Sharing devices with family members and limited data plans also poses connectivity challenges.

**Helping Learners Get Connected and Understanding Learner's Needs** – Adult educators and support staff can assist learners by conducting surveys to identify barriers and sharing information about relevant programs. Various federal, state, and nonprofit organizations offer discounted internet access and devices for eligible individuals. Program providers can gather information through pre-assessments, surveys, and personal relationships with learners to identify and address access and connectivity needs.

**Building Digital Infrastructure** – Ensuring access and addressing the total cost of ownership are essential for effective digital infrastructure in education. Factors to consider include software licensing, device maintenance and upgrades, inflation costs, technical support, and technology training. Institutions should explore free or discounted software options, plan for device lifespan and maintenance, account for inflation in budgeting, provide technical support, and offer training opportunities for educators and support staff. State organizations and technology companies can offer professional development resources. Considering these factors contributes to short-term implementation and long-term sustainability in digital education.

**Digital Literacy Skills** – Digital literacy is crucial for adult learners and adult educators. It encompasses skills such as finding, evaluating, organizing, creating, and communicating digital information. Tools such as Northstar Digital Literacy and the Certiport IC3 assessment provide ways for learners to demonstrate progress and signal digital competencies to employers or training programs. The Digital Navigator Model from the EdTech Center at World Education and resources from organizations such as the Barbara Bush Foundation and Digital Promise provide guidance on implementing digital literacy programs.

**Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning** – Accessibility is crucial in education to ensure that all learners, including those with disabilities, have equal opportunities. Adult educators need to consider accessibility laws and standards, such as Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Providing accessible learning materials and environments is not only a legal requirement, but it also supports the needs of diverse learners. Resources like those provided by OTAN and the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials can assist educators in creating accessible materials.

Universal Design for Learning promotes the design of inclusive learning experiences by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression for all learners.

## **Guidance Engagement Questions**

**Understanding Learner Needs** – Adult learners may not always feel comfortable self-reporting barriers like home internet constraints or financial issues in a formal survey. Beyond a written intake form, what conversations, observations, or routines help us understand how learners are accessing and using technology? Where could you add one low-pressure check-in during the first few weeks of class to learn more about learners' actual access conditions?

**Planning for Common Access Conditions** – Many learners share a single device with family members or children. As you read about flexible course design and HyFlex models, think about your program. Where do your current schedules, assignments, communication routines, or participation expectations assume reliable device access? Which assignment, deadline, or attendance routine could you adjust so learners with shared devices still have a realistic way to participate?

**Connecting Learners to Resources and Support** – Some adult learners have fears about data privacy or impacts on government benefits that may hinder them from applying for internet subsidies. How do you currently communicate about these resources, and where might learners need more clarity, trust, or follow-up support? What information should be added to your intake, orientation, flyer, text message, or referral script so learners can make an informed decision about available supports?"

**Building Digital Infrastructure** – Infrastructure is described as a sustained investment rather than a one-time event. When we buy new devices, we are also starting a clock on their eventual replacement. Based on your experience, what is a realistic lifespan for a laptop or tablet in an adult education setting?

**Ensuring Staff Access and Capacity** – Think of a digital tool you use daily. If you were given three hours of collaborative planning time with a peer to master just one advanced feature of that tool, how would it change the utilization of that tool in your classroom?

**Digital Literacy Skills** – This section distinguishes between foundational technical skills (like using a mouse) and digital resilience (the ability to troubleshoot and adapt to new tools). Looking at your current student population, do you find they struggle more with the physical navigation of devices or the confidence to problem-solve when a new app doesn't work as expected?

**Accessibility (Including Tools and Strategies)** – The WCAG principles provide a framework for better design. Looking at the Understandable principle — which calls for clear, predictable instructions — what is one way you could simplify the navigation of your online class or LMS to reduce confusion for students with cognitive differences?

**Universal Design for Learning** – UDL isn't just about the content; it's about supporting the mental processes like goal-setting and planning. Which of the scaffolding tools mentioned — such as study schedules, checklists, or guided reflections — do you think would be most helpful for your students who are currently juggling the demands of work and family alongside their education?