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TO: Indiana's Workforce Investment System

FROM: Gina DelSanto, Ph.D.
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DATE: March 30, 2012

SUBJECT: DWD Policy 2011-14
Using Workforce Investment Act Training Funds for Prior Learning Assessment

Purpose
To provide guidance on how Workforce Investment Act Funds may be utilized to provide prior learning assessments to eligible participants enrolled in occupational skills training.

Rescission
None

Background
Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process that reviews an individual's learning gained from previous experience, including work responsibilities, and military and corporate training, in order to award the individual college-level credit. Through PLA, individuals who have acquired knowledge outside of a formal classroom setting have the opportunity to have that learning reviewed for college-level equivalency. PLA can potentially save an individual time and money toward completing a degree or certificate program.

Nearly all of the post-secondary institutions throughout the State of Indiana offer students some form of PLA as an opportunity to earn credit based upon the student's knowledge gained from work experiences. There are many methods in which institutions determine the amount of prior learning credit to award to a student. Some examples of these methods include the development and review of a portfolio documenting the student's prior learning, and the completion of a nationally-recognized prior learning test which measures the student's prior learning. There are many nationally-recognized prior learning tests that may be utilized, including the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the DSST Credit by Exam Program.

The State Workforce Innovation Council (SWIC) and the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) place a high value on prior learning assessment, and believe that investing in PLA may save Workforce Investment Act participants time and funds as they participate in occupational skills training funded by the Workforce Investment Act..

This policy will provide guidance to Indiana's Workforce Investment System on how WIA training funds may be utilized to provide prior learning assessments to eligible WIA participants, and will include the minimum requirements that must be followed when utilizing WIA funds for PLA.

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Prior Learning Assessment Models

When offering prior learning assessments and awarding prior learning credit, post-secondary institutions invariably provide PLA in one of the following models:

1. Student completes a prior learning portfolio or completes a nationally-recognized prior learning test independently. If prior learning credit is awarded, the training institution receives funding based upon the number of credits awarded.
2. Training Institution offers prior learning assessment course, where student develops a prior learning assessment portfolio with an instructor and/or completes a nationally-recognized prior learning test. Student receives credit for completing the course, and could be awarded prior learning credit based upon prior learning experiences. The training institution first receives tuition for the credit-bearing course, and following the review of the student's portfolio, additional payment based upon the number of prior learning credits awarded to the student.
3. A third-party organization or institution offers prior learning assessment courses to prospective post-secondary students. The third-party organization assists the student in developing a prior learning portfolio and awards credit to student for completing the course as well as prior learning credit based upon a review of the prior learning portfolio or completion of a nationally-recognized prior learning test. The credit earned through both the prior learning assessment course and the award of prior learning credit is then transferred to the post-secondary institution that the student is attending for occupational skills training. The third-party organization first receives tuition for the credit-bearing course, and following the review of the student's portfolio, additional payment based upon the number of prior learning credits awarded to the student.

When appropriate, any or all of the three models may be utilized by WIA grantees to fund PLA for eligible WIA participants.

State Requirements for Utilizing WIA funds for Prior Learning Assessments

The SWIC and DWD have imposed the following requirements that must be followed when WIA funds are to be utilized for prior learning assessments:

- WIA participant must have an academic and career plan, which signifies the need for occupational skills training;
- The WIA participant must be accepted into a program of study included on INTraining, the State of Indiana's list of WIA eligible training providers;
- Prior learning assessment may only be utilized for programs of study which lead to an associate degree or a credit-bearing pre-baccalaureate occupational certificate;

- WIA funds may only be utilized for prior learning credit that is applicable to the participant's program of study; and
- WIA funds may not be utilized for fees associated with the transfer of credit from one institution to another, or in cases where an institution charges a fee for credits earned as the result of completing a nationally-recognized prior learning test, such as CLEP or DSST Credit by Exam. As examples:
    - Some institutions charge a fee to accept transferred credit. In a scenario where a third-party organization is utilized to provide PLA and award prior learning credit and credits are then transferred (with a fee) to the institution where the participant is receiving occupational skills training, WIA funds may not be used for the transfer fee.
    - Most nationally-recognized prior learning tests (CLEP, DSST, etc.) are administered for a fee, often paid directly to the test vendor, in secure testing facilities. WIA funds may be used to pay for the administration and scoring of the test. Some institutions of higher education charge a fee to award credit for successful outcomes on the prior learning tests. In such cases, WIA funds may not be used for the costs associated with the award of credit as a result of the test.

Prior Learning Assessment Process

1. After an Academic and Career Counselor (ACC) or a case manager has worked with the participant to develop an Academic and Career Plan, has determined that the participant is eligible to receive an Individual Training Account (ITA), and has ensured that the participant has been accepted into the associate degree or credit-bearing occupational certificate program, the ACC or case manager should work with the participant to determine if a prior learning assessment is appropriate.

   When determining whether prior learning assessment is appropriate, ACCs and case managers should consider a number of factors, including:

   - The participant's previous experience, including,
       - Prior work experience in the occupation for which the participant will receive training.
           - For example, if the participant has worked previously as an electrician's assistant, and he/she is entering an Associate in Electrical Engineering Technology program, PLA may be appropriate.
       - Prior certifications or certificates earned by the participant in the occupation for which the participant will receive training.
       - Prior experience gained through military service that relates to the occupation for which the participant will receive training.
       - Prior experience gained through voluntary work that relates to the occupation for which the participant will receive training.
   - Does the institution in which the participant will enroll offer prior learning assessments and/or accept prior learning credit?

    - If the determination is made to utilize a third-party institution or organization (Model #3) for PLA, the ACC or case manager must ensure that the institution or organization and its PLA program is listed on INTraining.
- Will there be tangible benefits derived from utilizing WIA funds to pay for prior learning assessment?
    - The ACC or case manager should perform a brief cost-benefit analysis, determining how the cost of PLA and any potential prior learning credit earned may save time and/or funds. For example, would the cost of PLA be less than if the participant was required to attend and complete the course at the training institution? Would the participant be able to complete the program sooner if he/she earns prior learning credit?
- Will the credit earned from both the prior learning assessment course and any resulting prior learning credit count towards the completion of the associate degree program or credit-bearing occupational certificate program for which the participant will receive training?
- Does the institution charge a fee for accepting transferred credits?

2. After determining that PLA is appropriate, the ACC or case manager should document the use of PLA in the participant's academic and career plan and case file, including justification for using PLA in the circumstance.

3. The ACC or case manager issues the ITA for prior learning assessment, following local processes for issuing ITAs.

NOTE: In scenarios where the student completes a nationally-recognized prior learning test without being enrolled in WIA training-level services, if funded by WIA, the test would be considered as a supportive service and not occupational skills training.

Effective Date
Immediately

End Date
Upon rescission

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Action

Local Workforce Investment Boards and Regional Workforce Boards should ensure that a process is developed for utilizing prior learning assessments where appropriate. WorkOne Operators should ensure that academic and career counselors and case managers understand how to utilize prior learning assessments for eligible WIA participants.