Credit for Prior Learning: Creating Messages to Engage Stakeholders and Increase Participation

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Leveraging Credit for Prior Learning to Meet Your Goals

While community college enrollment has declined every year since 2010[1] — a trend heightened by the coronavirus pandemic — enrollment in postsecondary Career Technical Education (CTE) programs has remained steady in recent years.[2] Learners are turning to postsecondary CTE programs because they serve as essential on-ramps to in-demand training and degree programs that lead to jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage and provide opportunities for advancement.

Credit for prior learning (CPL), which is often referred to as prior learning assessment, is the process postsecondary institutions use to award credit to learners for college-level learning they have earned outside of the classroom. When integrated into career pathways and CTE programs of study, CPL can be an effective strategy for postsecondary institutions and systems to not only increase enrollment but also meet retention, completion and equity goals. CPL is also a high-reward strategy to help state leaders work toward statewide attainment goals, address crucial workforce shortages and build inclusive economies.

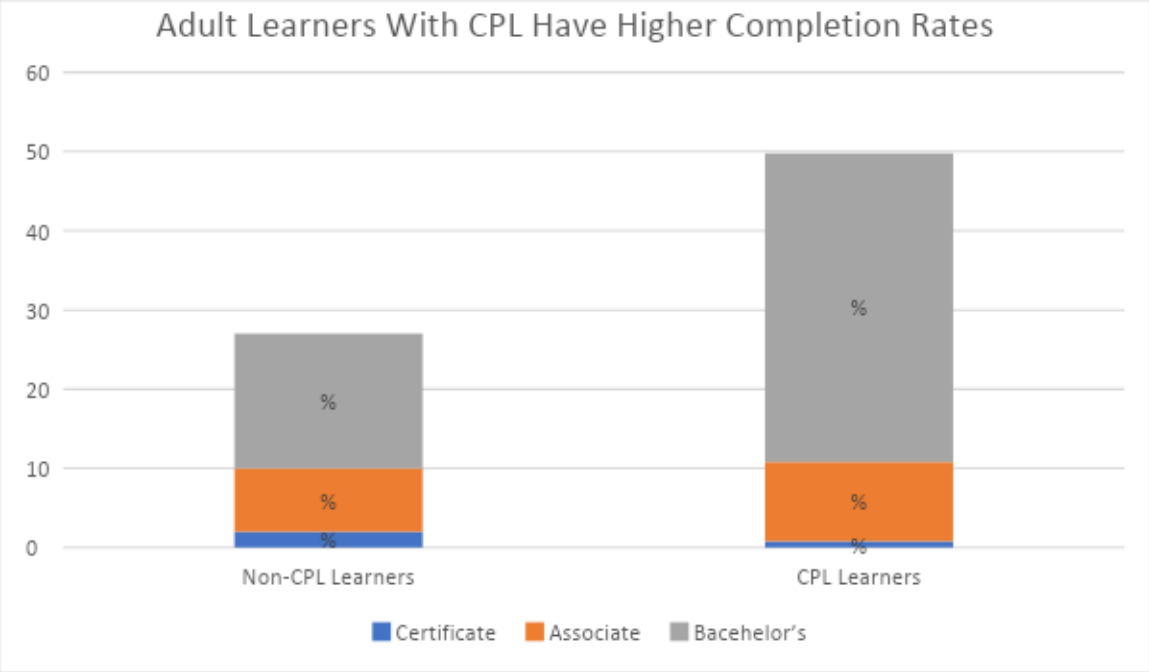
Earning CPL and placing out of required courses provides a valuable jumpstart for adult learners who are returning to the classroom. Research shows that 49 percent of adult learners with CPL complete their credential or degree, compared to 27 percent without CPL.[3] These higher completion rates hold true for learner populations that have been historically disadvantaged, including adult learners across races/ethnicities and adult learners from low-income families.[4]

[1] American Association of Community Colleges. (2019). *Community college enrollment crisis? Historical trends in community college enrollment.* https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Crisis-in-Enrollment-2019.pdf

[2] Perkins Collaborative Resource Network. (n.d.). *State profiles.* https://cte.ed.gov/profiles/national-summary

[3] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[4] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

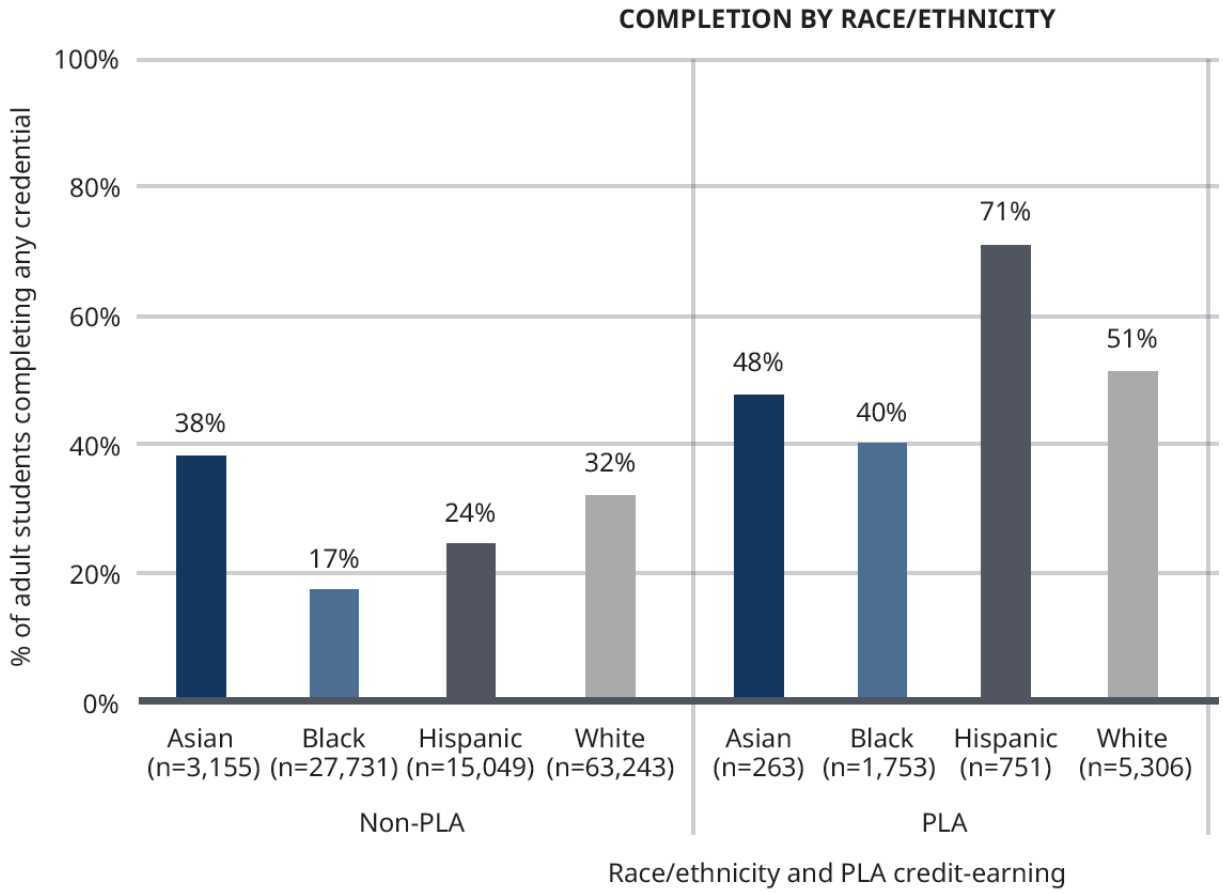


Note: Credential level results may not add up to the total due to rounding.
Source: *The PLA Boost: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes*[5]

[note: will align terminology for consistency and remove Ns when re-create chart below. Also, add Pell Grant recipients: 55% with CPL, 27% without CPL]

Adult Learners Across Groups Have Higher Completion Rates With CPL

[5] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf



Source: *The PLA Boost: Results from a 72-Institution Targeted Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes*[6]

However, only 11 percent of entering adult learners earn CPL. At public community and technical colleges, the rate is even lower: Only 4 percent earn CPL.[7] Looking at results for specific adult learner groups shows that learners from low-income backgrounds and Black and American Indian/Alaska Native learners were less likely to earn CPL than Hispanic and White learners and those from relatively higher socioeconomic backgrounds.[8]
[visual: 11 percent of entering adult learners earn CPL, 4 percent of adult learners at community and technical colleges]

[6] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[7] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[8] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

Studies show that the main reason for low CPL participation rates among adult learners is lack of information.[9] Other barriers cited by adult learners include concerns about the cost and time required to complete the CPL process[10] and lack of confidence that they belong at college.[11]

[box]

What Is CPL?

CPL refers to the various processes for recognizing and awarding credit for college-level learning gained outside the classroom. It is often referred to as prior learning assessment. Common methods of assessing prior learning for credit include:

- *Standardized examination:* Learners can earn credit by successfully completing exams such as Advanced Placement, College-Level Examination Program, International Baccalaureate, Excelsior exams, DANTES Subject Standardized Tests and others.
- *Faculty-developed challenge exam:* Learners can earn credit for a specific course by taking a comprehensive examination developed by campus faculty.
- *Portfolio-based and other individualized assessment:* Learners can earn credit by preparing a portfolio and/or demonstration of their learning from a variety of experiences and non-credit activities. Faculty then evaluate the learner's portfolio and award credit as appropriate.
- *Evaluation of non-college programs:* Learners can earn credit based on recommendations provided by the National College Credit Recommendation Service and the American Council on Education, which conduct evaluations of training offered by employers or the military.
- *Faculty review of credentials:* Institutions also engage faculty to conduct their own review of programs and certifications, including coordinating with workforce development agencies and other training providers to develop crosswalks that map between external training/credentials and existing degree programs.

[end box]

About This Toolkit

To help state and local leaders scale the effective use of CPL, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group, with support from JPMorganChase & Co. and in service to the six *New Skills ready network* sites, convened a Credit for Prior Learning Shared Solutions Workgroup from December 2021 through June 2022. The workgroup included representatives from state

[9] Leibrandt, S. (2020). *PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/

[10] Leibrandt, S. (2020). *PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/

[11] Klein-Collins, R., & Olson, R. (2014, October). *Random access: The Latino student experience with prior learning assessment.* Council for Adult and Experiential Learning & Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/random-access-latino-student-experience-prior-learning-assessment

postsecondary education agencies and governance boards, two- and four-year postsecondary systems and institutions and national partner organizations.

Together the workgroup developed the CPL Policy Benchmark Tool.[12] The tool identifies the five core elements of effective CPL practice and provides rubrics for state, system and institutional leaders to assess their current CPL policy and practice. [visual: cover and spread from Policy Benchmark tool]

The workgroup also identified the need for more resources to communicate and message the value of CPL and support the implementation of the Policy Benchmark Tool, particularly Core Element 3: CPL Processes Are Transparent, Seamless and Learner Centered. With feedback from select members of the workgroup, this toolkit provides guidance, best practices and customizable resources to create messages to help State CTE Directors and postsecondary institutions and systems increase participation in CPL among adult learners. It particularly focuses on messaging they can use to engage adult learners who are returning to school to finish their degree or get a credential or license. These learners either are in the workforce or stopped out. It also focuses on messaging to engage postsecondary faculty and staff and employers, who are essential levers for reaching these learners.

Because they do not interact directly with learners and families, this toolkit does not directly address messaging for policymakers. However, State CTE Directors, postsecondary institutions and postsecondary systems may be able to use some of the messaging in this toolkit if they need to work with policymakers to change policies and create the conditions for increased participation in CPL.

[12] Advance CTE. (2022, July). *Embedding credit for prior learning in career pathways.* https://careertech.org/resource/Embedding_Credit_for_Prior_Learning_in_Career_Pathways

Developing CPL Messages

Get Started

This toolkit focuses on how to create messages targeted to key audiences to increase CPL participation among adult learners who are pursuing career pathways and CTE programs of study that lead to jobs in in-demand fields.

Before you begin to develop messages, it is important to be clear about how your efforts align with your overall strategic and communications goals for CTE and/or CPL in your state or at your institution. Start by reviewing your state's Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) plan and identify how increasing participation in CPL aligns with those goals.

[sidebar]

Planning CTE Communications

Messaging is only one part of creating successful communications. The Advance CTE website contains many additional resources on how to create an effective communications campaign[13] and how to communicate data.[14] It also contains infographics and other downloadable resources you can use and adapt to meet your needs.[15] Many of these resources focus on CTE rather than specifically on CPL, but the strategies and tips can apply to your CPL engagement efforts.

[end sidebar]

Identify Your Audiences and What You Want Them to Do

Increasing participation in CPL will require direct communication with learners, so they will be a primary audience for your messages. Overall, only 1 in 10 adult learners currently earn CPL.[16] But moving the needle and ensuring that all learners have equitable access to CPL opportunities will require disaggregating the data to identify any gaps in awareness and participation among learner groups. The more you can target your efforts to specific learner groups, the more successful you are likely to be.

[Box]

Tip: The CPL Policy Benchmark Tool encourages postsecondary institutions to collect disaggregated data to better understand how learners are making use of CPL.[17] Assess what

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[13] Advance CTE. (n.d.). *Create a CTE communications campaign.* https://careertech.org/plan-your-campaign

[14] Advance CTE. (2020, November). *Beyond the numbers: A toolkit for communicating CTE data.* https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/files/resources/Beyond_Numbers_Toolkit_Communicating_CTE_Data_2020.pdf

[15] Advance CTE. (n.d.). *Strategy to increase college completion: Credit for prior learning.* https://careertech.org/sites/default/files/Advance_CTE_Credit_for_Prior_Learning.jpg

[16] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[17] Advance CTE. (2022, July). *Embedding credit for prior learning in career pathways.* https://careertech.org/resource/Embedding_Credit_for_Prior_Learning_in_Career_Pathways

data your institution is currently collecting on CPL and how it is being used to benefit learners based on the rubric for Core Element 4b. You may use this information to tailor your messaging to learner groups.
[end box]

Also think about whom you need to engage to reach adult learner groups. Adult learners report that conversations with individuals (such as counselors or academic advisers on the college campus, other learners, or family members) are their main source of information about CPL, not written material or the college catalogue.[18] Therefore, you will need to think about individuals who interact with your target audience, such as postsecondary faculty and staff and employers, to help promote CPL opportunities.

Finally, consider what action you want each audience to take and what information they need to take that action. Following is an example of key audiences for State CTE Directors and postsecondary systems and institutions:

Target Audience	What You Want Them To Do	What Information They Need to Take This Action
Adult Learners	Apply for CPL	What CPL is, its benefits, and how the application and approval process works
Postsecondary Faculty and Staff	Promote CPL to adult learners	What CPL is, its benefits (for the institution, for adult learners, for their communities/state/nation), and how the application and approval process works
Employers	Formalize partnerships with postsecondary institutions to extend CPL as a benefit to employees	What CPL is, its benefits (for their business, for their communities/state/nation), and how the application and approval process works

[box]
Tip: Don't forget K–12. Even among learners over age 25, the high school counselor was the second most frequently cited source of information on CPL (after college adviser).[19] If learners start hearing about CPL early, it may have an effect later. CPL can also be leveraged

[18] Leibrandt, S. (2020). *PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/
[19] Leibrandt, S. (2020). *PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/

for experiences learners have at the secondary level, such as work-based learning and credential attainment.
[end box]

Tailor the Content to Your Audience
Once you know whom you need to reach and what they need to know to take the action you want, you can tailor the content for your audience. The following are some best practices for creating your content.

Focus on the benefits for each audience
Effective messages focus on benefits rather than process — tell each audience what is in it for them. Once they are engaged, you can provide additional resources to explain how to apply for CPL and how CPL is awarded. For adult learners, benefits include:

- ***Money and time saved***. Adult learners who earn CPL on average save $1,500 to $10,200 and earn their degree or credential 9-14 months faster.[20]
- ***Increased likelihood of completion***. Learners who earn CPL do not have to spend time and money on classes for which they already know content, decreasing frustration and almost doubling the chance that they will complete their studies.[21]
- ***Career benefits***. Because learners who earn CPL are more likely to complete their degree or credential, they are also more likely to gain the skills and knowledge they need to get a promotion or land a job in a high-demand, high-wage industry.
- ***Increased pride and self-worth***. Learners report that the process of applying for CPL validated the knowledge and experience they already possessed, increasing their confidence and feelings of being valued.[22]

[box]
Tip: Providing examples (through videos, testimonials, etc.) of people in specific careers who have earned CPL helps learners see themselves and understand how CPL can help them achieve their goals.
[end box]

[box]
Tip: Focusing you messages on what learners already know and moving away from terms that imply deficits or pose barriers — such as "prove," "challenge" and "assessment" — will

[20] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[21] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[22] Klein-Collins, R., & Olson, R. (2014, October). *Random access: The Latino student experience with prior learning assessment.* Council for Adult and Experiential Learning & Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/random-access-latino-student-experience-prior-learning-assessment

make your messages more effective. Using asset-based language can give learners more confidence to enroll in postsecondary education or training and then apply for CPL. It can also make institutions more attractive to learners.
[end box]

For postsecondary faculty and staff, benefits include:

- ***Meeting completion and equity goals.*** Because adult learners who earn CPL complete their degree or credential at higher rates, encouraging more learners to apply for CPL can help institutions meet completion and equity goals.[23]
- ***Increased number of credits earned by learners***. Adult learners with CPL take an average of 17.6 more credits than those who without CPL because they are less likely to stop out.[24] These increased numbers of credits lead to more tuition money for institution.[25]
- ***Increased pool of potential learners.*** The opportunity to earn CPL and place out of required courses may help attract adult learners who are considering a return to the classroom.[26]
- ***More inclusive and engaged classrooms.*** Learners who earn CPL often have more applied knowledge that can benefit other learners in classroom discussion and activities.
- ***More learners in higher-level courses***. When adult learners place out of entry-level courses, enrollment in higher-level courses can increase, which benefits the program of study.

For employers, benefits include:

- ***Qualified talent for current job openings***. Earning CPL can help employees learn the knowledge and skills they need to fill current and near-term job openings faster.
- ***Pipeline of future skilled workers***. When CPL is incorporated within CTE pathways, employers benefit from a pipeline of employees with the knowledge and skills they need to fill job openings in the future.

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[23] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[24] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[25] Klein-Collins, R. (2015). *PLA is your business: Pricing and other considerations for the PLA business model.* Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/2015_PLA_Business_Model-FINAL.pdf; Travers, N. (2015). *Prior learning assessment handbook.* Northeast Resiliency Consortium. https://www.skillscommons.org/bitstream/handle/taaccct/12960/NRC%20PLA%20Handbook.pdf?sequence=2%26isAllowed=y

[26] Klein-Collins, R., & Olson, R. (2014, October). *Random access: The Latino student experience with prior learning assessment.* Council for Adult and Experiential Learning & Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/random-access-latino-student-experience-prior-learning-assessment

- ***Employee retention***. Employers also cite retention and improved morale as benefits of employees using CPL when they return to postsecondary education.[27]
- ***Better return on their investment for tuition assistance***. Companies spend $83 billion a year on workforce training,[28] and 85 percent of employers offer tuition assistance programs for their workers.[29] Employers who offer tuition reimbursement for employees have lower costs when employees earn CPL, and their employees spend less time in the classroom and out of the workplace. Employers also report that earning CPL and going on to finish their degree leads to increased job productivity among employees.[30]

Be alert to barriers

While lack of information about CPL opportunities is by far the primary reason adult learners cite for not participating in CPL, it is not the only reason.[31] As you craft messages to raise awareness about CPL and spur your audiences to take the desired action, being alert to these other barriers can help you effectively tailor your messages.

[box]
Tip: Refer back to Policy Benchmark Tool Core Element 2b to help understand barriers in your state, system or institution.[32]
[box]

For learners, primary barriers to applying for CPL include:

- ***Confusion about the process***. The process of applying for and awarding CPL varies from state to state — and even from institution to institution and program to program. So being clear in your initial messaging about how to find out more about the CPL process is critical.
- ***Additional fees.*** While CPL can decrease the overall cost of earning a credential or degree, applying for CPL often has an associated cost, even if credit is not ultimately awarded. Being clear about those costs — and any opportunities for support to defray those costs — is important. Showing the cost of applying for CPL versus the cost of taking classes for which CPL is earned may also help.
- ***Time needed to complete the process***. Many adult learners face additional work and family responsibilities beyond the classroom, leaving them little time to

[27] Ryu, M. (2013, November). *Credit for prior learning from the student, campus, and industry perspectives.* American Council on Education & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Issue-Brief.pdf
[28] Freifeld, L. (2020, November 17). *2020 training industry report.* Training. https://trainingmag.com/2020-training-industry-report
[29] Ho. (2019). https://www.worldatwork.org/dA/f2b21babd0/total-rewards-incentive-survey-2018-new.pdf
[30] Ryu, M. (2013, November). *Credit for prior learning from the student, campus, and industry perspectives.* American Council on Education & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Issue-Brief.pdf
[31] Leibrandt, S. (2020). *PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/
[32] Advance CTE. (2022, July). *Embedding credit for prior learning in career pathways.* https://careertech.org/resource/Embedding_Credit_for_Prior_Learning_in_Career_Pathways

complete the application and/or gather evidence of prior learning. Focusing on the benefits of CPL and the time and costs saved can help overcome this hurdle.
- ***Lack of confidence that they belong in college***. Messages such as "prove what you know" and "demonstrate what you have learned" can be a hurdle for learners "who are worried they do not belong in college."[33] Focusing on what learners already know and showing them the many ways they have acquired prior knowledge beyond the classroom can help allay these fears and build confidence.

For postsecondary faculty and staff, barriers include:
- ***Limited knowledge about process and confusion about the terminology***.[34] Clear, consistent and frequent communications will help keep CPL top of mind for staff and familiarize them with the terminology.
- ***Lack of confidence in CPL.*** Some faculty do not believe real-life experience is equal to classroom experience and that learners who place out of entry-level courses will succeed in higher-level courses.[35] Communications can reinforce that the process is rigorous, that it is often overseen by a staff or faculty member with content knowledge, and that not all experiences translate into credit. Highlight that the process is about matching competencies learners have with what they would learn in the classroom.
- ***Concerns that CPL takes away faculty jobs***. Emphasizing that CPL can help increase the number of learners placing into higher-level classes and the increased number of credits taken by learners with CPL can help allay this concern.

For employers, barriers include:
- ***Concerns about employees having to spend time away from the workplace***. Learners who earn CPL ultimately spend less time out of the workplace because they are able to attain their degree or credential faster.
- ***Delayed impact in the workplace***. As employers in high-demand industries face critical worker shortages, learners who earn CPL are able to obtain the knowledge and skills employers need to fill openings faster with CPL.

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[33] Klein-Collins, R., & Olson, R. (2014, October). *Random access: The Latino student experience with prior learning assessment.* Council for Adult and Experiential Learning & Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/random-access-latino-student-experience-prior-learning-assessment

[34] Lakin, M. B., Seymour, D., Nellum, C. J., & Crandall, J. R. (2015). *Credit for prior learning: Charting institutional practice for sustainability.* American Council on Education, Center for Education Attainment and Innovation & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Charting-Institutional-Practice-for-Sustainability.pdf

[35] Lakin, M. B., Seymour, D., Nellum, C. J., & Crandall, J. R. (2015). *Credit for prior learning: Charting institutional practice for sustainability.* American Council on Education, Center for Education Attainment and Innovation & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Charting-Institutional-Practice-for-Sustainability.pdf

- ***Perception that employees may leave for a different position or switch careers***. In a survey of employers, they cited employee retention as a benefit of employees earning CPL when they return to postsecondary education.[36]

Engage your audience in the messaging process
When crafting your messages, engaging your target audience, especially learners, will help you ensure that your messages will have the intended impact. When planning, you can test the content of your messages with your audience and find out where and how they prefer to get their information to determine the best vehicles to deliver those messages. You can gather this input by inviting them to participate in work groups or committees, conducting focus groups, or doing a survey. Equally important, after you begin to use your messages, get feedback and assess whether you are meeting your goals. Even anecdotal feedback can help you adjust your messages to reach your target audiences.

[box]
Tip: To show that you value their time and input and to encourage participation, consider providing gift cards or small stipends to learners and others who take part in the messaging process. A little bit can go a long way to make sure you are creating effective messages that will resonate with your audiences.
[end box]

[sidebar]
Additional best practices for messaging
- Use simple, clear language — no jargon. You also can consider including a glossary of terms that are relevant to the CPL process.
- Supplement your messages with visuals and testimonials from real people who look like your target audience. Consider factors such as age, race/ethnicity, life experience and the career pathways you are targeting. (See page X for examples.)
- Provide messages in multiple languages based on your target audience.
- Do not overpromise. Learners have different levels and types of experience. Not everyone will earn the maximum number of credits and have the same amount of savings in time and money.

[end sidebar]

[36] Ryu, M. (2013, November). *Credit for prior learning from the student, campus, and industry perspectives.* American Council on Education & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Issue-Brief.pdf

Tips for Dissemination

Identify partners and leverage champions. This toolkit focuses on messaging, but even the most effective messages will not help you reach your goal if they do not reach your target audience. But you do not have to do it alone. Following are some organizations you can engage to help you reach adult learners:

- Institution faculty and staff, including admissions and registrar staff, advisers and counselors;
- Major local employers;
- Workforce development boards;
- Education office staff on military base;
- Chamber of commerce; and
- Learner-run affinity groups.

You can also think outside the norm and consider entities such as prisons, day care centers, youth opportunity centers and One-Stop Career Centers.[37]

Use multiple communications vehicles. The college catalog is the method of advertising CPL that learners use the least.[38] Therefore, you will need to expand your efforts to other communications vehicles to deliver your messages.

As you plan, keep in mind that the best vehicles for adult learners may not be the best for postsecondary faculty and staff and employers. Also consider how accessible information will be for your target audience in each channel: Will you be able to provide translations, define complex terminology, etc.?

Following are a few examples of communications channels and target audiences they can reach. The list also includes examples of resources that states and postsecondary institutions currently are using to engage adult learners in CPL.

	Adult Learners	Postsecondary Faculty and Staff	Employers	Example to include in toolkit
Website	X	X	X	https://myexperiencecounts.mass.edu/home https://www.credits2careers.org/

[37] Lakin, M. B., Seymour, D., Nellum, C. J., & Crandall, J. R. (2015). *Credit for prior learning: Charting institutional practice for sustainability.* American Council on Education, Center for Education Attainment and Innovation & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Charting-Institutional-Practice-for-Sustainability.pdf

[38] Leibrandt, S. (2020). *PLA from the student's perspective: Lessons learned from survey and interview data.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/key-initiatives/recognition-of-learning/pla-student-perspectives/

Email campaign	X	X	X	https://www.cael.org/hubfs/2022-CPL-PLA/CAEL-CPL_Student_Outreach_Toolkit.pdf
Social media posts	X	X	X	https://www.cael.org/hubfs/2022-CPL-PLA/CAEL-CPL_Student_Outreach_Toolkit.pdf https://twitter.com/advancevt/status/1235943707964248067 https://twitter.com/SUNYEmpire/status/1184975395411628033 https://twitter.com/SUNYEmpire/status/1155124467552727040
Social media ads	X		X	
Video	X	X	X	https://ccv.edu/academics/credit-for-what-you-know/ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTvRd3wT6qs&t=116s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPs6vfuM3qY https://www.cccs.edu/credit-for-workforce-experience/
Webinar/ podcast	X	X	X	
Admissions information/ application	X			Example from VT
Enrollment materials, including	X			

transfer and materials for changing a program of study				
Orientation events and materials	X			
Roundtable discussions		X	X	
Professional development		X		
Statewide/ regional events for postsecondary educators		X		IN CHE hosted its 2021 Career Relevance Educator and Employer Convening and over 160 participants joined
Statewide/ regional events for employers			X	

Provide information early and often. The average person needs to see a message 11 times before it sticks. Plus, learners and employees are often deluged with communications when they enroll in school or start a new job. Being the first to get your message out can help. For example, the night that learners over the age of 25 submit an application to the Community College of Vermont, they receive an email making them aware of CPL opportunities. Other postsecondary institutions include information about CPL in enrollment materials as well as orientation. Some also incorporate explorations of a learner's prior learning into mandatory first-year courses.[39]

Make taking the next step easy for learners. While your initial messages need to focus on the benefits of CPL, they should also include clear information about how learners can find out more or take the next steps. On a website, make sure the information is accessible within three clicks of the home page and centralize CPL information in one section, rather than scattering it across different department pages. Providing a human connection, such as an email address or phone number learners can call to find out more, also helps. Finally, states, institutions and employers can provide credit crosswalks and other tools to show learners how industry-recognized credentials and non-credit courses could translate into credit-bearing courses to help them understand what college-level learning they may already have acquired.

[39] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

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Plan Your Outreach

The following is a continuum of activities state leaders and postsecondary institutions can plan to reach each target audience. Use this continuum to assess your state's, system's or institution's activities and think about how you can expand your efforts.

Who is doing the outreach	Audience	Basic	Developing	Effective
Postsecondary institutions	Learners	Institution provides some information about CPL on its website and in other venues such as orientation or advising, but information is scattered and hard to find and mostly about how to get CPL, not why.	Admissions officers, academic advisers, career counselors and program coordinators also direct learners to CPL offerings.	Institution also provides information about CPL and how it can benefit learners prior to admission and when they are admitted; ensures learners receive expert advising on options; provides information through all types of communication (social media, website, orientation, and more) from initial outreach with potential learners through graduation.
Postsecondary institutions	Postsecondary faculty and staff	Institution provides some information about CPL on its website and during onboarding, but information is	Institution also creates venues for information sharing across stakeholders and committees; provides professional development about CPL.	Institution also enables participation in conferences about CPL; includes CPL activities in annual reviews and promotion/tenure evaluations; implements incentives and areas of recognition.

		scattered and hard to find and mostly about how to get CPL, not why it benefits institution and learners.		
Postsecondary institutions	Employers	Institution provides some information about CPL on its website.	Institution also reaches out to local employers to discuss workforce needs and provide information about CPL opportunities.	Institution also embeds CPL in customized training programs for employers; analyzes local LMI and creates crosswalks with employers that employers can use to show employees how validated workplace training aligns with courses for credit toward credential or degree.
State leaders	Learners	Agency provides some information about CPL on its website.	Agency also provides electronic and printable messaging templates for institutions to communicate with learners about CPL; provides partner agencies and programs with information about CPL and professional development on how to incorporate into existing	Agency also creates a statewide webpage or database of CPL opportunities to help learners navigate next steps and connect with postsecondary institutions.

			outreach to learners.	
State leaders	Postsecondary institutions	Agency provides relevant policy documents and information about CPL best practices on its website.	Agency also promotes effective CPL practices through additional communications, such as a social media or an email campaign.	Agency also facilitates collaboration among state postsecondary institutions and other partners to identify and scale effective CPL practices and increase participation in CPL.
State leaders	Employers	Agency provides some information about CPL on its website.	Agency also analyzes LMI and conducts outreach to major employer organizations and associations in high-skill, high-need, high-wage industries.	Agency also hosts webinars/podcasts and makes presentations about CPL at statewide/regional employer conferences; convenes employers to scale effective CPL practices; and conducts direct outreach to employers in high-skill, high-need, high-wage industries.

Source: Adapted from *Credit for Prior Learning: Charting Institutional Practice for Sustainability*[40]

[40] Lakin, M. B., Seymour, D., Nellum, C. J., & Crandall, J. R. (2015). *Credit for prior learning: Charting institutional practice for sustainability.* American Council on Education, Center for Education Attainment and Innovation & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Charting-Institutional-Practice-for-Sustainability.pdf

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Tools

[end]

Sample Messages

Following are sample messages that you can use or provide to stakeholders to communicate with learners and families, postsecondary faculty and staff and employers about what CPL is and how it benefits them. Because many institutions have unique CPL processes, the messages are intentionally top line — focusing on the what and why for each group rather than the how. Additional materials, such as subpages on a website, can provide more detail about how learners apply for CPL and how postsecondary institutions evaluate and award credit.

The messages are designed to work as building blocks, so you can use them on their own or in combinations that work for your purposes. These examples use national data and examples of completion and equity goals, but they can be customized with your local data and information. You can also supplement them with testimonials and examples from local champions.

See the messaging worksheet on page X to begin adapting these messages or creating your own.

Sample Messages for Communicating With Learners

What is CPL

Credit for prior learning is the process postsecondary institutions use to award college credit for your knowledge and experience — whether you earned it inside or outside the classroom. If you want to go back to school to get a credential or degree, you may be able to earn college credit for what you have learned on the job, through other learning opportunities, at home caring for family members, or from pursuing a personal hobby or activity. With this credit, you can place out of required courses.

Benefits of CPL

Money and time saved

Credit for prior learning can help you earn a credential or degree faster — and decrease your costs. If you earn this credit, you can save as much as $1,500-$10,200 in tuition and associated expenses by placing out of required courses. This jumpstart also means you may complete your studies 9-14 months faster than learners who do not earn credit for prior learning, so you can meet your personal and professional goals more quickly.[41]

[41] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

Increased likelihood of completion
If you earn credit for prior learning, you can place out of required courses, so you do not have to spend time and money on classes for which you already know content. This jumpstart puts you right into the classes you need and increases the chances that you will ultimately be able to complete your degree or credential.[42]

Career benefits
Earning a credential or degree can help you advance in your career or land a job in a high-wage, high-demand industry. Learners who receive credit for prior learning can get a jumpstart by placing out of required courses. This credit can save you time and money — minimizing the chance that work, caring for family, or other competing demands will get in the way as you pursue your educational goals. In fact, learners who earn credit for prior learning are almost two times more likely to earn their credential or degree than learners who do not pursue this opportunity.[43]

Increased pride and self-worth
Whether you earned it in the classroom or the real world, your experience matters. Through work, pursuing learning opportunities outside of college, caring for family members, or participating in personal hobbies or activities, you have knowledge and skills that you have built over a lifetime. You may not realize it, but through credit for prior learning, you may be able to turn that experience into college credit before you even start taking classes. People like you often say they feel more valued and confident after going through the credit for prior learning process — which can help you persist as you work to meet your educational, personal and professional goals.[44]

Sample Messages for Communicating With Postsecondary Faculty and Staff

What is CPL
Credit for prior learning is the process we use to award returning or new learners credit for their college-level learning — whether they have earned it inside or outside the classroom. Learners gain knowledge and experience on the job, through non-collegiate learning opportunities, at home, or from pursuing a personal hobby or activity. Through the rigorous

[42] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[43] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[44] Klein-Collins, R., & Olson, R. (2014, October). *Random access: The Latino student experience with prior learning assessment.* Council for Adult and Experiential Learning & Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/random-access-latino-student-experience-prior-learning-assessment

credit for prior learning process, which is overseen by expert faculty and staff, we determine whether this life experience enables them to place out of required courses.

CPL benefits for learners

Credit for prior learning is a key strategy to help learners earn a degree or credential of value. Studies show that adult learners who earn credit for prior learning feel valued and more confident in their studies. They also can save as much as $1,500-$10,200 and earn their degree or credential more than a year faster than other learners. All of these benefits mean that adult learners are almost two times more likely to graduate.[45]

CPL benefits for the institution

Meeting completion and equity goals
These messages provide examples of specific attainment goals and national data on completion rates. Substitute your own equity or completion goals and attainment data for your institution.

At [institution name], we are working to improve retention and completion rates for adult learners. Our goal is for X percent of learners to earn a degree or credential of value by 2030. Credit for prior learning is a key strategy to help us meet that goal. Studies show that 49 percent of adult learners who earn this credit complete their credential or degree, compared to 27 percent who do not.[46]

We know that earning a degree or credential benefits our learners. They are more likely to obtain jobs in high-wage, high-skill, in-demand fields; advance in their careers; and be engaged in their communities. Currently, only X percent of adult learners from low-income backgrounds at our school attain their degree or credential. Credit for prior learning is a key strategy to help us improve our completion rates and ensure that all learners, particularly learners that have been historically disadvantaged, have the education they

[45] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[46] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

need to meet their goals. Studies show that adult learners who earn credit for prior learning are almost two times more likely to graduate.[47]

For many adult learners, returning to school to earn a degree or credential can be daunting. Many work full time and have additional responsibilities caring for family members at home. Or they may not believe that they have the educational background to attend college. Credit for prior learning can help them overcome these challenges. When adult learners earn credit for their existing knowledge and experience — whether they earned it inside or outside the classroom — they are more likely to feel confident enough to enroll. And once they enroll, they are almost two times more likely to complete their credential or degree.[48]

Increased number of credits earned by learners
Studies show that adult learners who earn credit for prior learning are less likely to drop out of school before they earn a degree or credential of value. In fact, they take an average of 17.6 more credits than adult learners who do not complete, which benefits our college financially.[49]

Increased pool of potential learners
At a time when college enrollments are decreasing nationwide, credit for prior learning is a key strategy to help us expand the pool of potential learners. Credit for prior learning particularly helps adult learners, who often face additional responsibilities outside of school such as jobs and caring for family, feel confident about balancing these outside pressures with the desire to earn a degree or credential of value. With credit for prior learning, they can meet their educational goals more quickly and at a lower cost. Studies show that they can save as much as $1,500-$10,200 and complete their studies more than a year faster than other learners.[50]

More inclusive and engaged classrooms
The opportunity to earn credit for prior learning can help attract adult learners with a wide variety of applied knowledge back to the classroom. These learners both increase diversity

[47] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[48] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[49] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[50] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

in the classroom and contribute to more engaging discussions about how the course content can be used in the real world.

More learners in higher-level courses
Adult learners who earn credit for prior learning go on to take an average of 17.6 more credits than learners who do not have credit for prior learning.[51] These additional credits mean that more students are enrolling in higher-level courses, which benefits the program of study.

CPL benefits for community/state/nation

Adult learners who receive credit for prior learning are almost two times more likely to earn a degree or credential of value.[52] A credential can help them advance in their careers and promote economic and social mobility, which can lead to increased civic engagement that benefits our community, our state and the nation. Higher completion rates also help industries fill job openings in high-demand, high-wage, high-skill industries, resulting in economic benefits.

Sample Messages for Communicating With Employers

What is CPL
Credit for prior learning is the process postsecondary institutions use to award adult learners and other learners college credit for their knowledge and experience — whether they earned it inside or outside the classroom. Through credit for prior learning, learners may be able to earn college credit for what they have learned on the job.

CPL benefits for employers

Qualified talent for current job openings
When your employees earn credit for prior learning, they can get a jumpstart on acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to fill open jobs in your company — and fill them more quickly. Placing out of required courses through credit for prior learning can both reduce the time they have to spend out of the workplace and decrease their overall educational costs. Studies show that learners who receive credit for prior learning can complete their studies 9-14 months faster than learners who do not receive it.[53]

[51] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[52] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf
[53] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western

Pipeline of future skilled workers
Working with postsecondary systems and institutions to formalize partnerships and embed credit for prior learning in career pathways and Career Technical Education programs of study can help ensure that your organization has a steady supply of employees who have the education required to meet your workforce needs — now and in the future.

Employee retention
Providing employees the opportunity to earn a degree or credential can build morale and improve job satisfaction by showing you value your employees and helping them advance, ultimately leading to higher retention rates. Through credit for prior learning, learners may be able to place out of required courses on their way to a degree or credential that aligns with their career goals. This jumpstart reduces the time they have to spend out of the workplace and decreases overall costs while they learn the valuable skills your company needs.

Better return on investment for tuition assistance
If you provide tuition reimbursement benefits, credit for prior learning also can help you save costs by reducing the number of courses employees have to take. Employees also spend less time in the classroom and out of the workplace. Some employers even report that earning credit for prior learning and going on to finish their degree leads to increased job productivity among employees.[54]

CPL benefits for community/state/nation

Adult learners who receive credit for prior learning are almost two times more likely to earn a degree or credential of value.[55] A credential can help them advance in their careers and promote economic and social mobility, which can lead to increased civic engagement that benefits our community, our state and the nation. Higher completion rates also help industries fill job openings in high-demand, high-wage, high-skill industries, resulting in economic benefits.

Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[54] Ryu, M. (2013, November). *Credit for prior learning from the student, campus, and industry perspectives.* American Council on Education & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Issue-Brief.pdf

[55] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

FAQs

The following FAQs focus on the benefits of CPL. Like the messages, they are intentionally high level because the process of applying for and awarding CPL varies from state to state, institution to institution and program to program. Leading with these FAQs will help engage your audiences. You can adapt them with your own messaging and examples and follow them with more detailed FAQs about the process, costs, timing, etc. for your state or institution.

Learners

What is CPL?

Credit for prior learning (CPL) is the process postsecondary institutions use to award college credit for your knowledge and experience — whether you earned it inside or outside the classroom. If you want to go back to school to get a credential or degree, you may be able to earn college credit for what you have learned on the job, through other learning opportunities, at home caring for family members, or from pursuing a personal hobby or activity. With this credit, you can place out of required courses.

Why should I apply for CPL?

CPL rewards you for skills and knowledge you already have. Earning CPL can help you get a credential or degree faster — and decrease your costs. You can save as much as $1,500-$10,200 in tuition and associated expenses by placing out of required courses. This jumpstart also means you can complete your studies 9-14 months faster than learners who do not earn CPL, so you can meet your personal and professional goals more quickly.[56]

How do I know if I am eligible for CPL?

If you are considering going back to school, reach out to the admissions team or visit the college's website to find out more about credit for prior learning opportunities. If you are already admitted or enrolled, talk to your adviser. They can help you understand how your knowledge and experience could translate into credit — and how that credit can give you a jumpstart on your credential or degree.

Applying for CPL requires me to take extra steps. Is it worth it?

Earning credit for prior learning decreases the amount of time and money it takes to earn a degree or credential — on average learners save $1,500-$10,200 and 9-14 months.[57] You may also find that you are already well on your way to earning a credential or degree aligned with your career goals.

What does credit for life experience mean?

[56] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[57] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

Getting credit for life experience means you already know the class material. Through work, other learning opportunities, caring for family members, or participating in personal hobbies or activities, you have built a lifetime of knowledge and skills. And that experience could help you place out of required courses.

Postsecondary faculty and staff

How does CPL benefit my institution?

Increasing participation in CPL benefits postsecondary institutions in many ways. It can help our institution:

- Meet completion and equity goals. Studies show that adult learners who earn CPL, including learners from historically disadvantaged groups, also complete their studies at higher rates.[58]
- Grow enrollment by attracting adult learners who are considering returning to school to complete their studies or earn a new degree or credential.
- Increase revenue from tuition. Adult learners with CPL take more credits, which translates to more income for our institution.
- Enable more diverse and engaged classrooms. Adult learners with applied knowledge both increase diversity in the classroom and contribute to more engaging discussions about how the course content can be used in the real world.
- Increase enrollment in higher-level classes. When more learners place out of required courses, more learners can enroll in higher-level courses, which benefits that program of study.

How can I find out if my institution has CPL opportunities for learners in my program?

Start by checking with the academic adviser for your program or your institution's Career Center. Your state may also have a resource like Massachusetts' My Experience Counts website, which has crosswalks showing how industry-recognized credentials align with different programs.[59]

Employers

How does CPL benefit my company?

Formalizing partnerships with postsecondary institutions to encourage employees to participate in CPL opportunities helps companies establish a pipeline of workers with the skills and knowledge they need to fill current and future job openings. Employers also cite employee retention and improved productivity as benefits of employees earning CPL when they return to postsecondary education. And for companies that provide tuition assistance, CPL decreases the money needed to support employees as they earn a degree or credential and decreases the amount of time they spend out of the workplace in the classroom.

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[58] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

[59] Massachusetts Community Colleges. (n.d.). *My experience counts.* https://myexperiencecounts.mass.edu/home

How can I work with postsecondary institutions to make CPL available for my employees?
Start by checking to see if your local postsecondary institutions have a CPL office or lead. If not, talk to career and academic advisers. They can work with you to develop crosswalks showing how training and industry-recognized credentials align with programs of study at their schools. Having this information will help employees see the value of going back to school and understand how CPL can help them get a jumpstart on their studies.

Myths/Facts

Myths and facts are a useful tool for correcting common misperceptions and proactively allaying concerns among your target audience. They also can be a helpful internal tool so that you are prepared to answer critics and skeptics. You can use the following language or adapt it with your own examples and messaging.

Learners

Myth: Nothing in my experience will qualify for CPL.
Fact: Whether you earned it in the classroom or the real world, your experience matters. Through work, other learning opportunities, caring for family members, or participating in personal hobbies or activities, you have built a lifetime of knowledge and skills. With CPL, you may be able to turn that experience into college credit before you even start taking classes.

Myth: CPL is only awarded for Advanced Placement and other types of college-level learning you get in high school.
Fact: Postsecondary institutions award CPL for many types of learning and experiences. For example, the Credit2Careers website provides a list of organizations that issue industry certifications that are awarded CPL by at least one community college in Virginia.[60] You may also be able to earn CPL if you are fluent in a foreign language, have management experience from your job, have held leadership roles in volunteer activities and more.

Myth: The CPL process takes too long and costs too much to do me any good.
Fact: Applying for CPL does take some extra steps, but the time and money you may be able to save can give you a valuable jumpstart on earning your degree or credential. Learners who earn CPL on average save $1,500-$10,200 and complete their studies 9-14 months faster than learners without CPL.[61]

Myth: If I get credit and place out of a course, I might miss some important content I would learn in the class.
Fact: CPL is about matching what you know with what you would have learned in the classroom. Experts review each experience to ensure that anyone that earns CPL already knows the content they would have learned in the course.

Myth: CPL is only for those who have been in the military.
Fact: Many members of the military acquire knowledge and experience during their service that qualifies for CPL. But CPL opportunities are available to anyone to determine whether their life experience and the knowledge and skills they have learned on the job match up with the content in their college courses. For example, the My Experience Counts website in

[60] Virginia's Community Colleges. (n.d.). *Credit2Careers.* https://www.credits2careers.org/industry-certifications
[61] Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibrandt, S. (2020, December). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes.* Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education & Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. https://www.cael.org/hubfs/PLA%20Boost%20Paper%20ExecSummary%20-%20Oct%202020.pdf

Massachusetts lists areas of expertise and the associated courses for which you might be able to earn credit for prior learning at state community colleges.[62] You may also be able to earn CPL if you are fluent in a foreign language, have management experience from your job, have held leadership roles in volunteer activities, and more.

Myth: Every experience I have will count toward credit.
Fact: The CPL process is about making sure you have the knowledge and skills you need to succeed in college-level courses and in your career. You have knowledge and skills that you have built over a lifetime, whether inside the classroom or outside of it. If that experience covers the same content you would have learned in a course, we want to make sure you get credit and do not have to waste time and money on classes you do not need. But not every experience covers the material you need to know for courses you need in your program of study. That is why we have a CPL process so we can work together to make sure you are on the path to success.

Postsecondary faculty/staff
Myth: The process to award CPL is not rigorous enough; it is not the equivalent of college-level learning, so learners who earn CPL won't succeed in higher level courses.
Fact: The awarding of CPL is a rigorous process focuses on matching the competencies learners already have with the content they would learn in class. The goal is to ensure that learners are ready to succeed in higher-level courses or on the job, not to provide credit for every experience. If learners do not provide evidence of the knowledge they would have acquired in a specific course, they will not be awarded CPL.

Myth: CPL takes away faculty jobs.
Fact: Research shows that awarding CPL expands the pool of potential learners by attracting those who are considering returning to college to complete their studies or earn a degree or credential. Increasing enrollment can help preserve and protect faculty jobs. In addition, learners with CPL also go on to take more credits in higher-level courses, which benefits programs of study and increases tuition income.

Employers
Myth: If I encourage my employee to go back to college and earn a degree or credential, they will leave.
Fact: Research shows that encouraging employees to earn CPL and providing tuition assistance for them to continue their studies actually improves employee retention.[63] It can also help attract potential employees.

Myth: Postsecondary institutions are out of touch, and their classes do not teach the knowledge and skills needed for today's job openings.

[62] Massachusetts Community Colleges. (n.d.). *My experience counts.* https://myexperiencecounts.mass.edu/home
[63] Ryu, M. (2013, November). *Credit for prior learning from the student, campus, and industry perspectives.* American Council on Education & Center for Policy Research and Strategy. https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Credit-for-Prior-Learning-Issue-Brief.pdf

Fact: Companies and postsecondary institutions can ensure that what learners learn in class translates to the workplace by developing industry crosswalks. These crosswalks map the content learned in courses to the competencies employers need their employees to have.

Myth: I can do this better, faster and cheaper.
Fact: CPL takes the burden off employers. Providing the training employees need at postsecondary institutions rather than internally allows employers to focus their expertise and resources on their core work.

Messaging Worksheet

Use this template to adapt the messages in this toolkit or create your own messages.

Target Audience:

Action you want them to take	What they need to know to take this action	Relevant messages	Local details/data

Acknowledgments

To come