

Volume I:

Request for Clearance for Focus Groups on the
Need for Data on Adult Education and Training

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Justification

In early 2010, NCES constituted a new program area within the newly-renamed Postsecondary, Adult, and Career Education (PACE) Division. The new Adult and Career Education Program was created to collect and report data on the education and training that young adults and adults in the United States need to prepare for living-wage jobs in the 21st century economy.

PACE took the lead on an investigation into the needs for data on adult education, training, and literacy in order to inform program planning. The specific charge was to “assess our current portfolio of adult and career data collections (including PIAAC and NAAL), and determine what gaps exist, what existing collections are lower priority, and which gaps should be filled and how.”¹

In response to this charge, ACE staff met formally with each Associate Commissioner in NCES and his or her relevant staff to get input on both the process and the priorities for data on adult education and training. During these meetings, the staff solicited recommendations about the types of constituencies and specific people or groups we should talk to as part of our investigation. As a result of these discussions, it became clear that the best way to get input from a diverse group of key constituents was to conduct a series of focus groups to assess the need for data on adult education and training among our constituencies and to determine the implications of these data needs for future NCES data collection. We engaged an expert in adult education and qualitative research, MPR Associates, to help convene, record, and summarize the focus group discussions.

Starting in October 2010, we conducted a series of focus groups with colleagues from OVAE, the Office of the Under Secretary, the Workforce Investment Act staff at the Employment and Training Administration in Labor, and colleagues from BLS and Census

This request for clearance is to conduct 5 additional focus groups with non-federal participants. They will include researchers (two groups); representatives from associations with an interest in adult education; state directors of adult education, career and technical education, and correctional education; and representatives from private foundations that support adult education and training.

The scope of this research encompasses participation in adult education programs (from adult basic education through workforce training), skill and competencies of the US adult population, and outcomes of adult education. Of particular interest is the need for assessments of adult literacy, skills, and competencies—currently collected nationally through the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and internationally through the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

¹ Memo from Stuart Kerachsky to Tom Weko, Val Plisko, and Peggy Carr, July 6, 2010.

Design of Focus Groups

We will conduct the five focus groups via webinar from the MPR office in Washington DC during regular business hours. An NCES professional with experience in focus group facilitation will conduct the groups using a pre-designated focus group discussion guide (attached).

The objectives of the focus group research are to:

1. Identify the main policy, program, or research questions that participants have related to adult education and training;
2. Discuss the statistical data needed to address (or provide context for) those questions; and
3. Obtain information about the relative value to participants of national and international assessments.

We plan to recruit 10-12 participants for each focus group for a yield of approximately 10 per group. The foundation group will be considerably smaller because there are few of them. We also plan to solicit written comments from those who cannot participate in the focus group but want to provide input into the process. We are estimating that 5 participants will provide written comments.

Estimated Response Burden

We expect the focus groups to be approximately 90 minutes in length. We expect that participants submitting written comments will take approximately 60 minutes to reflect on the questions and compose a response. These estimates result in an estimated total respondent of 70.5 hours.

Table 1. Focus groups by burden

Group	Expected number of participants	Burden per participant (minutes)	Total burden (hours)
Researchers	20	90	30
Associations	10	90	15
State Directors	10	90	15
Foundations	5	90	7.5
Written responses	5	60	3

Estimated Cost Burden

There is no direct cost to respondents.

Recruitment and payment to respondents

NCES staff will identify and make initial contact with prospective focus group participants. MPR Associates will follow up to confirm participation and to inform the participants about the logistics for the webinar. There are no incentive payments for participating in the focus groups.

Assurance of confidentiality

Participation is completely voluntary. The notes from the focus groups and the summary document will not attribute any comments to any individuals. However, the list of participants and their affiliations will be included in the final report so that readers can evaluate the coverage of the research by types of participants.

Cost to Federal Government

The cost to the federal Government for this study, including a report, is \$75,000.

Project Schedule

Activity	Timeline
Recruitment	November 1 to December 31, 2010
Researchers Group 1	November 30, 2010
Researchers Group 2	December 2, 2010
Associations	December 7, 2010
State Directors	December 10, 2010
Foundations	January 10, 2011
Written comments	Received by January 15, 2011