

Title of Nomination: Helping Kentuckians Participate in the New Economy: Kentucky Virtual Adult Education Portal

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## Helping Kentuckians Participate in the New Economy: Kentucky Virtual Adult Education Portal

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adult illiteracy is a serious problem in Kentucky with far-reaching effects. One in four Kentuckians age 25 or older have not obtained a high school diploma or GED, and nearly one million of the 2.4 million working adults (40% of Kentucky's workforce) perform at the lowest literacy levels, as measured by the Kentucky Adult Literacy Survey. Adults with lower levels of literacy are less likely to be employed and more likely to experience poverty and poor health, which also places their children at risk. Furthermore, the educational skills of Kentucky's workforce hinders its ability to attract new business and industry, compete in the New Economy, and raise the standard of living for all of its citizens.

In 2000, the Kentucky General Assembly enacted measures to reform the state's system of adult education. The Kentucky Virtual Adult Education Portal ([www.kyvae.org](http://www.kyvae.org)) grew out of the need to reach more undereducated adults with improved access to basic reading, writing, math, and employability skills. Often, adults who need education the most are least able to pursue it—difficulty obtaining child care, transportation, or time off from work can get in the way of an education. KYVAE is dedicated to helping adult learners achieve their personal learning goals in a convenient, easy-to-use, and motivational format. The site also gives adult education instructors the option of completing professional development training and graduate coursework online, as well as opportunities to share best practices and access adult education resources from across the globe.

In less than two years, KYVAE has revolutionized the way services are delivered to citizens, and thousands more are enrolling as a result. Without a template to follow, two state agencies, the Council on Postsecondary Education (including the Kentucky Virtual University) and the Department for Adult Education and Literacy, charted an innovative course to meet the needs of citizens using leading-edge technology. KYVAE offers these free services and benefits:

- “Anytime, anywhere” access to quality curriculum, resources and instructional support through the KYVU help desk (1-877-740-HELP) and 24 x 7 technical support.
- Career planning through ACT WorkKeys assessment and alignment to the ACT occupational database of over 9,000 job profiles that specifies required skill levels. Based on an individual's gap between their skills and the job requirements, KYVAE's curriculum offers the learner targeted instruction to develop the required skills in a high-touch, online environment. Further, learners are eligible to earn a “Kentucky Employability Certificate” based on successful completion.
- Increased familiarity and confidence with computers, which can enhance adult learners' employment prospects.
- A more seamless transition from adult to postsecondary education, as learners can use KYVAE as a portal to online college courses.
- Increased cost-savings through economies of scale. **The cost per student is decreasing and is already \$132 less than the traditional adult learning center model of \$382 per student.**

KYVAE is improving the lives of thousands of undereducated adults in Kentucky and has already captured the attention of the national media. The “American Business Review,” a national television series hosted by CBS News Correspondent Morley Safer, will feature KYVAE in a segment airing in late summer. Cheryl King, Associate Vice President and Commissioner of Kentucky Adult Education, sums up Kentucky's technological innovations best: “From the hills to the hollows and from the cities, towns, and farms, the KYVAE is providing convenient, 24-hour-a-day access to quality learning opportunities, no matter where you live in Kentucky.”

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT, INCLUDING LENGTH OF TIME IN OPERATION**

KYVAE was launched in October 2001 as a partnership of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), including the Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU) and the Kentucky Virtual Library (KYVL), and the Kentucky Department for Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL). KYVAE is supported by state funds which makes it possible to provide all services free-of-charge to citizens.

In early 2001, planning began on the website. A diverse group of stakeholders was convened to develop the requirements for the website. The group met regularly for several months to map out the functional requirements, learner needs, the site architecture, content and look and feel. Usability testing was conducted in two learning centers, one in a rural area with older female learners and another in downtown Frankfort that included younger male and female learners. The testing and refining process continued with separate focus groups with two different DAEL groups: the regional training and development consultants who work with business and industry and the professional development consultants who work with program managers in the learning centers. This testing process has provided continuous improvement. A revamp of KYVAE will roll out this summer with numerous database-driven enhancements.

Retraining the 900 full-time and part-time adult education instructors, some of whom had not used a computer, was another massive effort. DAEL had already embarked on a course to expand the integration of technology into instruction prior to the KYVAE launch. The DAEL professional development staff ramped up into high gear to meet this need. The statewide training effort was accelerated to introduce the completely online training curriculum, and learn to deal with technology challenges, and develop methodologies and strategies for retention among adult learners who had experienced failure in traditional settings. Instructors also learned administrative functions for the curriculum and portal, and learned how to collaborate online with their peers. To facilitate a successful online environment, regional technical support personnel were hired to assist this transition.

### **KYVAE offers the following FREE learner services:**

- Quality curriculum aligned with competency-based assessment for adult learners. The PLATO curriculum offers GED preparation and simulated GED tests, workforce skills enhancement in numerous areas, English as a Second Language, and college-bound preparation, as well as individualized courses. The WIN curriculum focuses on workforce development and offers online courses for all eight ACT WorkKeys courses.
- Professional development for educators. Nine online courses range from an orientation to adult education, to planning professional development and to administering the WorkKeys assessments.
- Two high-tech, online training centers--*SkillMobiles* on wheels--feature the KYVAE and travel the state to employers' locations to provide skills upgrades and computer literacy skills for workplace education.
- 24/7 technical support
- Call center with daytime, evening and Sunday hours
- Access to employment opportunities and postsecondary education
- ACT Occupational database
- County and staff contact information for every DAEL Adult Literacy Center
- Professional development calendar displays all available PD offerings

**KYVAE offers FREE Kentucky Virtual Library Services:**

- Reference services for all students
- Interlibrary loan of books and articles from and to any county in Kentucky
- 40 electronic databases with electronic citation and more than 5,000 full-text journals
- Kentuckiana Digital Library with digitized historical materials
- Kentucky Adult Education Resource Database and LINCS
- Learn to Research self-paced tutorial
- KYVL for Kids, an interactive and fun learning site that learners can use with their children

An especially innovative enhancement to the website, called Get READy, is currently being beta tested and is scheduled to roll out this summer. This course will help learners who are in the beginning stages of reading. Using voice recognition software, text-to-speech technology and a variety of interactive, learning activities for adults, Get READy is—to our knowledge--the first online course of its kind in the nation. No previous computer skills are required.

KYVAE, while a new initiative, works with national literacy organizations, such as the National Center on Adult Literacy, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, LINC (a national database of adult education resources and materials of which Kentucky has contributed) and the National Center for Family Literacy. KYVAE's pedagogical results will be assessed as part of the multi-state Project IDEAL led by the University of Michigan.

**SIGNIFICANCE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE OPERATION OF GOVERNMENT**

The partnership of adult education (DAEL) and KYVU improves operating efficiencies and substantially decreases overall costs. DAEL provides the students, 900 instructors statewide with the content expertise, while the KYVU brings the technological expertise and infrastructure. This partnership is a stellar example of "good government" because it leverages the unique resources of the agencies to serve the diverse learning needs of citizens in a seamless environment.

KYVAE piggy-backed on the existing infrastructure and students services offered by KYVU, which was in operation two years prior to the deployment of KYVAE. The services offered by KYVAE, with the exception of the curriculum, were already developed and funded. These include the Kentucky Virtual Library services, the call center staff, the technical help, web development and IT personnel, marketing support, and project manager. KYVU's technological improvements, including a recent deployment of a new student portal with "single sign-on," was extended to KYVAE. The technology development was paid for by KYVU but is used to improve efficiencies among all KYVU virtual learning partnerships.

Another example of leveraging existing resources includes utilizing a previous investment Kentucky had made to extend connectivity to the farthest reaches of the state. The NASCIO award winning Kentucky Information Highway System was initially leveraged to provide immediate and far-reaching connectivity to the entire state with no additional cost to KYVAE. Further, over 2,000 public libraries offer free Internet access and computer workstations, and many librarians have been familiarized with the KYVAE. Hundreds more workstations with free Internet access are available at the Housing Authorities, community centers, Kentucky Guard Armories, and churches.

Co-branding the KYVAE portal with the KYVU, KYVL and the Kentucky Virtual High School is another improvement to the operation of government. With limited staff and financial

resources, co-branding ensures KYVAE maximum penetration for awareness-building activities and the promotion of lifelong learning. For the KYVAE user, co-branding provides a seamless experience and builds a pathway from their adult education literacy center to postsecondary education.

A unique marketing collaboration that resulted in raising awareness of KYVAE occurred during DAEL's recent \$2.5 million public communications campaign which focused on recruiting learners to prepare for the GED test. The TV and radio ads, and the marketing collaterals, asked citizens to call the KYVAE/KYVU toll-free number and directed them to the KYVAE website to register. By streamlining the inquiry pool to the existing KYVAE/KYVU call center, knowledgeable call center staff were prepared to assist the learners. It would have been impossible to list the phone numbers of all 120 adult literacy centers, but more importantly, the phones were answered by those most knowledgeable of the wide range of products and services available to the learners.

Other unique features of KYVAE improve the operation of government:

- Instructors work with and mentor more learners in the same approximate amount of time.
- The purchase of statewide licenses for quality curriculum and training reduces overall costs as compared to separate licenses for all 120 learning centers.
- Greater interagency cooperation and less duplication of effort.

### **BENEFITS REALIZED BY SERVICE RECIPIENTS, TAXPAYERS, AGENCY OR STATE**

Senate Bill 1, passed in 2000 by the General Assembly, increased the prominence of the state's literacy efforts and called for improved levels of performance with enrollment goals focused on workplace education, GED completion and transition to postsecondary education. KYVAE is a key tool to meet this legislative mandate. By using electronic means, the state can reach more low-literacy adults and can more effectively reach citizens in rural areas.

The initial benefit to recipients is 24/7 convenient service which allows anytime learning that does not interfere with work schedules, child care and other obligations. The ultimate benefit to recipients will be increased literacy, leading in many cases to academic credentials and increased earning power and to a better life. The ultimate benefit to taxpayers will be the delivery of necessary social services in a cost-effective way. The benefit to the state and to business and industry is a more skilled workforce for the New Economy.

In addition, the KYVAE offers the following benefits:

- Free services to the learners;
- Career planning through the online ACT WorkKeys occupational database;
- Learners may make educational gains more quickly online while working when it's convenient for them, which may save time in preparing for the GED, jobs, and additional educational opportunities;
- Local program information is readily available to all citizens who may not otherwise be able to find the information;
- Teachers make more efficient use of preparation time with access to resources, databases, curricula, and lesson plans; and
- Recipients learn both academic and computer skills which increases their employment skills and the intangible gains of self-esteem and social benefits to society and their children.

**Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback (include summary calculations). Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit.**

- This year, 3,416 adult learners and educators are enrolled in online learning modules, which is triple the 1,184 learners in 2002. Only 190 learners enrolled in 2001.
- Website traffic has nearly doubled from first quarter in 2002 to first quarter 2003. Nearly 62,000 visits were logged on the KYVAE website from January 2003-April 2003, an average of 15,484 per month. During the same period in 2002, a monthly average of fewer than 8,000 visits were reported.
- Nine online courses are available to instructors to help them improve the quality of instruction at their adult learning centers. Online professional development also reduces travel time and expenses, resulting in cost savings for the state.
- Statewide licenses of curriculum products sharply curtails costs. For example, the cost was \$400,000 for one curriculum product at only 10 pilot sites in 2002,. The statewide license in 2003, at \$500,000, provides curriculum in all 120 counties and includes unlimited training days and 24 x 7 technical help.

**Cost/Benefit Analysis**

The ability to reach citizens who otherwise would not be reached at all, and to scale operations to reach an anticipated 50,000 new users by 2008 without new revenue streams, is a goal of KYVAE. As the chart shows, KYVAE is rapidly increasing enrollment. Simultaneously, **the cost per user is decreasing and is already \$132 LESS than the on-site adult literacy center model of \$382 per user.** To realize this savings in less than two years surpasses our wildest expectations for KYVAE.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b># of users</b>	<b>Cost per user</b>
Year 1, 2001	\$700,000	190 users	\$3,684.
Year 2, 2002	\$522,000	1,184 users	\$440.
Year 3, 2003	\$852,600	3,416 users	\$250.

This innovative use of technology makes it possible to offer online learning 24 hours a day, seven days a week and do so efficiently and cost-effectively, and in a manner that also raises the information literacy skills of learners. Scalability in a face-to-face environment in an adult literacy center would be outrageously expensive as the following projection shows:

Based on 500 FTE instructors, paid \$15 per hour on average, working 7.5 hours a day, 240 days a year, requires state adult education funds of \$13.5 million annually just for salaries. This figure does not include fringe benefits or any other costs. To scale up its face-to-face instruction to 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, it would cost \$65.7 million annually in state funds. One can readily see that technology offers the only way to scale services efficiently to reach adults who need convenience and flexibility of anytime learning.

If the KYVAE cost per user remains at \$250 (the KYVAE expects to continue to reduce it) and the adult literacy center cost per user remains at \$382, then the 2008 goal of 50,000 online users would cost \$12.5 million, i.e., still far below the \$19.1 million cost of equivalent face-to-face instruction.

