

Study Guide for the AEM Quality Indicators with Critical Components for Workforce Development

By the National AEM Center at CAST

Published: August 2022

The contents of this document were developed under a cooperative agreement with the US Department of Education, #H327Z190004. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Rebecca Sheffield, Ph.D.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



National Center on Accessible Educational Materials (2022). Study Guide for the AEM Quality Indicators with Critical Components for Workforce Development. Wakefield, MA: National Center on Accessible Educational Materials.

Contents

Background and Purpose	1
Use	2
Actions for Making Meaning of the Quality Indicators	3
Quality Indicator 1: A Coordinated System	3
Quality Indicator 2: Timely Manner	4
Quality Indicator 3: Written Guidelines	4
Quality Indicator 4: Learning Opportunities for Staff	5
Quality Indicator 5: Data Collection	6
Quality Indicator 6: Data Use	7
Quality Indicator 7: Allocation of Resources	7

Background and Purpose

The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning (National AEM Center) at CAST is a technical assistance (TA) center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The purpose of the Center is to improve educational and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through TA activities that increase both the availability and the use of accessible materials and technologies. The Center’s stakeholders serve and advocate for individuals with disabilities and their families across the continuum of educational settings: early learning, K–12, and postsecondary academic and career training programs.

The AEM Center’s TA is guided by the [Quality Indicators for the Provision of AEM and Accessible Technologies](#). The seven Quality Indicators describe the essential elements of a system that ensure the consistent and reliable provision of high-quality and timely accessible materials and technologies for all Career and Technical Education (CTE) students and career seekers who need them, including those with disabilities. Each Quality Indicator includes a set of Critical Components that contextualize the Quality Indicators for the unique educational setting; in this case, workforce development programs.

It is through a shared vision and collective understanding of individual roles and responsibilities that systems change occurs. To that end, the [AEM Quality Indicators with Critical Components for Workforce Development](#) are designed to be implemented by a coordinated team of representatives from within a system (e.g., state or local workforce investment board, community college, or CTE program). For flexibility in building background knowledge on the content and use of the Quality Indicators, and to support the readiness of all team representatives to implement them, the purpose of this guide is to facilitate both collaborative and independent self-studies.

Use

This study guide is for individuals and teams seeking to develop knowledge and practical skills related to the AEM Quality Indicators with Critical Components for Workforce Development. The target audience includes but is not limited to workforce development agencies and programs in coordination with state education agencies (SEA), such as:

For career training programs in post high school settings

- State Department of Labor leadership
- Career centers
- Vocational Rehabilitation services
- State transition program
- Apprenticeship programs

For career training programs in secondary education

- CTE personnel
- Local education agencies (LEAs)

As a result of completing the suggested activities in this guide, you should be prepared to be an active and meaningful contributor to a team that is working toward systems change in the provision and use of accessible materials and technologies for all CTE students and career seekers, with and without disabilities. Note that the Quality Indicators address statutory requirements that mandate equitable access to learning opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Begin your study by downloading the [AEM Quality Indicators with Critical Components for Workforce Development](#). Carefully review each Quality Indicator and its Critical Components, being certain to follow hyperlinks for additional information. It is recommended that you complete a full review of all seven Quality Indicators before

completing the activities presented in this guide. The time commitment for completing this study is self-determined. You may choose to methodically complete all activities or select from those listed. Some are brief reads, listens, or views with prompts for reflection, while others are more action-oriented. You may consider completing shorter activities under each Quality Indicator first, and then returning to complete the more involved activities on subsequent passes.

Create your own space for recording what you learn during your study. Google Docs, Word, OneNote, or other programs can be used to create separate sections for each Quality Indicator. A workbook created with Excel or Google Sheets is another option. Regardless of the format you choose, challenge yourself to make it accessible from the start by following the AEM Center's guidance on [Creating Accessible Documents](#).

If you need assistance, please contact us by email at aem@cast.org.

Actions for Making Meaning of the Quality Indicators

For each of the seven Quality Indicators, a set of practical actions that an individual can take is provided. These are designed to help you build vocabulary, understand concepts, make human connections, collect relevant materials, and apply practices to your context.

Quality Indicator 1: A Coordinated System

Increase your awareness of [what accessible means](#), including the differences among related terms.

Watch the AEM Center video, [Introduction to Accessibility](#).

Review the Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust (POUR) model as a guide for understanding accessibility principles and guidelines in [vetting for accessibility](#) and [creating accessible materials](#).

Familiarize yourself with [accessible formats](#), commonly known as alternative formats in workforce settings.

Start building a team to coordinate the provision of AEM and accessible technologies in your agency/program. Identify key personnel that represent the roles listed in Critical Component 1.1. Reach out to them and ask: Do they have information and resources for improving the accessibility of materials and technologies for career seekers with disabilities? If so, create a list of the available resources that you can share with your

team. If not, explain why accessibility is so important to successful outcomes for career seekers with disabilities. Express your interest in improving the accessibility of materials and technologies provided to career seekers and inform them about the AEM Center's resources.

Quality Indicator 2: Timely Manner

If you are in a postsecondary setting, read the [ADA language](#) related to providing AEM in a timely manner for higher education students with disabilities.

If you are in a secondary education setting, read the [IDEA](#) language related to providing AEM in a timely manner, which pertains to CTE programs in middle and high schools.

Create organizational accounts with services that provide accessible formats of copyrighted materials for eligible career seekers, such as [Bookshare](#), [Learning Ally](#), and [AccessText](#).

Reach out to your [state Instructional Materials Center](#) or [American Printing House \(APH\)](#) to learn about obtaining braille, large print, and tactile materials.

Quality Indicator 3: Written Guidelines

Familiarize yourself with laws relevant to your workforce programs in secondary and postsecondary education:

[Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#)

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

[Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)

[Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

[Section 121 of U.S. Copyright Act/Chafee Amendment](#)

[Strengthening Career and Technical Education Act for the 21st Century](#)

Locate your agency/program's procurement policy and procedures. Review these documents for guidance and language related to [communicating digital accessibility requirements](#).

Review the AEM Center's practices for [vetting for accessibility](#) and consider how these might be incorporated in your agency/program's procurement process. Visit the AEM Center's [Understanding the VPAT](#) to learn about the benefits and limitations of the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template®.

Review [Promising Practices in Achieving Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide](#). This guide from the Department of Labor provides information for American Job Centers to comply with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity regulations in WIOA. It is also relevant for other agencies and businesses prioritizing inclusive environments for individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Quality Indicator 4: Learning Opportunities for Staff

Reflect on your own role in your agency/program related to ensuring that all career seekers receive AEM and accessible technologies in a timely manner. What information would help you increase your knowledge and skills? What are the questions you need answered? Record these.

Make a list of your agency/program's current professional development priorities. How might accessibility of materials and technologies be included without it being a separate initiative?

Review the [AEM Center's list of recorded webinars](#) and customize a learning series for improving AEM-related knowledge and skills of staff in your agency/program.

Complete the AEM Center's free [Online Learning Series on Accessible Materials & Technologies](#). Or consider creating a training program for staff.

Use the AEM Center's report, [Synthesis of Knowledge Development Findings: Workforce Development and Accessible Materials and Technologies](#), as a shared reading for your colleagues.

Contact [your state's Assistive Technology Program](#) to learn about training and resources available in your state.

Learn about some of the national organizations that offer professional resources related to accessibility in the workplace, for example:

[Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#): JAN is a national provider of technical assistance for job accommodations and disability employment.

A specific resource from JAN: [A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations](#)

[Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology \(PEAT\)](#) is funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy to support workplaces in using inclusive technologies that engage the skills of employees with disabilities.

A specific resource from PEAT: [Accessibility Staff Training for Specific Roles](#)

[National Disability Institute \(NDI\)](#) is a national nonprofit focused on financial empowerment for people with disabilities.

A specific resource from NDI: A newly released series of [factsheets](#) summarizing income inequality, bank account ownership, and access to credit for people with disabilities.

Quality Indicator 5: Data Collection

Ask an administrator about the data your agency/program collects regarding services and supports for career seekers with disabilities. Find out if the data are available for use. See Quality Indicator 6 for next steps.

Identify and create a list of your agency/program's most frequently used digital materials and technologies for training and instruction. For each, find and link to any available accessibility information, such as [an accessibility statement from the developer](#) or [Accessibility Conformance Report \(ACR\)](#). Additionally, ask a sample of career seekers with and without disabilities about how easy or difficult it is for them to use these materials and technologies. Add your findings. See Quality Indicator 6 for next steps.

If you provide disability accommodations, create a database for tracking both the timeliness and the quality of accessible formats of training and course materials provided to career seekers who are eligible for them. Include the sources of those formats (e.g., Bookshare, Learning Ally, AccessText, local conversion, etc.). Observe and ask recipients of the accessible formats how easy or difficult it is for them to use those materials and include your notes in the database. See Quality Indicator 6 for next steps.

Invite career seekers with and without disabilities to provide feedback on the usability of training and course materials and technologies through a variety of means, such as surveys and conversations. See Quality Indicator 6 for next steps.

Quality Indicator 6: Data Use

If your agency/program collects data regarding services and supports for career seekers with disabilities, and those data are available for use, review and determine what may be useful for improving the use of AEM and accessible technologies.

Share your data on the accessibility of your agency/program's digital materials and technologies with administrators and colleagues. Contact the publishers and developers of those digital materials and technologies and share your accessibility concerns. Findings from these communications can be used to improve procurement policies and practices. Suggest that this process of data collection and use regarding product accessibility be institutionalized by your agency/program.

Share your data on the timeliness and quality of accessible formats provided to career seekers with the relevant personnel, collaborators, and accessible media producers. Use the data to identify the causes of any identified delays and sources of low-quality accessible format materials. Suggest that this process of data collection and use regarding accessible formats be institutionalized.

Respond to usability feedback from career seekers by providing training on how to use built-in accessibility features of technology and improving the use of materials with assistive technology.

Develop a protocol for analyzing state and federally required data (WIOA for job training programs and IDEA Part B for CTE programs), and identify potential barriers in materials and technologies that may be causing low retention and program completion rates for career seekers with disabilities.

Quality Indicator 7: Allocation of Resources

Create a list of the investments you believe would contribute to the building of a system for providing high-quality and timely accessible materials and technologies for all career seekers within your agency/program. These can be related to personnel needs, training and professional development, data management software, technology updates, etc. Share this list with a decision-maker at your agency/program to begin the conversation about needed resources for providing high-quality and timely accessible materials and technologies for all career seekers.