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LEARNER HANDBOOK



**Vermont Adult
Learning**

2025

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WHAT IS VERMONT ADULT LEARNING?

MISSION STATEMENT

Vermont Adult Learning's mission is to create an innovative, inclusive and equitable learning environment that provides personalized opportunities for education and career development for Vermont residents by building relationships, strengthening communities, and fostering lifelong learning.

VISION STATEMENT

Vermont Adult Learning works for the day when all Vermonters are prosperous and have the life skills and knowledge to achieve success in their careers, family, and community. Further, we envision Vermont Adult Learning as a leader in education and training for those 16 years and older, and as a key resource in helping Vermonters to be successful in achieving their goals.

CORE VALUES

Respect

The inherent worth of each individual is valued. Respect for self and others is the basis for relationships among all VAL staff and learners.

Student-Centered Learning

VAL supports individuals in making informed choices about learning priorities and plans based on life circumstances and personal goals.

Lifelong Learning

VAL provides opportunities for learners and staff to continually expand their skills and knowledge.

Community Responsibility

VAL is dedicated to building a learning community that educates, advocates, and collaborates to create a better world.

Excellence

VAL is committed to ongoing program improvement.

HISTORY

In 1980, the Vermont Institute for Self-Reliance (VISR) was created to help learners obtain the knowledge and skills they needed to become self-reliant. VISR provided an Adult Basic Education correspondence course to learners in Vermont. The staff consisted of two employees, one full-time and one half-time, and the office was a rustic room in a 150-year-old barn on a dirt road in Calais.

In 1996, the name of the organization changed to Vermont Adult Learning (VAL). Today, VAL is the largest provider of adult education and life skills programs in the state, serving 7 counties. In 2020, VAL established the Online Learning Center to provide remote learning opportunities.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

As a learner at Vermont Adult Learning, you have the right to expect:

- Instruction focused on helping you achieve your goals.
- An Adult Learning Plan created with you to identify your path to achieving your goals.
- Clear feedback on a regular basis from your teachers concerning your progress.
- To be treated with courtesy and respect.
- Attendance, academic progress, and other records will not be released to a third party without your written permission or in accordance with a court order.
- Access to your own files through a request to a staff member.
- No photographs or video footage of you will be released without a signed media consent form.

SERVICES WE PROVIDE

Getting Started

The first step for new learners is to schedule an appointment for orientation and an initial assessment with a region's Student Support Specialist. You will discuss your goals, take your initial assessments, and discuss the steps that will be necessary to meet your goals.

Educational Advisor

The role of the Educational Advisor is to assist and guide the student through the process of setting goals, creating a learning plan, referring the student to other agencies/organizations (as necessary), and monitoring and supporting the student's progress throughout a student's time with VAL. Educational Advisors are responsible for keeping in regular contact with students.

Essential Skills Building

We offer classes and self-paced learning programs in reading, writing, basic math, and math problem-solving for learners at levels from beginner to high school completion/college preparation. An initial confidential assessment tells us where to begin so that you can make the most of your time with us. Whether you have a need for improved skills at your place of work or just want to be able to communicate and advocate for yourself more effectively in your personal life, we can provide a course of study to meet your needs.

SERVICES WE PROVIDE

General Educational Development (GED)

VAL offers courses to help you prepare for the GED. Our Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Rutland, and Windham County Learning Centers are authorized testing centers that offer GED testing regularly. As Windsor County does not yet have a GED testing center, students from that region are typically referred to Rutland.

To earn a GED, you need to pass four exams: Reasoning Through Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Each test is \$36. If this fee is a barrier, please talk to your advisor about it. To learn more or to register for exams, please visit [GED.com](https://www.ged.com). A valid government-issued ID, such as a driver's license or passport, is needed on exam day.

Adult Diploma Program

The Adult Diploma Program will allow Vermonters ages 16 and over to work with VAL or other Adult Education and Literacy providers to earn a high school diploma. In this program, you can build and demonstrate your skills through a wide variety of experiences, and may also include VAL classes and tutoring, online courses, paid employment, life skills, an assessment of prior learning, internships, mentorships, traditional classes at high schools, technical centers or colleges, and more. The ADP replaced the High School Completion Program in 2024, and many details are still being developed. Please speak with your Advisor if you have questions.

College and Career Preparation/Workforce Development

VAL can help you develop college-readiness skills, including study skills, reading and writing strategies, research skills, and financial and digital literacy. VAL can also help you build the work-readiness skills you need for your career through courses in reading, writing, and math. VAL staff can help learners prepare for exams like the Praxis, Accuplacer, or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) as examples. Please speak to your Ed Advisor about what services may be currently available.

VAL students can work with our Workforce Development team to get hands-on training in the building efficiency industry and learn skills they can use in other trades and construction jobs. Workforce Development participants should visit energyworksvermont.org and speak to the Program Manager about credentials available through current trainings.

English Language Learning (ELL)

The ELL program offers classes for multilingual learners who are interested in learning or enhancing their English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Courses also introduce students to American culture and civics. Classes are offered in-person and online, at various times during the day and evening. Citizenship classes are offered periodically at VAL Learning Centers and through the Online Learning Center.

SERVICES WE PROVIDE

Computer Classes/Digital Literacy

VAL strives to meet the digital literacy needs of our learners. For students on the ADP pathway, digital literacy will be incorporated into the curriculum. Regardless of your pathway, when you begin your work with VAL, we will assess your access to devices, internet connectivity, and comfort level with classroom technology. In the event that we don't have classes or instructors available for this topic, we will make an effort to refer you to a trusted partner agency in your specific region when possible.

Online Learning Center

VAL's Online Learning Center (OLC) is a supportive program that allows students to take courses with teachers from other Centers. Online courses typically last 7 weeks (Waves) and are offered during the daytime, evening, and weekends. In coordination with Advisors, students have considerably more options through the OLC as they work to reach their educational goals. The OLC Course Catalogue can be found at sites.google.com/vtadultlearning.org/course-catalog.

Learner Testimonials



"I love that VAL's mission provides a light and a path for nontraditional learning, which is so sorely needed for people who don't fit into the shape society has tried to make for them.

We're all different puzzle pieces; there's no one way to fit." -VAL High School Graduate

"I love what I do, and I could not have done it without Vermont Adult Learning. They gave me the education, exposure, support, confidence, and clear path I needed to pursue my dream of being a skilled worker in the building trades." -VAL Workforce Development Participant

"Vermont Adult Learning makes the impossible, possible!"

-VAL Essential Skills Student



OUR EXPECTATIONS OF YOU

VAL has specific expectations of you as a learner. These expectations have been established to improve your opportunities for success and to provide a safe, respectful learning environment that supports learning for all skill levels. Please take the time to become familiar with these expectations and ask questions if you need clarification or further information. When you enroll with VAL, we will ask you to review and sign a [Student Rights and Responsibilities agreement](#) that covers this information as well.

Academic Honesty

You must uphold principles of academic honesty in every assignment. This includes the principle of never submitting or taking credit for anyone's work but your own. To that end, please remember to express your thoughts in your own words and to quote and cite the work of others as necessary. When you cite other sources, please use a standard format. If you have questions about when or how to cite sources, please ask before submitting your work. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be a useful tool, but please speak with your teacher before using it to complete assignments. No work that contains plagiarism or any other violation of academic honesty may count as passing.

Attendance

VAL students will demonstrate a commitment to their education by making every effort to attend classes, assessments, trainings, advising meetings, and student support meetings as scheduled. Whenever possible, VAL staff will work to accommodate student circumstances and schedules.

Teachers and staff have limited time and complex schedules. When students don't show up to a scheduled meeting, staff are unable to provide services to others. Excessive absences cause disruptions to learning that may be difficult for students to overcome. To this end, we ask:

- Whenever possible, students should notify advisors and/or instructors of absences at least 24 hours prior to their appointment or class.
- If circumstances have changed and a current schedule of classes, appointments, etc., no longer works, students should speak with their advisor.

After missing 2 appointments or classes, a student review meeting between a student's Advisor, Instructor(s), and the Regional Director will occur to discuss continued participation in the program and any extenuating circumstances.

In some cases, VAL staff may decide to pause instruction until a student is able to commit to attending classes. When students are ready, they should contact the center to start the re-engagement process and resume classes. Thank you for helping us to make our services available to as many students as possible. Please understand that we aim to support all of our students in achieving their goals. If the current time is not ideal, for some that might mean a brief pause. Whenever the time is right for you - we will be here!

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF YOU

Cell Phones and Other Devices

We encourage limited to no use of cell phones or social media while in a class or training as they can be distracting for other learners and detract from your own educational experience. We understand circumstances arise where you may need your cell phone, and we ask that any cell phone use, such as phone calls, be conducted minimally and occur outside the classroom. Cell phone use is not permitted during assessments.

Recording and Photography

To protect the privacy and security of all students, staff, and visitors, unauthorized photography and audio or video recording are strictly prohibited both in-person and during remote classes or meetings. Students must obtain explicit permission from all parties involved before recording any class, meeting, or conversation.

Conduct

Learners are expected to behave with courtesy and respect at all times. This includes refraining from behavior that interferes with learning at our centers, during virtual interactions (online classes, meetings with Ed Advisors, etc.), or during off-site training and field trips, or threatens the safety or well-being of learners and staff.

If a student is inappropriate or disruptive, the Teacher may ask them to leave. In virtual classrooms, the Teacher may mute or disconnect disruptive parties from the video call. The Teacher may want to first check in with the student via a personal chat message or give a warning at their discretion.

Dress Code

Learners are expected to dress and groom themselves appropriately. Each student is expected to keep themselves and their clothing presentable. Sleep and loungewear are discouraged. Footwear and shirts must be worn. Clothing or accessories with slogans, symbols, or displays regarding drugs, alcohol, sex, obscenities, or gangs are prohibited. Please speak with your instructor or Ed Advisor if you have specific questions.

Drug-Free Environment

VAL centers, including satellite sites and off-site field trips and training locations, are drug-free environments. All learners are expected to come to the centers, online courses, or any affiliated location drug-free and not in possession of drugs or alcohol. A learner suspected to be under the influence may be asked to leave or may be dismissed from class (in-person or online) immediately.

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF YOU

Smoking and Vaping

All VAL Centers are smoke-free campuses. Smoking or use of tobacco products is not permitted in our centers. Any VAL-sponsored activities taking place at an off-site location must adhere to the location's smoking policies.

Harassment

Harassment is an illegal form of discrimination based on a person's sex, race, ethnicity, age, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. Actions, words, jokes, or comments based on these characteristics will not be tolerated. If you believe you are the target of harassment, please contact a staff member immediately (either in person or by phone, e-mail, or mail). See also "Complaint and Appeal Procedure" below.

Privacy

FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) is a Federal law that is administered by the Family Policy Compliance Office in the U.S. Department of Education. 20 U.S.C.

*1232g;34 CFR Part 99. FERPA guidelines are provided to students upon registration and enrollment. There may be times when teachers must contact learners at home by phone or mail. Please let your teacher know if you do not want to be contacted at home. FERPA rights apply to those 18 years and older. Minors may have their information disclosed to a parent or guardian.

Mandated Reporting of Abuse

Please be aware that VAL takes the position that the staff at the centers are mandated reporters of abuse and neglect for protected classes of people (children, the elderly, and people with certain disabilities). If information of this type is disclosed, staff members do not have a choice about reporting, regardless of a learner's desire or request.

Visitors

Visitors to the VAL centers are welcome to wait for students in the reception area. Any visitors stopping at an offsite location are permitted unless they are serving as a distraction to other learners, in which case they must remain outside the classroom in a neutral waiting area. For OLC students, instructors may choose to mute or remove participants to limit distractions for other learners.

Weapons

For the safety of all staff and students, no weapons are allowed on learning center property or at offsite locations during VAL-sponsored activities. This includes all guns, knives, mace, and hazardous materials. Any learner bringing weapons onto VAL property or other sites of services provided by Vermont Adult Learning will be asked to remove the weapon from the premises immediately.

SERVICES TO SUPPORT YOU

Community Resources

We work closely with a variety of local community resources that may be useful in helping you address obstacles to your education, such as lack of transportation or childcare. Please talk with your teacher or educational advisor about these. The United Ways of Vermont offer a resource directory that can be accessed online at vermont211.org or by simply calling 2-1-1 and speaking with an operator.

Language Access

Students who come to VAL will be assessed to ensure their language access needs are identified and responded to in a timely manner. If language access supports are needed (e.g. screen reader, relay service, screen magnification software, interpreter services, etc.), VAL staff will help arrange for those supports as soon as reasonably possible.

Complaint and Appeal Procedure

We strive to make your experience with us as positive and productive as possible, but there may be times when you feel you are not being treated fairly or appropriately. In these circumstances, we encourage you to take advantage of the following methods to register a complaint or appeal a decision:

1. Speak directly with staff to attempt to resolve issues informally.
1. If that does not resolve this issue, please contact the Regional Director at your Learning Center. An informal resolution and a hearing are to be completed within 60 days of the filing of the grievance or complaint.
2. If that does not resolve this issue, please contact appeals@vtadulthoodlearning.org or write to:

Executive Director
Vermont Adult Learning
77 College Street Ste 100
Burlington, VT 05401

Should you feel that your complaint has not been resolved and is Civil Rights related, you have the right to file a written complaint with the Civil Rights Commission within 180 days of the alleged discrimination. This can be mailed to:

Director
Civil Rights Center
ATTENTION: Office of External Enforcement
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room N-4123
Washington, DC 20210

SERVICES TO SUPPORT YOU

Disability Services

VAL centers are handicapped accessible. Our staff are trained educators who can accommodate a variety of learning styles in classroom and other instructional settings. Learners will be asked at intake if they require reasonable accommodations for specific disabilities or learning/testing needs.

The following accommodations are considered universal practices at VAL:

- Whenever possible, provide high-interest learning opportunities and/or self-designed learning plans.
- Create clear, consistent expectations for attendance and criteria for completing assignments.
- Allow extended time to complete assignments (this may result in an extended completion date).
- Provide assistance with assignment organization and presentation, as needed.
- Capability to create 504 to provide accommodations for national testing such as GED.

Please talk with your Teacher, Advisor, Student Support Specialist, or the Workforce Development Program Manager if you think you qualify for an accommodation or modification in instruction or testing.

Internet & Computer Use

Computer access is an important tool in today's learning environment. We strive to make this technology available to students. Every VAL center is equipped with computers and free Wi-Fi is available to enrolled students. Students may bring in personal laptops or technology to use for academic purposes. If you do not have the necessary personal technology available, VAL may lend Chromebooks to qualified students. Students must sign a computer use agreement provided during orientation.

VAL schoolwork may be printed free of charge. We require appropriate use of computers as part of a respectful environment. VAL computers are to be used for students' academic work only. Social media sites, sites with pornography, and downloads are prohibited on VAL computers and over VAL wifi. If you need any assistance or have specific questions, please ask VAL staff.

Transportation

VAL policy prohibits staff from providing transportation to students in personal vehicles. It is the learner's responsibility to make his or her own transportation plans. Student carpooling is encouraged. If you have difficulty securing transportation, please speak with a VAL staff member.