A Workforce Readiness Credential Based on Equipped for the Future
Dear Prospective Partner:

The following prospectus describes NIFL's plan to work with state and national partners to develop a workforce readiness credential based on Equipped for the Future.

In the last few years there has been a growing interest within both the adult education and workforce investment system in developing a workforce readiness credential that directly targets the range of skills that are critical to employment success. We envision this credential as a bridge between the world of education and the world of work, a “ticket” or “passport” that enables adults coming into the workforce system with divergent histories—
• welfare recipients coming into the workforce for the first time,
• dislocated workers seeking to qualify for new jobs, and
• immigrants from other countries who want to demonstrate what they can do in this country
—to demonstrate their readiness to enter that system, and to move along a number of career pathways to earn more advanced credentials and to qualify for better jobs.

If you would like to join us as a partner in this effort please contact me at sstein@nifl.gov or 202-233-2041. If you would like more information about EFF, please visit our web site at www.nifl.gov then click on the EFF logo.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sondra G. Stein, Director, Equipped for the Future
A Workforce Readiness Credential Based on Equipped for the Future

The current and future health of America’s 21st Century Economy depends directly on how broadly and deeply Americans reach a new level of literacy—21st Century Literacy—that includes strong academic skills, thinking, reasoning, teamwork skills, and proficiency in using technology.

—A Nation of Opportunity: Building America’s 21st Century Workforce

The Problem

In the last few years dozens of programs have sprung up across the country aimed at building work readiness skills for one or another group of potential job seekers—including young people, TANF recipients, and new immigrants coming into the American workforce for the first time. Yet employers continue to report difficulty in finding workers that have the skills necessary to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace:

• A 1999 American Management Association report found that “more than a third of job applicants nationwide lack the basic math and reading skills to do the jobs they are seeking.”

• A Conference Board report in the same year found that “throughout the U.S. private- and public-sector companies are facing the problem of a workforce severely lacking in workplace basic skills.”

• A National Association of Manufacturers report on The Skills Gap 2001 concludes that “…more than 80 percent of manufacturers report a shortage of qualified job candidates despite the recession in manufacturing and the economic downturn overall…. [with] some 60% of manufacturers having difficulty maintaining the production levels necessary to meet demand,
[while] 40 percent report that they cannot implement new productivity improvements.  

**An Answer**

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) proposes to respond to this critical problem by joining with state and national workforce development partners to develop a work readiness credential that directly measures the range of skills that are critical to employment success and, as a result, accurately signals the skills mastery of job applicants.

Based on NIFL’s nationally validated Equipped for the Future Standards, the Credential will provide a credible and portable tool for defining, measuring, and certifying mastery of those skills and abilities workers need in the 21st century workplace. The EFF Work Readiness Credential will benefit employers, jobseekers, and the adult basic education and workforce development systems that try to bring them together. With this new credential:

- Employers can be sure that a job applicant who comes to their door is ready to work and ready to learn job-specific technical skills.
- New workers, returning workers, and transitioning workers of any age, from any background, can feel confident that they are prepared to meet the challenges ahead.
- Workforce Investment Boards can define a clear set of results they expect from education and training vendors in the system.
- Education and training programs and curriculum developers can design courses of instruction that are intended to prepare adult students to qualify for this credential, in the same way that courses of instruction are now designed to prepare adults to pass the GED.
- One Stop Centers can accurately assess the readiness of jobseekers for employment.

By making clear what skills and knowledge are necessary for success, an EFF-based workforce readiness credential can help align supply and demand across the workforce system, achieving better results for employers and workers. Employers can count on the workforce they need to enhance productivity and competitiveness. Jobseekers coming into the workforce system from a variety of pathways will be able to demonstrate their readiness—not only to enter that system, but also to move along a number of career pathways to earn more advanced credentials and to qualify for better jobs.
In this way, an EFF work readiness credential can be a door that opens the way to life long learning.

**Proposed Action Plan to Build the Work Readiness Credential**

**STEP 1. Identify partners to work with NIFL to build this partnership.**
This proposal has been developed based on discussions conducted at the EFF National Policy Group in October 2001 and March 2002, and during a small, two-day planning meeting that included NIFL partners—from Pennsylvania, Texas, and the National Retail Federation/Sales and Service Voluntary Partnership—who expressed an interest in working with us to develop such a credential.

Technical work on the development of the credential will be undertaken through a partnership of SRI International and HumRRO under the auspices of the EFF Assessment Consortium.

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the EFF Assessment Consortium are actively seeking state and national partners in this development effort.

**STEP 2. Build consensus on standards and benchmarks for a work readiness credential.**
The goal is to create a single work readiness credential, at a single level. What is the appropriate benchmark for this credential? NIFL is depending upon its partners to help us determine the range and level of skilled performances to be certified by the work readiness credential.

The EFF Assessment Consortium will draft a set of proposed benchmarks, drawing on the work already done to create skill standards by national and state groups, including the Sales and Service Voluntary Partnership, and the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council.

Partner states will involve employers, workers and unions in responding to these proposed benchmarks, so that we can be sure that the credential meets their needs. Once the Consortium has analyzed feedback from participating

*(continued on page 6)*
EFF Work Readiness Credential

The EFF Work Readiness Credential will certify that an individual who has earned the credential is ready to:

### Key Activities in EFF Worker Role Map

#### DO THE WORK

- **Organize, plan and prioritize work**
  - Use technology, resources and other work tools to put ideas and work directions into action
  - Respond to and meet new work challenges
  - Take responsibility for assuring work quality, safety and results

#### WORK WITH OTHERS

- Communicate with others inside and outside the organization
- Give assistance, motivation, and direction
- Seek and receive assistance, support, motivation and direction
- Value people different from yourself

### Use these EFF Standards and PA Win Foundation Skills to Carry Out

- **EFF Communication Skills**
- Use Information and Communications Technology
- Plan
- Manage Time Effectively

- Solve Problems and Makes Decisions
- Locate and Use Resources
- Use Information and Communications Technology
- Cooperate With Others
- EFF Communication Skills

- Plan
- Take Responsibility for Learning
- Reflect and Evaluate
- Manage Change

- Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- Demonstrates Quality Consciousness
- Applies Health and Safety Concepts
- Learn Through Research
- Reflect and Evaluate

- Cooperates With Others
- Works Within Organizational Structure and Culture
- EFF Communication Skills

- Cooperate With Others
- Guide Others
- Provide Supervision
- Work in Teams

- Cooperate With Others
- Accepts Supervision

- Work in a Diverse Environment
- Cooperate With Others
- Resolve Conflict and Negotiate
### Use these EFF Standards and PA Win Foundation Skills to Carry Out

**Key Activities in EFF Worker Role Map**

**WORK WITHIN THE BIG PICTURE**

- **Work Within Organizational Structure and Culture**
- Understand One’s Role in the Organization
- Use Communication Structures in Organization
- Observe Critically
- Learn Through Research
- Reflect and Evaluate

- **Work within Organizational Structure and Culture**
- Understands Organizational Power Structure
- Understands Process and Product
- Learn Through Research
- Use Information and Communications Technology
- Understands Process and Product Communication Skills

- **Work Within Organizational Structure and Culture**
- Manage Change
- Advocate and Influence
- Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate
- Understand Finance
- EFF Communication Skills*

- **Understands Organization’s Role Within Larger Economy**
- Demonstrate Quality Consciousness
- Learn Through Research

**PLAN AND MANAGE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

- **Solve Problems and Make Decisions**
- Plan
- Manages Time Effectively
- Manages Stress

- **Demonstrate Quality Consciousness**
- Cooperate With Others
- Display Responsible Work Behaviors

- **Take Responsibility for Learning**
- Manage Change

- **Take Responsibility for Learning**
- Learn Through Research
- Manage Change

*EFF Communication Skills include: Read With Understanding, Convey Ideas in Writing, Speak So Others Can Understand, Listen Actively and Observe Critically.
states, a Policy Board composed of representatives from all development partners, will meet to agree on what standards and what benchmarks are critical to a credible, portable work readiness credential.

In a global labor market that spans countries and states as well as communities, employers and workers both benefit from a portable credential, based on a commonly defined threshold of work readiness. While gaining the advantages such a credential provides, local workforce development partners will be able to supplement the credential, if desired, with additional measures appropriate to their local labor market.

**STEP 3. Build consensus on specifications for the work readiness certification process and delivery system.**

At the same time we are building consensus on the content of the EFF Work Readiness Credential, we will also be working with our partners to develop design specifications for how, where, and under what conditions the credential assessment process should occur in order to meet the multiple purposes of partners most effectively.

In preliminary discussions we have established the goal of certifying performance through an assessment that:

- focuses on application of skills and knowledge in work-appropriate contexts;
- is flexible and modular, allowing for local customization;
- is delivered by computer in settings that are “certified” as meeting criteria we establish;
- can be easily scored; and
- is supplemented by a portfolio that documents the applicant's work history and past efforts to “plan and direct personal and professional growth.”

As we work with partners to further specify this goal, we can also begin to think about where assessment should take place (One Stop Centers, community colleges, other education and training centers) and what kinds of materials we will need to develop to support system implementation.

**STEP 4. Identify and develop assessment instruments to measure attainment of the certificate, and field test to determine their validity as measures of job success.**

Once we have determined the range and level of skilled performances the work
readiness credential will certify, the Assessment Consortium will identify and/or develop a set of assessments that are keyed to the new certificate.

Partner states will work with the Consortium to identify sites to field test assessment instruments and assure that they can be reliably used to measure the right skills, knowledge, and abilities.

The certifying assessments will be supplemented by a system of instructionally embedded assessments which can be used by programs preparing adults to qualify for the credential.

**STEP 5. Develop, field test and implement the work-readiness certification system.**

Once all design work has been completed on the components of the work readiness certification system, we will be ready to develop marketing and other support materials for the users and customers of the credential—including employers, Workforce Investment Boards, and education and training providers and to design and implement a process for field, expert and stakeholder review.

The review process will include a small-scale pilot of the credential in representative sites to assure that it meets quality criteria for validity, practicality, and fairness.

The field test will focus specifically on the following quality concerns:

- Field test with employers to assess whether holders of the certificate actually possess the knowledge and skills employers seek and expect.
- Field test within state workforce development systems to see how well various stakeholders understand and are able to use the certificate.
- Field test with practitioners to assess how easy/difficult it is to construct instructional programs to prepare adults for the certificate.

This field test will be the first stage of a longitudinal evaluation to determine the progress of adults who earned the credential in pursuing personal growth and development and in gaining and maintaining employment.
### ESTIMATED SCHEDULE FOR DEVELOPMENT:

**Total Development Time: 30 months**

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Development begins:

1. (Month 1 to Month 6)
2. (Month 1 to Month 6)
3. (Month 6 to Month 19)
4. (Month 20 to Month 30)

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4. Jerry Jasinowski (2002). *The skills gap 2001* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Manufacturers) p. 1. According to this survey “The major areas of concern have shifted from technology skills back to the fundamentals, with basic employability skills cited as the number one deficiency for both current hourly workers and applicants for hourly positions. Poor reading, writing, math and communication skills were also significant concerns.”
**Background:**

Advantages of Basing a Work Readiness Credential on EFF

Equipped for the Future presents a strong, research-based, customer-driven foundation for a new Work Readiness Credential.

- **Employers and workers from across the country worked with NIFL to define the EFF Worker Role Map—a picture of what effective workers do in a high performance workplace.** The EFF Worker Role Map represents an easy to understand picture of what effective workers do in a high performance workplace. It was developed through a structured feedback process involving workers and employers at every level in health care, hospitality, retail, and manufacturing. Our goal in involving a wide range of workers in this process was to create a cross-industry picture of what workers do. Defining broad categories of work responsibility and critical activities that workers perform to meet these responsibilities was the first critical step in our effort to identify the knowledge and skills adults need to be effective in their role as workers.

To assure that the picture of worker performance that resulted from this process was congruent with other major government workforce initiatives, our starting place was research conducted by the USDOL under the auspices of the Secretary’s Commission on Assessing Necessary Skills (SCANS) and the O*NET Project.

- **The EFF Worker Role Map was the starting point for defining the EFF Content Standards. The Worker Role Map and Standards will be the starting point for defining our new EFF Work Readiness Credential.** In January 2000 NIFL published *EFF Content Standards: What Adults Need to Know and Be Able to do in the 21st Century*. The 16 EFF Standards represent the core knowledge and skills adults need to be able to use in order to be effective not only in their role as workers—but in their roles as parents/family members and citizens/community members. Because the EFF Worker Role Map represents a consensus picture of performance and is supported by a nationally validated set of content standards, it is an appropriate starting point for defining a portable, national work readiness certificate.
Equipped for the Future Standards are the foundation for customer-driven workforce development efforts across the country. Equipped for the Future Standards have already been linked to the Customer Service Standards developed by the Sales and Service Voluntary Partnership, and are being used to prepare jobseekers to meet those standards in retail skill centers established by the National Retail Foundation in five states. EFF Standards also have been embedded in Pennsylvania’s Workplace Foundation Skills, the common ground for customized workplace education programs designed by Pennsylvania’s Workforce Improvement Network (PA Win).

Equipped for the Future Standards have been adopted as statewide learning results for both adult education and workforce investment programs. Hawaii, Maine, Ohio, New Jersey, and Washington are among the states that have already adopted the EFF Standards to define desired outcomes for Even Start, adult basic education, and workforce investment systems. EFF is currently working with USED’s OVAE to align assessment of the EFF Standards with the National Reporting System (NRS) for Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. In anticipation of the completion of this work (July 2003), 20 other states have begun the process of integrating EFF into their instructional and professional development systems.

Equipped for the Future Standards build workforce readiness because they provide a direct link between curriculum and instruction and achievement of real-world outcomes. Practitioners in states all across the country have found that the EFF Content Framework and Standards help them more systematically to focus instruction on the real world goals that bring adult learners to adult education programs. EFF professional development grounds practitioners in cognitive science research on how adults learn and develop expertise. As a result data from both teachers and program administrators show that students in EFF classrooms are more likely to use knowledge and skills outside of instructional settings, and to persist until they achieve their learning goals.

An Equipped for the Future Work Readiness Credential will assess performance of complex tasks of the sort that are required in the workplace today. The EFF Standards focus on application of knowledge and skills. The EFF approach to assessment of those standards takes advantage of advances in cognitive science research, psychometrics, and technology that enable measurement of cognitively complex behaviors.
The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) is an independent federal organization that is leading the national effort toward a fully literate America. By fostering communication, collaboration, and innovation, NIFL helps build and strengthen national, regional, and state literacy systems that can better serve adults in the 21st century.

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Secretary of Health and Human Services, **Tommy G. Thompson**
Secretary of Labor, **Elaine L. Chao**

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