



New Toolkit Equips Higher Education Leaders for a Rapid Response to Better Serve Displaced Workers

Washington, D.C. (March 15, 2020) — Today, Education Strategy Group (ESG) released a [new resource](#) to help higher education leaders prioritize and commit to strategies for urgent reskilling of workers displaced by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Rapid Response Toolkit*—the first major resource produced as part of ESG’s [Accelerating Recovery through Credentials initiative](#)—contains practical advice and tools for institutional and state decision makers to plan for and execute on strategic actions for quickly supporting displaced workers, as learners, to obtain the skills needed to transition into careers of the new economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the American economy and displaced millions of adult workers. Even more troubling, the impact of the pandemic has been entirely inequitable, with those holding fewer credentials, women, and people of color experiencing the highest rates of job loss and displacement. Coming out of the Great Recession, we learned that the changing workplace requires workers to have skills, signaled by postsecondary credentials, to build successful careers. An unprecedented number of American workers will need to find ways to transition or expand on their existing skills and credentials to enter new jobs and careers.

Bold and urgent actions at the state and institutional levels are critical to meet the immediate needs of displaced workers and, perhaps most importantly, to eliminate equity gaps and increase educational attainment for Hispanic and Black communities. In order to equitably recover from the pandemic and economic crisis, decision makers must commit to taking urgent action to reimagine education delivery systems. Through a compilation of best practices for skill acquisition and rapid credentialing and an actionable plan for supporting them, there is significant opportunity for impactful change.

“We are at a critical inflection point for both immediate recovery and the long-term economic prospects for millions of Americans,” said Matt Gandal, President and CEO of Education Strategy Group. “As displaced workers seek reskilling and retraining in order to get back to work, it is incumbent upon higher education and state leadership to act quickly, communicate the value of enrolling in higher education to reskill, and build plans that ensure these learners are served effectively, with systems and resources designed to meet their unique needs and set them on a path to success.”

ESG’s [Rapid Response Toolkit](#) is intended to identify important strategies to help reskill displaced workers, help build urgency among leaders, and expedite plans for implementing reskilling responses. Designed to guide institutional and state leaders through a process for immediately meeting the reskilling needs of adult learners, especially those displaced by the pandemic, the planning process laid out in the *Toolkit* begins with the identification of priority focus areas, including:

- Making postsecondary education financially possible
- Redesigning programs of study to meet reskilling students where they are
- Promoting reskilling through outreach
- Onboarding for purpose and acceleration
- Supporting students holistically



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Leaders will identify a set of activities for immediate action and ultimately build a *Rapid Response Action Plan* that clearly identifies a set of activities, milestones, and timelines. The *Toolkit* describes key strategic actions that both institutional and state leaders should consider applying within their contexts as they build their action plans.

“Adult learners are ready to engage in a post-pandemic economy. Employers are ready for them,” said Lee Lambert, Chancellor of Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona. “The *Toolkit* will guide institutions as they pivot to meet the need for accelerated credentialing and provide the necessary resources for learners to succeed in this new educational environment.”

The [*Rapid Response Toolkit*](#) is part of a larger initiative, [*Accelerating Recovery through Credentials*](#), led by ESG and generously supported by Ascendium Education Group and The Kresge Foundation. The initiative, informed by an expert advisory group of national, state, and institutional leaders, aims to help higher education institutions and states develop the systems and structures needed to better serve adult learners. Later this spring, ESG will release the [*Accelerating Recovery through Credentials Playbook*](#), which will help leaders take a more comprehensive and transformational approach to better serving multifaceted adult learners, across varying educational experiences, skill sets, experience levels, and backgrounds — beyond the immediate scope of reskilling displaced workers. Together, the *Toolkit* and the *Playbook* are intended to promote policy and practice that support adult acquisition of postsecondary credentials that lead to jobs with a family-sustaining wage and promote economic recovery in a post-COVID-19 context.

The full *Toolkit* is available [here](#). Please contact Kelly Van Beveren at kvanbeveren@edstrategy.org with questions.

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About Education Strategy Group

Education Strategy Group (ESG) works with America’s education, business, and civic leaders to expand economic opportunity and mobility by increasing educational attainment. We are driven by the conviction that a robust education system aligned with workforce demands leads to a stronger, more equitable society.