ESG | Education Strategy Group

Rapid Response Toolkit

Resources to help leaders prioritize and commit to strategies for urgent reskilling

Thank you to the organizations and institutions who participated in interviews:

American Association of Retired Persons

Achieving the Dream

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California Department of Labor

California State University System

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Coalition on Adult Basic Education

Colorado Workforce Development Office

Competency-Based Education Network

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Education Design Lab

Future Built

Graduate! Network

Institute for Higher Education Policy

Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Job for the Future

Louisiana Community and Technical College System

Migration Policy Institute

Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Mississippi Institutes of Higher Learning

Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development

Nashville Chamber of Commerce

North Carolina A&T State University

Norco College

National Survey on Student Engagement Institute

Oklahoma State Board of Regents

Portland Community College

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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.

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Accelerating Recovery Through Credentials

With the generous support from Ascendium Education Group and The Kresge Foundation, Education Strategy Group is leading *Accelerating Recovery through Credentials*, an initiative to develop a scalable policy and practice framework with accompanying guides—this *Rapid Response Toolkit* and the subsequent *Accelerating Recovery through Credentials (ARC) Playbook*—that will help higher education institutions and states develop the systems and structures needed to better serve adult learners. Together, the *Toolkit* and the *Playbook* are intended to promote acquisition of postsecondary credentials of value that lead to jobs with a family-sustaining wage and promote economic recovery in a post-COVID-19 context.

The *Rapid Response Toolkit* will equip decisionmakers with the resources and evidence to focus their attention and quickly act on strategies to assist workers and learners that have been displaced by the pandemic. The focus areas and strategies in this Toolkit have been prioritized based on their likelihood to target, leverage, teach, and support those who have their careers displaced by the pandemic. They are also chosen based on their ability to be implemented quickly and efficiently by higher education leaders.

The *ARC Playbook* will help leaders take a more holistic and reform-minded approach to better serving adult learners. Expanding beyond the scope of reskilling displaced workers, it will synthesize existing exemplary state and institutional policies and practices to refocus education and training systems to meet the needs of a very diverse population of adult learners (re)entering education with a wide range and variance in skills. These include reforming data systems to better track and account for adult learners, tackling program design and teaching and learning practices, building support systems and structures with adults in mind, and more.

Accelerating Recovery through Credentials will serve as a resource for action, supporting state higher education systems and institutional leaders with resources and tools enabling adult learners to effectively thrive within a post-pandemic economy.

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the American economy and displaced millions of adult workers. Bold actions at the state and institutional levels are critical to meet the immediate needs of displaced workers and, perhaps most importantly, to close equity gaps and increase educational attainment for Hispanic and Black communities. In order to equitably recover from the pandemic and economic crisis, decisionmakers must commit to taking urgent action to reimagine institutions of higher education and their 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.

This toolkit provides practical advice and tools for institutional and state decisionmakers to plan for and execute on strategies for quickly supporting displaced workers, as learners, to obtain the skills needed to transition into careers of the new economy. Leaders in both state and institutional contexts should digest the focus areas and strategies and then walk through the three core steps of this toolkit described below to build a plan for immediate action using the ***Rapid Response Action Plan*** provided. The optimal use of this toolkit is intended to help build urgency and expedite the process to plan reskilling responses, so that leaders can move swiftly to action. Once an initial plan is in place, we hope you return to the toolkit and continue to build on your success for more long-term results.

Our ***Rapid Response Planning Process*** has three core tasks:

✓ TASK 1:

Prioritize Your Reskilling Focus Areas.

Choose a limited number of areas to devote your immediate attention. We present five to consider that span the entire student experience. These five focus areas include:

Focus Area #1:
MAKE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
FINANCIALLY POSSIBLE

Focus Area #2:
REDESIGN PROGRAMS OF STUDY TO MEET RESKILLING
STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

Focus Area #3:
PROMOTE RESKILLING THROUGH OUTREACH

Focus Area #4:
ONBOARD FOR PURPOSE & ACCELERATION

Focus Area #5:
SUPPORT STUDENTS HOLISTICALLY

✓ TASK 2:

Review and Reflect on Strategic Actions.

Select an appropriate, aggressive, and achievable number of strategic actions to take. Within each focus area there is a subset of evidence-based strategic actions and corresponding examples. Reflection questions are provided at the bottom of each section. Use your answers to the reflection questions to build rationale and plot your next steps.

The most high-value institutional actions include:

- ✓ Maximize the ability to access and leverage Federal Title IV aid;
- ✓ Reorder degree pathways to front-load embedded non-degree credentials;
- ✓ Adapt message delivery mechanisms to account for COVID-19 contexts;
- ✓ Leverage real-time labor market information to support key decisions about programs of study; and
- ✓ Provide a single point of access to wrap-around supports.

The most high-value state actions include:

- ✓ Ensure state aid works for reskilling adult students;
- ✓ Prioritize allocation of federal stimulus resources to reskilling;
- ✓ Implement debt and loan amnesty policies; and
- ✓ Promote braiding of state and federal resources.

Policy actions at the state and institution levels can and should function in tandem, whether in parallel or independently.

✓ TASK 3:

Commit to a Plan.

Agree and commit to a set of activities and make a plan for implementing immediately. If you have identified priorities and reflected on actions, you've done your due diligence and are ready to set a plan in motion. Using your ***Rapid Response Action Plan***, set a course toward implementation with early milestones and an urgent implementation timeline that ranges from one month to one year.

Key resources and links on best practices are provided throughout the document and aggregated in the appendix.

The Need For A Rapid Response

In March 2020, amidst massive displacement and disruption as a result of COVID-19, a 34-year-old mother of two young children was laid off from her hospitality job. She no longer had income and her health insurance would shortly lapse. As tourists stopped traveling, the hospitality industry collapsed in her small town. With only a high school diploma and few jobs now available in her field, how would she find employment to pay her rent and provide for her children? This scenario has and continues to play out as the COVID-19 pandemic devastates the American economy. The crisis displaced millions of adult workers and experts suggest it will take at least two years to recover.[1]

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. Across the United States, over 100 million working aged adults do not hold any postsecondary credentials. Specifically, there are 29 million adults without a high school diploma, 63 million with just a high school diploma, and 36 million with some college but no degree.[2] Even individuals with college degrees have experienced significant job loss due to the collapse of industries during the pandemic. Job loss has been particularly acute for adults with no or few credentials, who lack the tools needed to pursue alternative career paths or job opportunities. 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.

What if higher education seized this opportunity to signal to displaced workers and potential adult learners that institutions can serve their needs and support a smooth transition back into the workforce in an accelerated fashion?
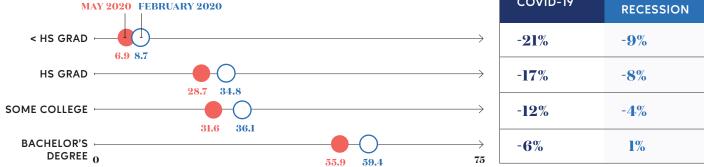
The displaced mother of two would be met where she is with a rapid response to her need; an outreach campaign finds its way to her and within weeks she is enrolled in an affordable certificate program that takes into account her existing skills and puts her on track to obtain a credential that will yield a job in a high-wage, in-demand field, and with stacking additional coursework, could lead to a degree.

Workers without any college education are affected more, but the COVID-19 downturn has also left many college graudates without a job

EMPLOYED WORKERS, IN MILLIONS

% LOSS IN …

	COVID-19	THE GREAT RECESSION
< HS GRAD	-21%	-9%
HS GRAD	-17%	-8%
SOME COLLEGE	-12%	-4%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE	-6%	1%

MAY 2020 · FEBRUARY 2020

< HS GRAD: 6.9 · 8.7
HS GRAD: 28.7 · 34.8
SOME COLLEGE: 31.6 · 36.1
BACHELOR'S DEGREE: 55.9 · 59.4

NOTE: Estimates refer to employed workers ages 25 and older, nonseaonally adjusted. Estimates for 2007 and 2009 refer to the fourth quarter of each year. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree, those who attended college but did not obtain a degree and those who attended technical, trade or vocational school.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

At least one study suggests the existence of an expanding skills mismatch among workers even prior to the pandemic.[3] But ultimately, American adult workers, particularly those that have been displaced during the pandemic, want to gain the necessary skills and obtain credentials to work in our new economic reality. Surveys of these workers indicate a significant number are interested in enrolling in higher education to accomplish this, specifically through skills training (39 percent) or a non-degree credential (24 percent).[4] However, data show that higher education enrollments have not reflected the evident need and demand among adult workers for credentials. The National Student Clearinghouse reports that as of October 2020, college enrollments across all age groups, including those age 25 and above, have declined significantly compared to the enrollments from the previous year, with significant and disproportionate declines occurring based on race/ethnicity.[5]

This is unsurprising, given that adult or "post-traditional" learners are especially wary of the opportunity cost of enrolling; this is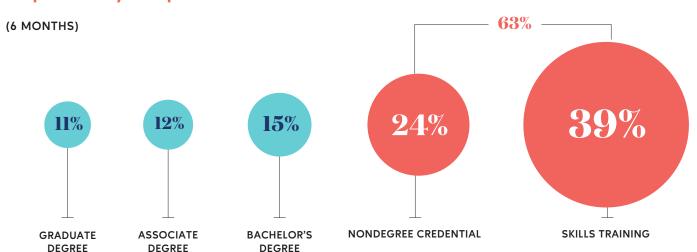 particularly acute for those with some college but no degree, who often believe the education system has failed them in the past.[6] Potential learners do not feel they can be successful and/or they question the value of postsecondary credentials to their economic prospects.[7] With cost of attendance, ill-fitting programs of study, poor onboarding, and lack of awareness and holistic support, post-traditional learners of varying skills and backgrounds face consistent, systemic barriers to college enrollment and success.

Institutional disruption and adaptation of existing delivery modes of higher education is critical to meet the immediate needs of displaced workers and, perhaps most importantly, to close equity gaps and increase educational attainment for Hispanic and Black communities. **In order to equitably recover from the pandemic and economic crises, decisionmakers must commit to taking urgent action to reimagine institutions of higher education and their education delivery systems.**

The truth is that institutions, particularly those currently serving a high proportion of diverse and multi-generational learners, can and should serve as societal engines of economic opportunity and success in times of crisis. Higher education is the best hope of millions of adults to secure, return to, or arrive at the American Dream.[8] Evidence exists on best practices, approaches, and strategies for how colleges can serve as the nexus for career transition. However these resources generally exist among disparate, siloed locales or spheres of influence, and are not immediately responsive to the pandemic or the needs of displaced workers. Despite pockets of excellence in policy and practice as it relates to adult learners, there is no landmark publication or comprehensive set of best-in-class strategies to serve this demographically and experientially diverse group.

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. **This toolkit provides practical advice and tools for institutional and state decisionmakers to plan for and execute on strategies for quickly supporting displaced workers, as learners, to obtain the skills needed to transition into the careers of the new economy.** This toolkit also provides high-level guidance to policymakers seeking to create conditions favorable to adult learners.

Preferred education option for those who have been displaced by the pandemic

(6 MONTHS)

63%

11% GRADUATE DEGREE

12% ASSOCIATE DEGREE

15% BACHELOR'S DEGREE

24% NONDEGREE CREDENTIAL

39% SKILLS TRAINING

Source: Strada Education Network

How To Use This Toolkit

The *Rapid Response Toolkit* is designed to guide you through a process for immediately meeting the reskilling needs of adult learners, especially those displaced by the pandemic. From figuring out your key priorities in reskilling to creating your *Rapid Response Action Plan*, the toolkit will prepare you to hit the ground running — quickly and efficiently taking strategic action to increase enrollments among adult workers and help current adult students better persist and complete in-demand credentials. While this plan is intended to address the urgent needs of displaced workers, once it is in place, we hope you will return to the guide and continue to build on your success for more long-term results.

Leaders in both state and institutional contexts should digest the focus areas and strategies then walk through the three core steps of this toolkit described below. With a designated team, leverage the resources and tools to build a plan for immediate action using the *__Rapid Response Action Plan__* template at the end of the toolkit. As you work through each step, use the template to note which focus areas and strategic actions you intend to prioritize for implementation. **While this planning process is important, it is recommended that institutions and states take no more than two months to engage in this process. The optimal use of this toolkit is to expedite the overall planning process so that leaders can move swiftly to action.** Moreover, these tools should be used to enhance existing strategic planning processes and structures; they should not be a one and done task, but given consideration as part of continuous improvement processes.

Our *Rapid Response Planning Process* suggests three core tasks:

✅ TASK 1:

Prioritize Your Reskilling Focus Areas.

Choose a limited number of areas to devote your immediate attention. We present five to consider that span the entire student experience. Some focus areas are tied to specific student experiences and others promote general conditions for student success. These five focus areas include:

Focus Area #1:
MAKE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FINANCIALLY POSSIBLE

Focus Area #2:
REDESIGN PROGRAMS OF STUDY TO MEET RESKILLING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

Focus Area #3:
PROMOTE RESKILLING THROUGH OUTREACH

Focus Area #4:
ONBOARD FOR PURPOSE & ACCELERATION

Focus Area #5:
SUPPORT STUDENTS HOLISTICALLY

✅ TASK 2:

Review and Reflect on Strategic Actions.

Select an appropriate, aggressive, and achievable number of strategic actions to take. Within each focus area there is a subset of evidence-based strategic actions and corresponding examples to review. Reflect on and reference the questions at the bottom of each section. It is recommended that this reflection process be informed by labor market information, so that changes to programs, supports and policies are attentive to in-demand occupations and industries. Use your answers to the reflection questions to build rationale and plot your next steps.

- **STRATEGIC INSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS.** Review strategic actions for reskilling within your priority focus areas and reflect on how these actions may be implemented at your institution. Designated "high-value strategic actions" are noted as potential starting points. Record early priorities in your *__Rapid Response Action Plan__*.

- **STRATEGIC STATE ACTIONS.** Review policies for reskilling and reflect on how these actions may be implemented in your state. Record early priorities in your *__Rapid Response Action Plan__*.

✅ TASK 3:

Commit to a Plan.

Agree and commit to a set of activities and make a plan for implementing immediately. If you have identified priorities and reflected on actions, you've done your due diligence and are ready to set a plan in motion. Using your *__Rapid Response Action Plan__*, set a course toward implementation with early milestones and an urgent implementation timeline that ranges from one month to one year.

A NOTE ON THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN STATE & INSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS

The rapid reskilling of millions of Americans demands both institutional and state actors take bold action. Institutions will need new approaches to providing financial, academic and social-emotional supports in order to ensure reskillers engage and ultimately succeed in postsecondary education and training. At the same time, states play an integral role in both seeding and accelerating efforts that take place on a local level. State levers for funding and scaling of quality efforts will undoubtedly be essential for success.

While this toolkit has provided two sections of possible strategic actions — one aimed at institutional leaders and one at state leaders — we acknowledge the important relationship between state and institutional action. As such, call-out boxes have been provided in each section pointing to complementary actions that can be taken by the opposite party. **Each box includes embedded links to the opposite section, so that leaders can easily toggle between institutional and state actions.** It is recommended both institutional and state leaders consider how these actions can and should inform their own priorities.

Prioritize Your Reskilling Focus Areas

Audience

- ✓ Institutional and state leaders

Task

- ✓ Choose a limited number of priority focus areas for rapid reskilling.

- ✓ Record your priority focus areas in your ***Rapid Response Action Plan***.

Using research from the field, five focus areas have been identified that should be a part of any institution or system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. **However, recognizing that discipline is needed to rapidly respond to the needs of millions of displaced workers, it is recommended that postsecondary institutions and states initially identify no more than two priority focus areas for action.** As the implementation unfolds, other focus areas may be returned to and considered as part of the ongoing improvement process.

The focus areas identified in this toolkit have been prioritized based on their likelihood to target, leverage, teach, and support those who have been displaced by the pandemic. They are also chosen based on their ability to be implemented quickly and efficiently by leaders. They include:

Focus Area #1: Make postsecondary education financially possible through proactive and transparent communications about finances, maximization of access to Title IV aid, and braided funding.

Focus Area #2: Redesign programs of study to meet reskilling students where they are by addressing the sequencing of current courses, acceleration, and awareness of labor market relevance.

Focus Area #3: Promote reskilling through outreach by tailoring messages to meet the needs of displaced workers, tweaking marketing strategies for a COVID-19 context and using data to better target those who have been displaced.
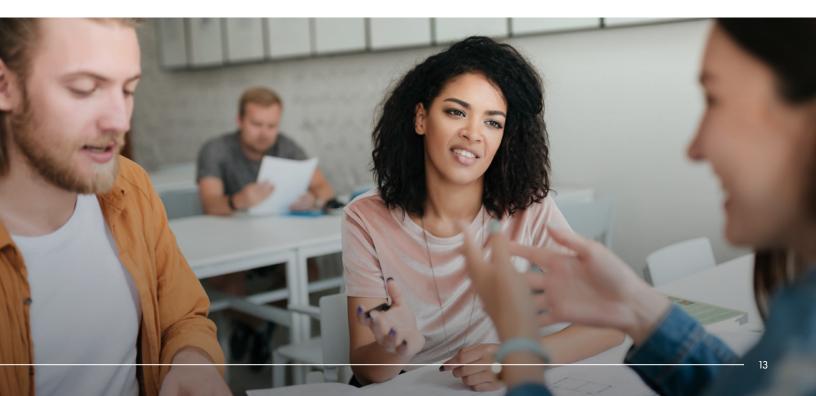
Focus Area #4: Onboard for purpose and acceleration by removing small administrative barriers to enrollment, recognizing and applying skill sets to expedite pathways, and providing opportunities for informed career decisionmaking.

Focus Area #5: Support students holistically by prioritizing tailored advising, centralized wrap-around supports, and faculty/student mentorship.

In developing your priorities, take quick stock of the programs, tools, and assets that might align with the five focus areas and can be adapted, leveraged, or scaled to meet displaced workers' reskilling needs. By building upon this foundation, you can stand up meaningful responses quickly and in a more cost effective and efficient manner.

GETTING STARTED TIP

As a place to start, prioritize either Focus Area #1 (Financial Aid) or Focus Area #3 (Outreach). Affordability is one of top reasons adult learners do not engage in postsecondary education and training.[9] These concerns are only exacerbated for those who have lost income as a result of the pandemic. Therefore, it is critical that both states and institutions prioritize ways to increase access to information and financial resources that support college-going. Furthermore, institutions and states will not get far without speaking directly to adult learners about the value of postsecondary education. Yet evidence shows that theunderemployed and unemployed respond to very different messaging than traditional populations.[10] Adapting your messaging to speak to these audiences will be an important step in getting them to engage with additional training.

2.1: Strategic Institutional Actions

Audience

✓ Institutional leaders with state support

Task

✓ Review strategic actions for reskilling within your priority focus areas and reflect on how these actions may be implemented at your institution. Record early priorities in your *Rapid Response Action Plan*.

To jump quickly to your priority focus areas, click the links below:

- Focus Area #1: **Make Postsecondary Education Financially Possible**

- Focus Area #2: **Redesign Programs of Study to Meet Reskilling Students Where They Are**

- Focus Area #3: **Promote Reskilling Through Outreach**

- Focus Area #4: **Onboard for Purpose & Acceleration**

- Focus Area #5: **Support Students Holistically**

Focus Area #1:

Make Postsecondary Education Financially Possible

Even before adult learners set foot on a college campus, most are concerned about how they will pay for their education. This is doubly true for displaced workers dealing with lost income and the added expense of learning. Paying for postsecondary education is consistently shown to be one of the biggest concerns and barriers for adult learners. Recent research by The Graduate! Network and New America shows that finances are the largest reason adult students dropout of college.[11] To meet the financial needs of displaced workers seeking to enroll in critical skill training, institutions must build financial aid systems and solutions to ensure that costs can be addressed.

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY

Maximize the ability to access and leverage Federal Title IV aid.

While the federal financial aid system was not built with adult students in mind, it can provide a significant level of resources to pay for education. Early Title IV student aid programs were built primarily for dependent students who enrolled in college full time. While policymakers have been adjusting federal financial aid programs since the early 1990s to better serve the growing population of older, part-time, and independent learners, there is opportunity in the next reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 1965 to continue improving financial aid to these important populations.[12] Within the existing systems, however, there are several opportunities for action to help displaced workers receive financial support. These include:

- **PROVIDING HELP WITH THE FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA).** Even with efforts to streamline the FAFSA through recent federal legislation, many adult learners find it intimidating and difficult to navigate. Just as there have been concerted efforts in recent years to support FAFSA completion for traditionally-aged students, colleges and universities can develop resources to help adult learners with FAFSA completion. These can be offered through seminars, dedicated help nights, online tutorials, and free tax assistance programs like VITA.

- **ENSURING PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT IS AVAILABLE AT SCALE FOR THE RECENTLY UNEMPLOYED.** Most students aren't familiar with ways in which they can advocate for themselves for student financial aid. Data for the FAFSA requires income from prior years and for displaced workers, that picture is likely to have changed significantly. Because subsequent aid packages automatically generate from old information, most students do not know that the institutional financial aid office can exercise professional judgment to reflect actual current income to develop student aid packages. These offices should proactively communicate to unemployed and displaced workers that the financial aid offices can help review aid and establish open times for unemployed students to connect with institutional financial aid officers. Tools like the one created by SwiftStudent can assist students with appeals.

Create transparent adult-focused resources that proactively communicate about finances.

For example, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Office of Adult and Evening Services has a clear and dedicated website that centralizes the range of resources available to adult learners. From demystifying costs to information on applying for aid to links to institutional resources, displaced adult learners can get a self-directed start on understanding and finding resources to enroll. More detail is mentioned below, but it is also important to provide transparency about the availability of resources to address unanticipated emergencies (medical, transportation, etc) that can arise and derail learning after the term has begun.

Implement institutional policies that support adult learners seeking to reskill.

Institutions have tended to build their policies to provide financial supports to focus on the realities of traditionally-aged, dependent students. In doing so, many have developed inadvertent barriers that can limit enrollment of adult learners. There are many ways in which institutions can refocus these efforts to serve adults, but some of the highest-value approaches to support displaced adults include:

- **PRIORITIZING INSTITUTIONAL AID FOR ADULTS.** Institutions of higher education award significant amounts of institutional aid. Approximately 16 percent of students attending public two-year institutions, 45 percent of students who attend public four-year institutions, 23 percent of students who attend for-profit institutions, and 81 percent of students attending private non-profit institutions receive some sort of institutional aid.[13] Yet much of the available institutional aid has award requirements such as recent high school graduation, full-time enrollment, or GPA that preclude many adult learners from accessing it. Institutions can shift some of these requirements and direct and target a higher proportion of this support to displaced adult workers, as well as expanding eligibility to include meaningful non-degree credentials that result in family-sustaining wages.

- **IMPLEMENT DEBT AND LOAN AMNESTY POLICIES.** A significant number of students — especially comebackers with some college, no degree — have some level of outstanding debt from previous attempts at college that stand as a barrier to reenrollment. A recent estimate by Ithaka S + R suggests that there could be as much as $15 billion in unpaid balances to colleges and universities.[14] Since an outstanding balance often means that a student cannot get a transcript, this blocks learners from returning to college and leaves as many as 6.6 million students with credits that they may not be able to access. Wayne State University's Warrior Way Back program provides up to $1,500 in debt relief to students who would like to return to complete their degree. In its first year the program welcomed back 56 students, and nine graduated in a single semester.[15] Because of this program's success, it was expanded regionally through a partnership with the Detroit Regional Chamber that included reciprocity agreements and transcript sharing across institutions to create a regional approach to debt forgiveness and college access.[16]

Braiding WIOA, SNAP, and other funding streams.

Adult learners need support throughout their educational journey to address critical basic needs, such as paying for reskilling programs and housing and food insecurity. The federal government provides multiple programs to support retraining, but the disconnections across these programs reduce their impact. States and institutions can undertake efforts to create a coherent strategic approach to combining and leveraging these streams to support eligible students. For example, Socorro Independent School District in Texas matches WIOA Title II funds with TANF funds designated for adult education to provide adult-focused career and technical education that builds skills.

🔗 LEARN MORE

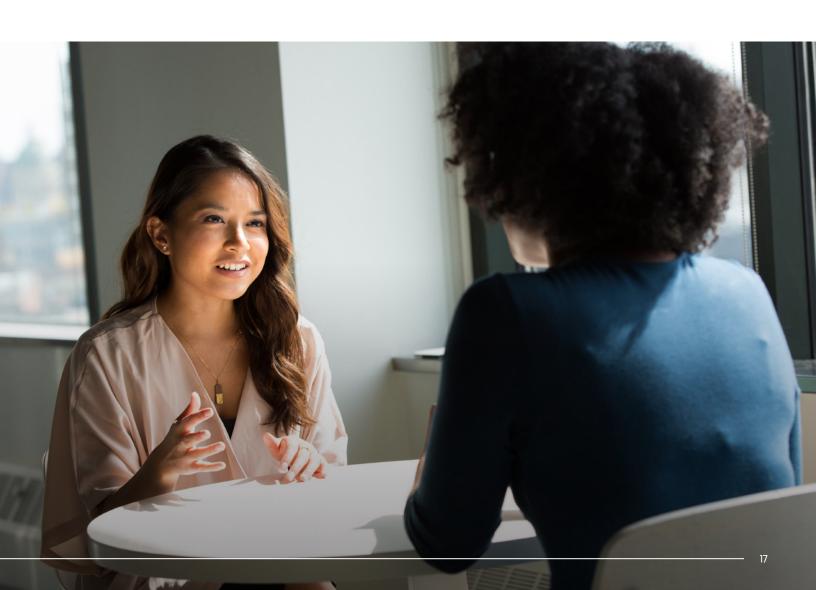**COMPLEMENTARY STATE POLICY ACTIONS**
- **Ensure state aid works for reskilling adult students.**
- **Prioritize allocation of federal stimulus resources to reskilling.**
- **Implement debt and loan amnesty policies.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO MAKE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FINANCIALLY POSSIBLE

- Is information about financial aid resources for adult learners easily accessible and centralized? To what extent is language about cost and aid clear and simple?

- Do post-traditional learners in your state or institution receive the same support to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid as traditional learners?

- To what extent does your institution or state communicate opportunities for professional judgment on financial aid packages?

- Are quality non-degree credentials eligible for institutional or state aid?

- What are the eligibility requirements on institutional and state aid? Are there restrictions based on high school graduation, full-time enrollment or GPA?

- What are institutional policies on debt amnesty for students with some college, no degree? At what level can you easily permit re-enrollment and/or release transcripts?

- To what extent is your institution or state leveraging WIOA Title II, TANF, Perkins V, the Veterans Benefits, and SNAP funding streams to support adult-focused career and technical education?

See the Appendix for a compilation of helpful resources and links to guide planning.

Redesign Programs of Study to Meet Reskilling Students Where They Are

While development of new curriculum is likely not feasible on the timeline displaced workers need, there are small things institutions can do to improve program design for students. The strategies in this section address sequencing of current courses, acceleration, and awareness of labor market relevance. By shifting coursework and bringing more relevance into the classroom, institutions can ensure outstanding content is offered in student-centered ways. These different approaches are more attuned to the pacing, aspirations and lifestyles of those looking to reskill and are thus more likely to ensure students succeed.

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY

Reorder degree pathways to front-load embedded non-degree credentials.

Research consistently indicates that those with associate degrees and higher have more consistent wage progression and are less vulnerable to job loss during economic shifts. Yet salience and market value of non-degree credentials is increasing and many are seeing these credentials as solutions to help people displaced by the pandemic return to good jobs. While stackability has been discussed for years, data indicate that fewer take advantage of stacking, with more adults and people of color stopping with the first non-degree credential.[17] In the long term, this represents a significant lost opportunity, both in terms of lifetime wages and career opportunities. By reordering the recommended sequence of coursework in degree paths that have embedded non-degree credentials, institutions create an approach that

has multiple benefits for adult learners seeking to reskill. It builds on the ethos of Guided Pathways to provide unambiguous pathways and sequencing for both certificate and degree-seeking students, gives opportunity to complete interim credentials that have labor market payoff, and engages learners in content relevant to their careers more quickly. Ideally, these approaches would pertain to programs both within and across non-credit and credit programs with easy on-ramps and links to further education to help adults chart their course. To promote degree completion, institutions can provide incentives to students to continue on their degree path.

Prioritize accelerated certificate and degree programming in select high-wage, in-demand careers.

Displaced workers may find that the more traditional length of time required to complete a credential may not support their need to quickly reskill to earn family-sustaining wages. Finding ways to accelerate programs and still fully prepare learners to succeed in the workplace is essential.[18] Colleges should use regional labor market data and work with employers to build accelerated certificate and degree programs in occupations that lead to promising careers with high demand, family-sustaining wages, and greater long-term employability/advancement.[19] Some colleges view acceleration in the form of shortened course terms and/or year-round offerings with multiple starting times throughout the year, which maximize terms to help adult learners progress and complete their program in the most optimal amount of time.[20] As a principle, all non-degree credentials — both credit and non-credit — should transparently articulate to degree programs. Some approaches of acceleration include:

- Sinclair College in Dayton, OH offers the EAGLE program, which stands for Engaging Adults to Graduate

and Lead to Efficiencies, which focuses on acceleration to improve completion. Sinclair offers 14 in-demand associate degree programs that can be completed in 15 months rather than a full two years.

- The University of Hawaii is offering an option for students to complete associate and bachelor's degrees online through five-week courses starting at multiple times throughout the year, which can be taken in the system's community colleges or universities. Learners take three five-week courses per term, doing just one course at a time, to complete their degree in two or four years.

- Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona provides accelerated on-ramps for learners with developmental needs by using Ability to Benefit and an Integrated Education and Training (IET) model to serve learners in need of adult basic education across three CTE programs — medical assistant, mechatronics, and logistics and supply chain management. Basic skills are taught in the career context and students simultaneously prepare for the GED, take credit-bearing coursework, and gain career focused skills.

- The University of Louisville B.S. in Organizational Leadership and Learning (OLL) is a program designed for busy adults with documented work experience and/or military training, and who are seeking a bachelor's degree. This program offers an accelerated format with 8 week courses and cost savings through Prior Learning Assessment class (up to 48 credits) by providing online or on campus options.

Expand "learn and earn" models.

Because displaced workers have an urgent need to rebuild their income, purposefully expanding learn and earn models provide opportunities to leverage experiential learning to enhance their career. These work-based learning approaches can include internships, apprenticeships, and clinical experience while providing learning in the context of the workplace and through real-world application supported by adult learning theory. More colleges are creating and marketing earn and learn programs tailored to adult learners, as are companies who seek to support their employees in accessing education as a benefit or direct part of their work experience. These sorts of programs provide opportunities for colleges and universities to partner with regional employers as well as to assist learners with resources to support tuition. For example, Austin Community College (ACC) in Austin, Texas created a 12-month earn and learn program to provide students with paid internships and apprenticeships in IT, manufacturing, and health care fields, while providing self-paced training leading to a certificate that will count toward a degree. The program is housed in ACC's Career ACCelerator Program and provides tuition assistance to make the program more affordable for learners. Employer partners include Samsung, Honda, Toyota, the City of Austin, and others.[21]

Implement systemic approaches to credit for prior learning.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) approaches play a critical role in supporting adult learner success in postsecondary education. For many displaced workers, providing credit for adjacent skills can get them into reskilling coursework sooner and thus accelerate completion of programs so that they can get back to work. Recent reports from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) provide rigorous analysis and data to demonstrate PLA's potential. Their analyses show higher completion rates across all credential levels for adult students who earned PLA credits compared to those who did not. They further found PLA increased an adult student's chance of completion by 17 percent (24 percent for Hispanic students, 14 percent for Black students, and 25 percent among community college students).[22] Research from CAEL and Excelencia in Education also indicates that accessing credits for prior learning is often ad hoc and uneven, especially for students of color.[23] Colleges and universities should develop systemic approaches so that all adult learners have the opportunity to determine if they have had learning experiences that might be credit-worthy. To develop these systems, colleges and universities should:

- **DEVELOP FRONT-END AGREEMENTS FOR CREDIT.** When discussing PLA, many assume portfolio approaches. However, these approaches place a significant burden on students to demonstrate that their experiences are "credit-worthy." Instead, colleges should look to more standardized approaches that fit into an auto-awarding structure such as CLEP, challenge exams and credit for industry-recognizing credentials.[24] In addition, ACE credit recommendations for learning provide a strong starting point for many certifications, professional development, and military learning. Many colleges also develop agreements to recognize relevant non-credit coursework completed at the institution. For example, Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana developed a credit matrix to award credit to over 100 industry-based credentials in a way that adult learners can easily understand and demonstrate how these credits articulate into credit-based certificates and degree programs.

- **SUPPORT FACULTY CAPACITY FOR ACCEPTING CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING.** Faculty play a critical role in the assessment of prior learning as many take part in faculty review committees. While the learning does not take place in their classroom, they have the relevant content knowledge within a given discipline to assess knowledge and skills gained. Moreover, knowledge and assessment are two different functions, and building faculty understanding and capacity for

this task is critical. One example is with the [Ohio Department of Higher Education's PLA with a Purpose initiative](#) which developed an online open-source resource for campuses to train faculty in the review of portfolios.

- **PROVIDE CLEAR MESSAGING WITH SUPPORTIVE ADVISING TO STUDENTS ON PLA.** In 2019, New America identified that one of the most common hurdles to PLA implementation is lack of guidance connecting students to PLA opportunities.[25] In one of the TAACCCT-funded programs at Northwest State Community College of Ohio, students are alerted of the option for PLA credit upon meeting with academic advisers. PLA coaches were specifically hired to help students determine their level of college-equivalent learning and provide it to faculty. Credits awarded this way more than doubled during the TAACCCT grant period.[26]

Provide developmental refreshers.

Adult learners may come to reskilling with a wide range of skills and levels of academic readiness. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Those who have been out of the educational sphere may need a brief refresher as they jump into their education and training. Offering streamlined foundational skills in parallel to education or training courses has been

shown to accelerate learners' progression through programs.[27] Such models are particularly effective for adult learners who are eager to minimize time to completion and cost.[28] Colleges should develop short, intensive refresher courses tailored specifically to adult learners, which can serve as a critical intervention. Other solutions include providing supplemental instruction and making resources, such as tutoring or coaches available to support foundation learning. Broadening restrictive policies related to demonstrating readiness for programs is also important. One compelling example is WGU Academy, an off-shoot of Western Governors University (WGU), which provides learners with college-readiness skills prior to their degree program. The Academy launched in 2018 with credit-bearing foundation English and mathematics courses, with a curriculum that infused elements supporting self-efficacy, a growth mindset, and belonging.[29] Learners take two to three foundation courses, based on the program they plan to enroll in at WGU. Courses are self-paced and learners have access to tutors and a personal coach.[30] The program has appeal for a broad range of learners, but is particularly focused on reskilling adults and has served more than 10,000 learners to date.[31]

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY STATE ACTION

- **Facilitate system-wide approaches to award credit for prior learning.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO REDESIGN PROGRAMS OF STUDY

- What federal, state and/or local data do you use to determine if pathways are in-demand and high-wage? Are these sources reliable and up-to-date within the last few months?

- What acceleration options are currently offered to students? To what extent can they be quickly scaled or strengthened?

- How many of your institution's degree pathways have embedded non-degree credentials? How do you communicate to reskilling students they can build upon existing credentials to a degree?

- Which degree pathways could you quickly resequence to emphasize front-loaded non-degree credentials?

- What approaches does your state or institution take to credit for prior learning? To what extent are these approaches systematic or automated?

- How do you support faculty and faculty committees to provide credit for prior learning?

- Does your institution or state offer adult-friendly developmental courses with quick opportunities to refresh basic skills?

See the Appendix for a compilation of helpful resources and links to guide planning.

Focus Area #3:

Promote Reskilling Through Outreach

Unfortunately, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has rendered many standard marketing and outreach practices ineffective and is forcing higher education to adapt their methods for the "new normal." To buck the troubling trends in postsecondary enrollment seen since the start of the pandemic, higher education entities must leverage both data and partnerships to understand and strategically target their unique reskilling population and communicate the value of postsecondary education through creative messaging and marketing.

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY

Adapt message delivery mechanisms to account for COVID-19 contexts.

For example, South Texas College shifted resources from supporting geofencing to additional advertisements on streaming services to attract COVID-impacted students. The college also invested additional resources in social media advertising and saw a four-fold increase in leads generated via these sites — a large portion of which were recently unemployed or underemployed adults looking to reskill or upskill. Consider posting on job boards to attract the unemployed and connect them to reskilling.[32] Ensure all websites convey to current and potential adult learners what they can expect in the current academic year due to COVID-19. In California, OnwardCA bills itself as a, "one-stop resource for the people of California impacted by job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic." The site prioritizes simplicity by focusing on three steps: Step 1: Connect to essential life services; Step 2: Connect to Retraining Opportunities; and Step 3: Connect to your next job. The site uses an intelligent matching system to connect users to relevant training and job opportunities. Finally, chatbots and automated, personalized text messaging can also be used efficiently and effectively to conduct outreach to current students and help them stay on track to completion.[33]

Strategically use data to understand and target those who have been displaced by the pandemic.

The profile of a reskilling candidate in a given community will vary based on numerous economic and social factors. States and institutions must first take the time to identify their community's unique reskilling audience, so that they can be strategically targeted for outreach. Doing so will require using employment and wage data in combination with postsecondary administrative data to target enrollment strategies at those who have lost their jobs due to COVID. For example, in spring 2020, the Indiana Commission on Higher Education used unemployment claims information to market reskilling opportunities to those with no postsecondary experience. Nudge4Solutions conducted an analysis of the academic experiences and employment outcomes of the some college, no degree stop-outs from the Virginia Community College System using data from administrative records, National Student Clearinghouse, and the Virginia Employment Commission.[34] Their study suggests also targeting enrollment strategies at stop-outs who have experienced flat or declining wages after leaving college, and those who performed well academically for most of their time at college but experienced a negative academic shock immediately before they withdrew.

Refine the message to resonate with reskilling audiences.

For all adult learners, emphasizing relevance, cost, and speed is key to getting their attention.[35] To do so, get specific about what skills students will learn and how they will apply those skills to the real world. Provide concrete evidence to support job placements and wage premiums.[36] Be transparent about the credentials that get them those skills. The credential marketplace presents an overwhelming challenge to potential students who attempt to differentiate between different credentials (industry-recognized credentials, certificates, certifications, licenses, degrees, etc).[37] Institutions should provide clear information about programs, credentials, and outcomes, including earnings potential, to support learner

agency and decisionmaking. Messages should focus on the actual cost of attendance, availability, and provide clear guidance on financial aid.[38] To that end, develop and share tutorials on state websites and with institutions to help adult learners fill out the Free Application for Financial Aid and apply for state emergency aid.

Above all else, messages must convey flexibility.[39] According to a nationally representative survey conducted by the Aspen Institute, higher education entities should focus messages on leveraging whatever experience individuals bring to the table, and working collaboratively to create a flexible schedule that helps them achieve their goals as quickly as possible.[40] To the extent possible, convey a positive message about your institution's response to COVID-19. Demonstrate

how your institutions or institutions are handling COVID and showcase the ways your institution or institutions have become more student-centric.[41] **As relevant, communicate any new programs and supports created in response to the pandemic, such as accelerated programs, waived application requirements, and additional emergency aid support.**

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY STATE ACTION
- **Develop a state-level outreach strategy.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO PROMOTE RESKILLING THROUGH OUTREACH

- Has your institution or state developed a clear profile of those that have been displaced?

- Do your institution's or state's outreach messages:

  - Get specific about what skills students will learn and how they will apply those skills to the real world?

  - Include concrete evidence to support the job placement rates, wage premiums and return on investment of programs to learners?

  - Focus on the actual cost of attendance and provide clear guidance on the availability of financial aid?

  - Communicate, where applicable, that prior experience will be leveraged?

  - Communicate flexibility to achieve goals as quickly as possible?

- How has or hasn't your approach to marketing changed as a result of the pandemic?

See the Appendix for a compilation of helpful resources and links to guide planning.

Focus Area #4:

Onboard for Purpose & Acceleration

The importance of onboarding in the reskilling process cannot be overstated. It is critical institutions consider how to best place reskilling students on a path that is both accelerated and purposeful, so that they can move quickly into a job with a family-sustaining wage. Acceleration demands both the removal of administrative barriers, as well as the recognition and application of relevant skill sets to further learning. Additionally, the onboarding process should be an opportunity to further explore and learn about career opportunities in the region and the ways in which specific programs of study do or do not prepare them for success in those occupations.

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY

Leverage real-time labor market information to support key decisions about programs of study.

The main goal of connecting to labor and employment data is to direct reskillers toward in-demand and high-wage fields and then understand their employment placement and progression to determine impact and return on investment for their education and training. During the recovery, institutions and systems should aim to quickly understand the most urgent needs of the regional economy and how to use that data to reskill adults and help them get connected to the workforce. When launching programs specifically geared at reskilling for the recovery, be sure to collect data on learners gaining employment in their chosen program of study. Use this data to inform future efforts that are geared toward responding to emerging regional needs. This data can also be used to modify existing programs to improve employment placement and workforce progression. For example, at Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY, their Economic Development and Workforce Center structures all of its programming based upon labor market analyses.

To do this, they combine real-time labor market information with economic development analysis to determine pathways and validate them with the employer community.

Streamline the enrollment and registration process.

This may include transitioning admission and enrollment processes online, eliminating application fees, and using software to support the ease of the process. Requiring a high school diploma for entry is one example of how small barriers can get in the way. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System eliminated this requirement and began offering multiple options for attainment of a high school equivalency diploma. This includes putting a system in place to provide adult basic education and GED training for learners while they pursue credit-based courses toward a credential. Another option is to transition to a paperless document system. Jones College in Mississippi started working in early 2020, prior to the pandemic, on a plan to bring together all student services — recruiting, admissions, financial aid, records, and student success — under one unit and transition from hard copy documents to electronic documents. The college recognized the significant delays learners experienced waiting for hard copy forms to move from one office to the next or to receive hard copy communication about necessary next steps. The pandemic accelerated the need for a paperless system and helped staff and stakeholders recognize the inefficiencies. The enrollment office has now moved completely digital as a result.

Inventory existing skills, training, and credentials and leverage to accelerate learning.

All students, but especially those returning to education after participating in the workforce, learn best when they draw on their prior knowledge and experiences, are

motivated to learn, and are able to practice and apply their learning.[42] For those who have been displaced by the pandemic, it is critical that prior knowledge and skills attained are used as a launching point to expedite new knowledge and skill acquisition. These skills should be leveraged in two ways. As identified in Focus Areas 2, institutions should assess and provide credit, where possible, for relevant training and credentials. Further, prior learning and skill acquisition should be taken into consideration when choosing programs of study such that transferable skills are maximized to accelerate progress. It is recommended that institutions crosswalk skills from occupations and industries with high displacement rates, such as retail and hospitality, against jobs that are in-demand and high-wage. Studies

of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program show that programs which helped TAA-eligible workers not only obtain credit for prior learning, but also placed them into in-demand programs of study with some degree of transferability to their former work experience, led to positive credential completion and employment outcomes.[43]
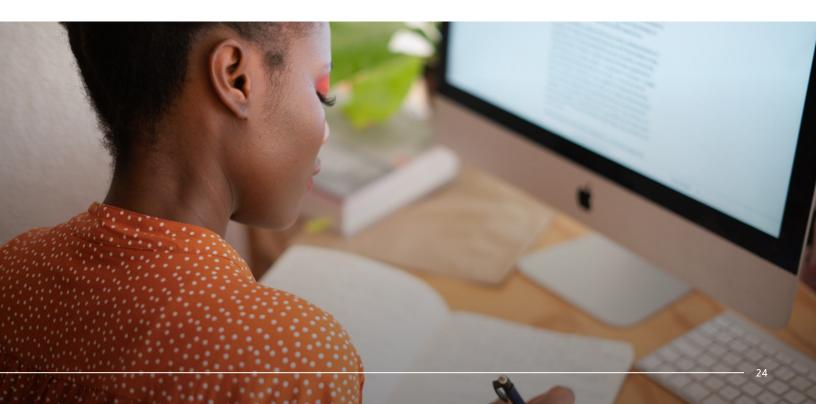
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COMPLEMENTARY STATE ACTION

- **Ensure regional labor market data are timely and available.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO ONBOARD FOR PURPOSE AND ACCELERATION

- (Institutions only) To what extent is your institution leveraging technology to improve the enrollment and registration process? Have minor fees or eligibility requirements been waived to streamline the process?

- (Institutions only) How well does your institution streamline onboarding of students so that it can be done quickly, easily, and efficiently? Have you used "secret shoppers" to review processes from an adult learner perspective?

- Are there systemic assessments of possible applicability of prior learning used to inform program selection so that transferable skills are maximized to accelerate progress to a certificate or degree?

- To what extent is information on employment opportunities and wage premiums used to inform program selection?

See the Appendix for a compilation of helpful resources and links to guide planning.

Focus Area #5:

Support Learners Holistically

Like most post-traditional students who are working (68 percent), raising a family (30 percent), attending college part-time (83 percent), and older (33 percent over age 25), reskilling candidates are constantly balancing work, personal, and academic responsibilities.[44] As a result, many do not seek academic or career counseling unless required or easily accessible. Therefore, it is incumbent upon institutions to proactively address the needs of students' academic and social livelihoods.[45] This includes having tailored advisors or coaches to guide students through key matriculation tasks and place them on the right path, providing wrap-around supports to ensure seemingly small financial troubles don't curtail aspiration, and nurturing faculty or students mentors who can deliver additional social-emotional support and encouragement.

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY

Provide a single point of access to wrap-around supports.

Basic needs insecurity among all students grew as a result of the pandemic, and is higher among those who experienced job loss and/or cuts to pay or hours, which will be the case among many seeking reskilling opportunities.[46] Done virtually, digitally, or through brick and mortar, the practice of co-locating and integrating basic needs services provides students essential information in a one-stop shop model. The exemplar practice houses both basic needs support services and academic and career advising in a single digital space.[47] Bringing services under one roof is a key strategy implemented by Oregon State University's Human Services Resources Center. The office consolidated the resources related to basic needs and financial assistance, including a food pantry, food assistance program, emergency housing, legal advocacy services and more, into one central location. Rather than a brick and mortar location, the University of California Berkeley centralized their support services in an online portal

✓ available to the broad campus community. The portal ensures that information is shared efficiently across the campus community, resulting in time savings for both students and staff. Not only can students access the portal, but it is available for staff who previously spent time locating resources for individual students. In response to the pandemic and increased need, the University redesigned the website in September 2020. According to Brightspot Strategies, institutions should involve students, staff, and community stakeholders in the process to design and assess needs for the integrated services, as well as develop a shared culture and values that this shared space will uphold.[48]

Invest in reskilling coaches or navigators.

Navigators are non-academic advisors who support adult students during every step of their postsecondary education, from filling out their applications and developing career plans to completing their courses of study and transitioning to the labor market. They have been specifically trained to be the single point of contact on adult students' distinct needs, such as child care and transportation assistance, and are available at times that adult students are on campus. Evidence from TAACCCT evaluations shows that navigators have a significant positive effect on student completion and employment outcomes.[49] Some institutions, like Arizona State University's Edplus program, have assigned coches to specific segmentations of adult learners. For example, they have coaches assigned to the military-affiliated, graduate students, stop-outs, etc. Students are tracked through CRM enterprise software—Salesforce in this case—to ensure thorough case management. For rapid recovery, institutions may want to consider assigned advisors specifically for the reskilling population. For this population in particular, institutions should consider working collaboratively with community-based organizations, who have existing relationships with potential students, to advise learnersnow moved completely digital as a result.

Train faculty, staff, and/or students to act as mentors to reskilling students.

Belonging matters, especially for students who have been mistreated by the education system in the past. Colleges should consider setting up programs or incentives for faculty and/or students to act as mentors to reskilling students. According to New America and The Graduate! Network, adult students, specifically those who have stopped out of higher education, report that supportive faculty relationships were the biggest key to their success.[50] This type of mentoring could be facilitated through department chairs, with the support of the non-traditional student office. Rhode Island College has engaged graduate students as peer mentors. The College developed a program called Learning for Life

(L4L), which is a partnership between the institution and community-based organizations that links students to a wide variety of services and supports on campus and in the community. Students in the School for Social Work are trained by faculty and provide peer-to-peer mentorship to the students participating in L4L. Student mentors receive internship credit for their participation, scholars benefit from interaction with peers, and the School of Social Work provides a steady pipeline to the L4L program.

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY STATE ACTION
- **Develop a state-level outreach strategy.**
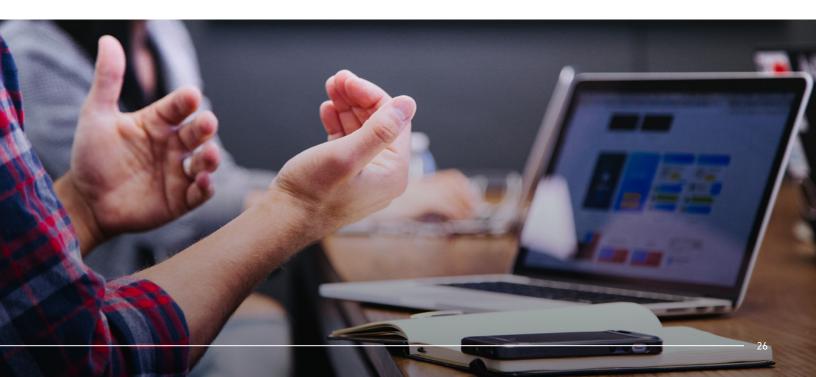
REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS HOLISTICALLY

- (Institutions only) Does your institution have dedicated advisors for specific segments of adult learners, such as learners of color, first-generation students, single parents, learners with barriers to employment, and justice-impacted?

- (Institutions only) To what extent are basic needs supports co-located with academic and career advising?

- Are support services easily accessible through an online portal or user-friendly website?

- (Institutions only) Have your faculty been supported and/or trained to develop supportive mentoring relationships with students, especially those who have been displaced?

- (Institutions only) Have you considered deploying a peer-mentor model to support displaced workers?

See the Appendix for a compilation of helpful resources and links to guide planning.

2.2: Strategic State Actions

Audience

✓ State leaders with institutional support

Task

✓ Review policies for reskilling and reflect on how these actions may be implemented in your state. Record early priorities in your *Rapid Response Action Plan*.

Public policy can create conditions that make it much more favorable for institutions to support reskilling displaced workers. At a moment when state budgets are unquestionably tight and new dollars may not be available, policymakers can prioritize alignment and redirection of existing resources to facilitate better outcomes for displaced workers. Finding ways to leverage existing programs with one another as well as promoting connections between higher education, workforce, and social service systems can lead to higher-quality rapid reskilling outcomes.

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGIES

Ensure state aid works for reskilling adult students.

Like federal aid, until recently, most large state aid programs were designed for traditional-age students. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) analyzed each state's large student aid programs against best practice approaches for adults identified by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and found that most state aid did not have adult-friendly policies. On the whole, the largest state aid programs fail to meet these approaches; ECS found that about half the programs were merit-based, one-fourth rely on high school graduation date for eligibility, one-third require full-time enrollment, and one-fifth exclude two-year institutions. Only one program includes all of these components: Minnesota's Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program, which provides financial assistance to students who have children 12 and under, are not receiving assistance under the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), and who demonstrate financial need for grants, to help pay for child care while pursuing a postsecondary education. Most programs include two or fewer characteristics.[51] States can explore changing some of the eligibility criteria to better serve adult learners, especially those seeking reskilling. The same challenges exist for many state College Promise programs, which have strict requirements for eligibility that exclude many adult learners.

Prioritize allocation of federal stimulus resources to reskilling.

Because of constraints on state budgets, it is less likely for new resources to be available through state general funds. Providing clear guidance to institutions on usage of Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER) funds can help; half of these funds must be used for direct aid to students, but other portions could provide opportunities for strategic approaches to reskilling and structure in ways that promote pathways and not just short-term training. States will be well served to apply lessons from The Federal CARES Act resources. Additionally, Governors received Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds to meet individual state needs. HEER and GEER funding comes when many states and institutions are trying to keep college doors open. However, because these funds provide student support or are unencumbered, they provide a unique opportunity for innovation. Innovations could provide opportunities to leverage and expand existing programs or to create pandemic-focused reskilling efforts. Some notable examples to learn from CARES include:

- **Texas invested $46.5 million** for emergency student support. This federal resource complements a partnership already happening between the Greater Texas Foundation, the Trellis Foundation and the Kresge Foundation to award more than $700,000 to institutions for student emergency aid grants. Finally, the governor invested $10 million in technology development, including Open Education Resource course material, which can significantly reduce textbooks' costs.

- **Maryland allocated $10 million** to community colleges to provide courses and continuing professional development that leads to a government or industry certification or licensure.

Implement debt and loan amnesty policies.

As mentioned in Focus Area #1, many students with some college, no degree face minor debts as a barrier to re-enrollment. In addition to changes to institutional policies, states should examine their policy conditions that can either accelerate or prevent thoughtful approaches to debt amnesty. For example, the state legislature in California implemented a new prohibited debt collection law that keeps colleges from withholding transcripts for minor debts.

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONAL ACTION
- **Maximize the ability to access and leverage Federal Title IV aid.**

HIGH-VALUE STRATEGY

Promote braiding of state and federal resources.

States are responsible for developing plans for the administration of federal funds such as TANF, Perkins, and WIOA. These planning processes provide a unique opportunity to align definitions and outcomes and ensure that stakeholders know how funding sources can work together to better serve students. TANF resources can drive more resources to core activities that support adult learners (e.g. cash assistance, work-related activities [including training], and childcare services). WIOA funding can be used for career planning, identifying an appropriate career pathway, and support services. Perkins can help provide career and technical education training, and state funding can supplement higher education coursework. For example, Oregon's Pathways to Opportunity initiative aligns and expands expands the federal, state, and local resources available to students with low incomes. This legislation directed the community colleges to join state agencies, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), the Office of the Governor, and other stakeholders to study and determine the best methods for community college students to learn about and apply for state or federal programs that offer financial or other benefits, as well as align these benefits to better support students with low incomes. Additionally, in 2019, the Governor of North Carolina used the annual budget process to secure WIOA funds for the Finish Line Grants program. This unique emergency aid program is run through local workforce development boards in partnership with community colleges in the state. On the surface this program is more like a completion grant; however, program documents make clear recipient students may use funds for "course materials, housing, medical needs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students face through no fault of their own."

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONAL ACTION
- **Maximize the ability to access and leverage Federal Title IV aid.**

Ensure regional labor market data are timely and available.

As colleges and universities develop regional analyses of their labor markets to determine which programs will lead to in-demand opportunities that result in family-sustaining wages, states should ensure that economic development data about labor market projections are available for each region. To strengthen these data, providing insights from real-time labor market information will provide more timely and robust information to drive decisions. These can be combined and developed into meaningful reports to catalyze informed action. For instance, Ivy Tech Community College has been creating monthly Rapid Recovery reports sourced from national, state, and local sources that offer the most up-to-date information about unemployment and labor market needs.

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONAL ACTION
- **Leverage real-time labor market information to support key decisions about programs of study.**

Develop a state-level outreach strategy.

Alongside many of the institutional outreach strategies identified above, states can also play a role in engaging prospective reskilling candidates. The best efforts create branded, concerted communications efforts that can be focused statewide. Indiana's You Can. Go Back. (YCGB) is a notable example of targeted outreach efforts to reengage the 750,000 Hoosier adult population with some college credit but no degree and provide encouragement and tools to return to school and complete a degree. Before launching the outreach campaign, under directive from the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, institutions agreed to establish a single point of contact at each campus to handle the influx of interested returning adults, examine and streamline processes to address student success barriers, and offer flexible scheduling and other services to help adult learners complete.

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONAL ACTION
- **Adapt message delivery mechanisms to account for COVID-19 contexts.**

Facilitate system-wide approaches to award credit for prior learning.

Many of the strategies identified above regarding prior learning assessments can be accelerated with state-level support. State-level support and policies can expand this resource to adults seeking reskilling. As institutions expand their efforts to systematically implement credit for prior learning, promoting common approaches is critical to long term success. In order to ensure equitable access to PLA opportunities, states should address the up-front costs associated with assessment and coordinate consistent policies and procedures across state institutions. These approaches also ensure that students earning PLA credits are likely to be able to transfer their coursework without duplication. Notable examples of PLA policies include:

- Idaho implemented state policy to ensure the costs charged for PLA are based on the operational costs of the assessment and do not increase due to the number of credits awarded. The state policy also ensures PLA credits transfer across institutions within the state.

- Community Colleges of Pennsylvania have created a single portal to support student access to PLA opportunities and all institutions within the system adhere to the same policies and procedures. The primary goal of this PLA system is improving the visibility of PLA opportunities among adult learners.

🔗 LEARN MORE

COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONAL ACTION

- **Reorder degree pathways to front-load embedded non-degree credentials.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

- What reskilling eligibility requirements could you look to expand within the current state need-based aid programs? What changes would need to occur to authorizing legislation to make this permissible?

- Did your state use CARES or GEER funding to address reskilling? Has it all been deployed? How will you identify reskilling priorities if new resources become available?

- Does your state have any existing policies or legislation related to outstanding debt? What research must be done to understand scope and ranges of outstanding learner debt?

- Does your state have a combined plan for WIOA, Perkins, and TANF? Does it offer clear provisions to braid resources for reskilling and encourage/compel cross agency collaboration?

- Beyond the priority policies mentioned above, were there additional policy approaches mentioned in the focus areas that resonated? What were they?

See the Appendix for a compilation of helpful resources and links to guide planning.

Commit to a Plan

⊗ Audience

✓ Institutional and state leaders
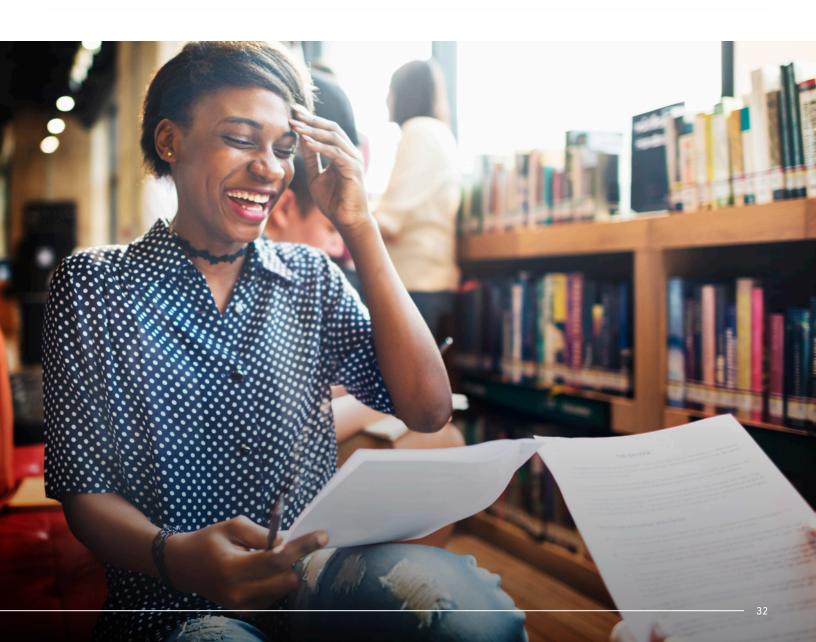
▤ Task

✓ Commit to your focus areas and strategies. Identify early milestones for implementation.

Upon completion of the first two tasks in the process, leaders should have a good sense of which focus areas and strategic actions are being prioritized. As a final step, institutional and state leaders should lay out a few key milestones for implementation.

Respond to reflection questions below to identify potential assets, prepare for roadblocks, and embed principles of equity into the effort.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PLANNING

- What assets can you leverage to accomplish this work?

- What resources might you need to accomplish this work?

- What challenges should you anticipate?

- What commitments and timelines has each key stakeholder made to implement the strategic actions?

- How will you structure the strategies to eliminate equity gaps in service access and delivery and student outcomes? How will you disaggregate data to track progress and identify areas for additional support?

- How will you include employers and industry?

- What other initiatives can be leveraged and aligned across sectors to make this work successful?

Rapid Response Action Plan for Accelerating Recovery

✓ **TASK 1: CHOOSE FOCUS AREA(S)**

FOCUS AREAS	RATIONALE

✓ **TASK 2: STRATEGIC ACTIONS**

STRATEGIC ACTION	FOCUS AREA (1-5)

✅ TASK 3: IDENTIFY KEY MILESTONES

Strategy #1:

MILESTONES	LEAD	COLLABORATORS	START DATE	DURATION	STATUS

Strategy #2:

MILESTONES	LEAD	COLLABORATORS	START DATE	DURATION	STATUS

Strategy #3:

MILESTONES	LEAD	COLLABORATORS	START DATE	DURATION	STATUS

Strategy #4:

MILESTONES	LEAD	COLLABORATORS	START DATE	DURATION	STATUS

Resources and Links for Leaders

Make Postsecondary Education Financially Possible

- University of North Carolina at Charlotte's Office of Adult and Evening Services has a clear and dedicated website for financial aid resources.

- Norwich University's website provides a concise, easy to navigate section for military and veterans, among other learners, that highlights important and straightforward information on financial aid and student support services.

- The Graduate! Network assists civic and education leaders in standing up an array of strategies that identify adults with some college, no degree who aspire to return to college, and then deliver services that help them enroll, persevere and graduate.

- Wayne State University's Warrior Way Back program provides up to $1,500 in debt relief to students who would like to return to complete their degree.

- Oakland University's Reconnector Grant is available to students with a past due university bill of $1,500 or less who are active (eligible to register other than holds), in good academic standing, and have had at least a one-year gap in attendance. Grant covers up to $500 per semester up to a maximum of three semesters.

- Henry Ford College's Hawk Pathways Debt Forgiveness Program covers outstanding students who have earned college credit, were not recently enrolled, and have outstanding college debt.

- In California, a new prohibited debt collection law was passed to prevent colleges from withholding transcripts for minor debts.

- Socorro Independent School District in Texas braids funding across WIOA Title II and TANF to support adult-focused career and technical education that builds skills.

- Texas invested over $40 million in GEER funding for emergency student support.

- Maryland allocated $10 million to community colleges to provide courses and continuing professional development that leads to a government or industry certification or licensure.

- Minnesota's Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program is one of the country's most adult-friendly state student aid programs.

- SwiftStudent is a tool to help empower and assist students with the FAFSA appeals process.

Redesign Programs of Study

- Sinclair College's Engaging Adults to Graduate and Lead to Efficiencies (EAGLE) offers 14 in-demand associate degree programs that can be completed in 15 months.

- The University of Hawaii offers 5-week courses, instead of 16-week courses, that can be started at multiple times throughout the year.

- Pima Community College's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training teaches basic skills in a career context while preparing for the GED, taking credit-bearing coursework, and gaining career focused skills.

- Empire State Colleges Credential As You Go initiative is examining how students can gain credentials as they move through higher education, rather than only in the current four-tiered degree system.

- Austin Community College Career ACCelerator Program is a 12-month earn and learn program to provide students with paid apprenticeships/internships and self-paced training leading to a credit or non-credit certificate.

- Ohio Means Internships and Coops provides guidance to college faculty and administrators in building high-quality, student-centered, business-friendly internship or cooperative education (co-op) programs.

- American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT) provides guidelines for institutions and learners to connect workplace learning and corporate training programs with college credit.

- Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana developed a credit crosswalk to award credit to over 100 industry-based credentials.

- Ohio Department of Higher Education's PLA with a Purpose initiative developed a set of online open-source resources for campuses to train faculty in the review of portfolios.

- Western Governors University WGU Academy provides learners with college readiness skills prior to their degree program.

- Alamo Colleges District's Integrated Reading and Writing Course is typically a face-to-face eight-clock hour course taught by faculty to help students improve placement scores.

- The University of Louisville B.S. in Organizational Leadership and Learning (OLL) offers an accelerated format with 8 week courses and cost savings through Prior Learning Assessment class (up to 48 credits) by providing online or on-campus options.

Promote Reskilling Through Outreach

- The Aspen Institute's Messaging to Underrepresented Populations: The Dos and Don'ts of Messaging offers practical advice for specific outreach language and messages.

- South Texas College shifted its marketing delivery mechanisms away from geofencing to focus more on social media advertising.

- OnwardCA is a statewide resource to assist Californias that have lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Indiana's You Can. Go Back. (YCGB) is a notable example of targeted outreach efforts to re-engage the 750,000 Hoosier adult population with some college credit but no degree.

- Tennessee Reconnect is the state of Tennessee's comprehensive outreach campaign to adult students.

- Reach Higher Oklahoma is Oklahoma's comprehensive outreach campaign to adult students.

- Charter Oak State College's website highlights many of the messages that resonate with adults seeking to earn degrees including personalized support, flexibility in credit transfer and scheduling, opportunities for PLA, and connections to careers.

- Pueblo Community College website clearly articulates the economic value of certificates and associate degrees, targeting former students who stopped out during the fall 2020 semester due to COVID-19.

Resources & Links to Onboard for Purpose and Acceleration

- The Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) eliminated high school diploma entry requirements and began offering multiple options for attainment of a high school equivalency diploma.

- LCTCS Work Ready U offers free online classes to assist adults in earning their high school equivalency diploma.

- Jones College in Mississippi has moved its enrollment office into a completely digital format.

- Ivy Tech Community College's Rapid Recovery reports provide the most up-to-date information about unemployment and labor market needs.

- Monroe Community College's Economic Development and Workforce Center structures all their programming based upon labor market analyses by combining real-time labor market information with economic development analysis to determine pathways and validate them with the employer community.

Support Students Holistically

- Arizona State University's Edplus program is focused on the design and scalable delivery of digital teaching and learning models to increase student success and reduce barriers to achievement in higher education.

- Oregon State University Human Services Resources Center brings academic, career, well-being and student resources into one central location.

- The University of California Berkeley centralized their basic needs support in a Basic Needs Center and transformed it into an online portal available to the broad campus community.

- Rhode Island College's Learning for Life program is a near-peer mentoring program that links undergraduate and graduate students.

- The United Way of King County in Seattle is supporting college students' basic needs through their Benefits Hubs, which are located on several college campuses in the Seattle region.

- Oregon's Pathways to Opportunity initiative expands the federal, state, and local resources available to students with low incomes.

- North Carolina's Finish Line Grants program is a unique emergency aid program run through local workforce development boards in partnership with community colleges in the state.

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