

A grayscale photograph of a woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark-colored cardigan over a light-colored top. Her hands are crossed in front of her, and she is wearing several rings on her fingers. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a library or a room with bookshelves.

# Action Guide for Adult-Ready Transformation Data

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## »» Need for Data

Data-informed decision-making is essential as part of transforming institutions and systems to effectively serve post-traditional learners. Data is a tool to help make a case for changing how we serve students at or over the age of 25 and identify challenges. It is also a mechanism for tracking progress and informing improvement. In the case of postsecondary data around outcomes for post-traditional students, a lack of clear definitions and agreement on how to measure outcomes is often a barrier.

By definition, students at or over the age of 25 are considered non-traditional. They do not look and act the way that the higher education system expects students to behave. The data standard of collecting information on first-time, full-time students is built around a model that does not reflect the enrollment patterns of post-traditional learners. Moreover, most systems don't track age at first entry or recognize if there is a significant gap between enrolled terms. As a result, it becomes difficult to specifically identify and track behavior of post-traditional learners. Further, while age has been the most common proxy to characterise this learner, it misses significant factors that describe post-traditional student context and experience.

According to data from the National Student Clearinghouse, just 47% of the students who entered college in 2012 stayed enrolled full-time through their entire education.<sup>1</sup> Only 37% of students over 24 enrolled full-time. The Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS), which sets most standard definitions in higher education, is primarily defined by traditional measures for traditional learners who are focused on a traditional higher education pathway.

There are a number of data sets that have information particularly relevant to post-traditional students that are outside of the traditional state higher education data system. As institutions, systems, and states work to understand the needs of post-traditional populations, sharing data across the various systems and agencies is an important means of better understanding, tracking, and supporting post-traditional learners.

<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P.K., Bhimdiwala, A. & Wilson, S. E. (2018, December). Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates – Fall 2012 Cohort (Signature Report No. 16). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport16/>

## »» Value of Data

The value of improving data has an indirect, but significant effect on post-traditional learners. Institutional and system capacity to more clearly track post-traditional learner outcomes can result in clearer actions, thereby resulting in improved post-traditional learner experiences and outcomes. Institutions, systems, and states that can see which programs post-traditional learners are entering, how they are faring, which pathways they are following, and how they are transitioning into employment, will be better poised to understand and improve how they are serving these learners. Connecting to data beyond the postsecondary realm will provide additional transparency on post-traditional learners and offer a more complete picture and understanding of their experience.

## »» Equity in Data

Achieving an equity-minded approach to data transformation will demand disaggregation of outcomes and key indicators (e.g. gateway course enrollment, courseload, course performance, etc.) by age as well as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender and other key facets of identity. For post-traditional learners, tracking and disaggregating based on veteran or parenting status, as well as justice involvement is important given the diverse needs of these student populations. Through thoughtful disaggregation of data, states and institutions can more meaningfully track and assess how well they are serving the diverse array of post-traditional learners.



# Strategies & Actions: Data

To ensure that the experiences and outcomes of post-traditional learners are authentically represented through data, implement the following strategies, in accordance with the iterative approach laid out in the user's guide and the findings of the self-assessment. The strategies and actions to implement, to improve, and to go to the next level are as follows:

## STRATEGY #1:

### Strengthen data measurement and collection systems to better monitor and evaluate post-traditional learner outcomes



#### TO IMPLEMENT

- Create common metrics and definitions for post-traditional learners
- Connect state data across agencies to improve measurement and disaggregation of long-term outcomes



#### TO IMPROVE

- Leverage national data sets to measure success indicators and outcomes for post-traditional learners
- Link non-credit and credit data systems to better track students in non-credit programs



#### TO GO NEXT LEVEL

- Transparently report on established goals for post-traditional learner enrollment and outcomes





# Strategy #1

Strengthen data measurement and collection systems to better monitor and evaluate post-traditional learner outcomes



## TO IMPLEMENT

# Create common metrics and definitions for post-traditional learners

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Data on post-traditional learners is an important means of understanding and shaping efforts to improve their experiences and outcomes. Unfortunately, there is no established set of metrics or standards to understand the breadth of the post-traditional populations that institutions and states are serving and how well. Because post-traditional learners tend to not engage with systems in the way that systems expect in terms of enrollment status and continuity, institutions and states have not historically done a good job of identifying and tracking the varying types and populations of post-traditional learners. Simply measuring by age does not capture all of the variables or consider factors important to defining post-traditional such as enrollment intensity or “comebackers” who are returning after stopping out for an extended period of time.

Post-traditional learners constitute a significant portion of students and need to be properly represented in the data. Getting to a common methodology for defining post-traditional learners will create standardized, comparable approaches to measuring outcomes. We need common metrics and definitions to identify and track all post-traditional learners. Institutions and states should focus on determining metrics and definitions to bring visibility and insight to the experiences and outcomes of their post-traditional learners.

Without exception, measuring post-traditional learner success is a challenge given the current state of data infrastructure in most states and institutions. **In an effort to move toward the ideal state, foundational efforts to build an effective denominator for data analyses of post-traditional students would yield the highest value improvement to be undertaken by leaders. This would entail building capacity to capture post-traditional learners as aged 25 or older at first entry OR 25 or older with at least a 12 month gap in continuous enrollment (either at the institution or as a transfer).** While a number of institutions collect these data, most do not. Building this data collection capacity would build the ability for deeper, more nuanced analyses of post-traditional learner outcomes.

After building baseline capacity, conduct deeper analyses on important metrics that can inform on the post-traditional student journey. So, rather than provide a case study, a table with suggested analyses has been provided. Institutions and states can use this table as a starting point toward defining their own approaches for better understanding post-traditional learner outcomes.

## Data Analyses to Better Understand Post-traditional Learners

Indicators for Analysis	Guidance	Additional Considerations
<b>Access</b>	Disaggregate populations by economic status, race/ethnicity, age, gender, program of study, first-generation status, and level of academic preparation.	Include learners in short-term and non-credit programs. Consider all populations from adult basic education programs. Capture non-traditional characteristics such as students who are parents and students who are employed, as well as distinct learner populations, such as military connected students or formerly incarcerated individuals.
<b>Enrollment</b>	Look at enrollment status (full-time/part-time), consistency of enrollment intensity across terms, degree and certificate seeking status. Include analyses for returning some college, no degree learners to better understand what shifts may have occurred.	Consider how patterns of enrollment and student outcomes differ between traditional programs and those designed specifically for post-traditional learners (e.g., accelerated programs, programs offered at non-traditional times, or programs that integrate adult basic education with postsecondary certificates).
<b>Transfer/Transition</b>	Evaluate how post-traditional learners are moving across institutions. Consider transfer to and from non-credit, non-degree credentials earned at other institutions, where possible.	To take this to the next level, track whether the transfer student was a stop-out or completer in order to understand the degree to which either is predictive of transfer.
<b>Retention and Progress</b>	Look at credit accumulation, gateway course completion, and program-specific course completion to understand how post-traditional learners are performing compared to other student populations.	Research from the Community College Research Center has found that students are more likely to complete when they increase their momentum toward a degree. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Attainment/Outcomes</b>	For post-traditional learners, determine the overall rate of credential completion, credential completion within certain programs and, to the extent possible, labor market outcomes following completion.	Consider adopting the following framework as a starting point for measuring outcomes for degree programs: <i>Answering the Call: Institutions and States Lead the Way Toward Better Measures of Postsecondary Performance</i> , which brings together learnings from various metrics initiatives. <sup>3</sup> IHEP has a technical guide, <i>Towards Convergence: A Technical Guide for the Postsecondary Metrics Frameworks</i> , which offers a starting point for defining cohorts, measures and demographic groups. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, D. & Bailey, T. (2017). Early momentum metrics: Why they matter for college improvement. (Research Brief No. 65). Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/early-momentum-metrics-college-improvement.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Engle, J. (2016) *Answering the Call: Institutions and States Lead the Way Toward Better Measures of Postsecondary Performance*. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Washington, United States of America

<sup>4</sup> Janice, A. and Voight, M. (2016). *Towards Convergence: A Technical Guide for the Postsecondary Metrics Framework*. <http://www.ihep.org/research/publications/toward-convergence-technical-guide-postsecondary-metrics-framework>

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Build capacity to capture post-traditional learner outcomes by ensuring that post-traditional learners can be identified within the data as aged 25 or older at first entry OR 25 or older with at least a 12 month gap in continuous enrollment (either at the institution or as a transfer);
- 2 Deepen analyses by looking at groups of post-traditional learners on their own. Grouping individuals solely on the basis of age alone can lead to missing important distinctions about a given population, hide important trends, and lead to other unintended consequences.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bensimon, E. M. (2016). The misbegotten URM as a data point. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Urban Education, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California. [https://cue.usc.edu/files/2016/01/Bensimon\\_The-Misbegotten-URM-as-a-Data-Point.pdf](https://cue.usc.edu/files/2016/01/Bensimon_The-Misbegotten-URM-as-a-Data-Point.pdf)





## Connect state data across agencies to improve measurement and disaggregation of long-term outcomes

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

State data capacity has grown dramatically over the last ten years through state investment in data systems and federal investment through the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) grant program. According to SHEEO (2018)<sup>6</sup> and Education Commission of the States (2020),<sup>7</sup> virtually all states have postsecondary student unit record systems at the state or system level that track data, but they can vary greatly from state to state. In addition to building statewide capacity to determine age at first entry/re-enrollment status, building strong linkages to workforce outcomes is also critical to understanding post-traditional learner outcomes. While all 50 states have the ability to connect data across four separate sectors (early learning, k-12, postsecondary, and workforce), only 16 states have full P-20 systems that connect to workforce data systems.<sup>8</sup> States have prioritized such linkages in recent years. While in 2010, only 10 state agencies were linking or planned to link their educational data with workforce data, by 2018, more than 50 state agencies across 46 states were linking or planning to link education and workforce data.<sup>9</sup>

Linking postsecondary data to workforce and related data is particularly important for understanding post-traditional learners' pathways, experience, and outcomes. This type of data connection provides states and institutions with insight into how graduates are faring in terms of employment and wages, through unemployment insurance and wage data. Fostering this data connection also sheds light on what pathways and trajectories post-traditional learners are taking related to employment.

State higher education agencies should work with other state agencies to create a comprehensive resource to connect workers with information about high demand jobs, credential options and the return on investment of different career pathways. With the recent restoration of Pell grants for incarcerated learners, state systems should plan to connect with or incorporate educational data from the state department of corrections as well. These steps can build on existing collaborations across agencies, such as with workforce investment boards to provide short-term training, with the department of labor on apprenticeships, with state approving agencies for veterans, and with health and human services and other agencies on public benefits.

Examples of such data are listed on the next page.

<sup>6</sup> Whitfield, C., Armstrong, J. and Weeden, D. (2018). The State of State Postsecondary Data Systems. The State Higher Education Executive Officers. [https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO\\_StrongFoundations\\_18.pdf](https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO_StrongFoundations_18.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Education Commission of the States. (2020). 50-State comparison: Statewide longitudinal data systems. <https://www.ecs.org/state-longitudinal-data-systems/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Whitfield, C., Armstrong, J. and Weeden, D. (2018). The State of State Postsecondary Data Systems. The State Higher Education Executive Officers. [https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO\\_StrongFoundations\\_18.pdf](https://postsecondarydata.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO_StrongFoundations_18.pdf)

## Data Analyses to Better Understand Post-traditional Learners

Agencies	Purpose/Content	Application for Post-traditional Learners
<b>Workforce Development</b>	Workforce development agencies are required to develop a plan to measure and monitor outcomes of workforce programs, including programs to provide those over the age of 25 with job search and employment services and adult education programs. State workforce boards use these data to monitor the impact of services to job seekers, many of whom will be accessing postsecondary education.	Working with workforce boards, higher education institutions can determine which of their students are receiving workforce benefits in order to better meet these students' needs. Institutions can also forge relationships with Workforce entities that can lead to new streams of post-traditional learners. Because adult education services are funded through WIOA Title II aid, ensure data sets tracking these students are aligned with state data systems.
<b>Apprenticeship Standards Recognition Entities</b>	A Standards Recognition Entity (SRE) is a third-party entity, approved by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) as qualified to recognize apprenticeship programs as industry-recognized apprenticeship programs. While many SRE's are national, focused in specific industries, some are state-based and work to build, register and launch new apprenticeship programs across the state. These offices help bridge the gap between apprenticeship partners including postsecondary institutions, employers, workforce development boards and K-12 schools. All SREs are required to report data on new and continuing apprentices, number and rate of completions, post-employment retention rate, and more.	As institutions expand partnerships to increase paid work opportunities for learners, it will be important to consider partnerships on data sharing and interoperability with SREs overseeing local, state and federal apprenticeship programs. The Registered Apprenticeship College Consortium in the federal Department of Labor brings systems together and enables interoperability.
<b>Veterans Affairs</b>	Thousands of students receive resources from the GI Bill to attend college every year. Schools are responsible for certifying enrollment and reporting data on programs and services provided to State Approving Agencies (SAA). SAA's ensure the quality of postsecondary programs approved for GI Bill benefits.	As states work to collect data on quality credentials it may be worth exploring what can be learned from data partnerships with veterans' affairs organizations. Also, collect data from Veteran Student Success Centers on campus.

STRATEGY #1: STRENGTHEN DATA MEASUREMENT AND COLLECTION SYSTEMS TO BETTER MONITOR AND EVALUATE  
POST-TRADITIONAL LEARNER OUTCOMES

Agencies	Purpose/Content	Application for Post-traditional Learners
<b>Health and Human Services</b>	Public benefits data, which are often housed within state Human Services agencies, show how state and local agencies are serving the community through assistance programs related to housing, food, childcare, transportation, and more.	Partner with state Department of Human Services to understand which students access benefits. Data from these systems, when linked with higher education data, can be used to understand how well institutions are serving specific populations, especially parents.
<b>Labor and Economic Development</b>	Labor agencies receive key data on employment and wage from any state employer subject to unemployment insurance (UI) laws, as well as key unemployment claims data. In addition, these state agencies may be the ones responsible for collecting and analyzing key labor market information on job demand by industry and occupation.	UI wage data can be an important source of information on student labor market outcomes both prior to entering and after completing postsecondary programs. These data tend to be much more cost effective, broader reaching and more accurate than alumni surveys. <sup>10</sup> For post-traditional learners who have a particular interest in career advancement, it is incumbent upon postsecondary leaders to accurately measure wage and employment outcomes to ensure their needs are being met.

<sup>10</sup> Feldbaum, M., & Harmon, T. (n.d.). *Using Unemployment Insurance Wage Data to Improve Program Employment Outcomes: A Technical Assistance Guide for Community and Technical Colleges*. <https://www.achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/resources/Using%20UI%20Wage%20Data.pdf>.

## CASE STUDY

# Promoting Cross-agency Collaborations through Data Integration: Data for the American Dream and My Colorado Journey

## BACKGROUND

The Data for the American Dream (D4AD) initiative supports efforts to expand access to data about jobs and education opportunities, particularly for low-income, lower-skilled, underemployed, and unemployed individuals. Current grantees in the network include state agencies in Colorado, Michigan and New Jersey that partner with public and/or private organizations to improve access to data.

In Colorado, the initiative was conceived as a way to drive the reskilling of the workforce and improve postsecondary attainment in the state. The impetus for change came as funding for a previous platform called College in Colorado (CIC) was going away, which pushed the leadership at the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) to think about next steps. The team at CDHE and at the Workforce Development Council partnered with state agencies involved in K12, workforce development, human services, and labor and employment on a multi-agency task force to work on a vision for the ideal platform to help learners navigate the education and training space that would ultimately result in improved postsecondary, employment and workforce outcomes.

## GETTING STARTED

The initiative required the state agencies involved to be flexible and agile in order to effectively work with each other and with external partners within the existing legal framework. In addition, leadership at CDHE and the Workforce Development Council offered a compelling vision of what could be achieved that brought people to the table even before any funding became available.

The team at CDHE and the Workforce Development Council issued a Request for Information (RFI) to get a sense of what the vendor community might be able to offer to build the infrastructure. The RFI led to a Request for Proposals (RFP) that laid out the vision for the platform. The RFP indicated that funding was not available yet, and invited vendors to work with the state to identify funding opportunities. Two vendors, Pairin and Brighthive, submitted a joint proposal suggesting Data for the American Dream (D4AD) as an opportunity to get financial support to realize the vision.

The grant from D4AD helped to build momentum for the cross-agency work, which led to the establishment of a shared data ecosystem. By integrating data across agencies, the team was able to create [My Colorado Journey](#), the state's free platform for users to navigate education, training and workforce opportunities.

## GETTING TO SCALE

Partnering with D4AD to create My Colorado Journey allowed state agencies in Colorado to expand their scope and scale by 1) building momentum for cross-agency collaborations beyond the initial vision, and 2) providing a multi-state collaborative space where members of the D4AD network can think innovatively and learn from each other.

The data sharing ecosystem that made My Colorado Journey possible also set the foundation for other cross-sector initiatives. For example, My Colorado Journey now links to the data of [Mile High United Way](#) to offer students information on community support services, including food, housing, transportation, and childcare. In addition, CDHE launched the [Hunger Free and Healthy Minds Campus](#) checklists, a statewide initiative to address food insecurity and mental health needs among college students. As part of this program, campuses that meet the requirements included in the checklists, will receive Hunger Free and Healthy Minds designations.

In terms of the governance structure, the initial multi-agency task force led to the establishment of the My Colorado Journey Steering Committee, a cross-sector and cross-agency entity which remains an ‘open table’ as they continue to welcome partners and agencies that want to join. The Department of Corrections recently joined the initiative and is currently offering My Colorado Journey to incarcerated students. CDHE and the Workforce Development Council have also thought innovatively about organizational structure by creating a joint position that can work across the two agencies on collaborative initiatives.

Finally, D4AD provides an environment where members are thought partners, can think collectively about innovations around data, learn from each other, and create synergies. For example, Colorado is currently working with New Jersey to think of ways to integrate data on non-degree credentials in the Eligible Provider Training List (ETPL), and to work with Credential Engine to have all of their ETPL offerings in the Credential Engine registry.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Create a vision, with a focus on low income and students of color, that shows how a new and integrated data ecosystem can help tackle complex problems that require multiple state agencies to work together;
- 2 Think innovatively about potential partners to bring to the table, including private sector and state agency partners. See [Partnerships Action Guide](#) for additional levers to cross-agency collaborations;
- 3 Work within your legal framework to create positions that can collaborate across agencies and partners; and
- 4 Collaborate with others in your state and in other states to share challenges and lessons learned.

<sup>31</sup> Success is defined as obtaining a passing grade of C or better.



# Leverage national data sets to measure success indicators and outcomes for post-traditional learners

**STAKEHOLDERS:**

Institutions, States

**POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:**

All

Institutions and states will be limited on certain metrics and will need to use national data sets to both glean data missing from their own systems as well as to understand the broader postsecondary ecosystem. Engage national data sets for additional perspective and information. While no single national data instrument is complete within itself and allface certain limitations, these data still represent an important lens through which to view post-traditional learner populations.

The table below provides an overview of the purpose/content in major national datasets, as well as their applications for post-traditional learners.

Survey Instrument	Purpose/Content	Application for Post-traditional Learners
<a href="#">American Community Survey</a>	An annual survey of a representative sample of the US population that includes questions not included in the decennial census on topics related to education, employment, internet access and transportation. The annually updated data sets provide robust information, with many opportunities to understand attainment by race/ethnicity, age bands, and region, among other factors.	Estimate postsecondary attainment rates statewide and for different populations.  Understand the population in need of postsecondary credentials.
<a href="#">The US Census</a>	The US Census is conducted every ten years to provide an official count of the US population. The Census asks a shorter set of demographic questions than the ACS, but it provides detailed information on changes in the size of US population and changing demographics within states and communities with regard to age, sex, race and Hispanic origin.	Examine demographic trends and prepare for future enrollment patterns.

STRATEGY #1: STRENGTHEN DATA MEASUREMENT AND COLLECTION SYSTEMS TO BETTER MONITOR AND EVALUATE POST-TRADITIONAL LEARNER OUTCOMES

Survey Instrument	Purpose/Content	Application for Post-traditional Learners
<a href="#"><u>The Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS)</u></a>	Data on institutions and aggregate data on the outcomes of their students as required by the Higher Education Act (HEA). These are the most comprehensive publicly available data available on postsecondary institutions.	Understand which schools are serving part-time and Pell-eligible populations best. Observe trends among non-first-time students.
<a href="#"><u>College Scorecard</u></a>	Brings together data from IPEDS, the National Student Loan Database (NSLD), and the Internal Revenue System (IRS)	Explore debt and wage outcomes across institutions with high numbers of part-time students.
<a href="#"><u>National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)</u></a>	A series of surveys conducted on a representative sample of students that provide essential information about postsecondary students' characteristics, experiences, and outcomes.	Unpack different behaviors and characteristics of older or post-traditional students.

## Exemplars

**The U.S. Census Bureau** partnered with Colorado, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin to make wage data readily available through its postsecondary employment outcomes evaluation of its Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics survey. They matched state data with national data to estimate wage earnings for students at 1, 5, and 10 years after graduation.<sup>11</sup>

**The University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Division of Continuing Studies** initially analyzed national datasets from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to help inform course offerings, programs, and the potential student market. The process, however, was cumbersome and time-consuming. In 2017, they began using [Labor Insight™](#) from Burning Glass Technologies to more easily access national and local market data and see emerging trends, improving the University’s market-driven decisions.

**The Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI)** is a Federal collaborative partnership between the Departments of Labor and of Education. The long-term goal for WDQI and Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems is for states to use their longitudinal data systems to follow individuals through school and into and through their work life. WDQI awards grants to states to demonstrate the state level partnerships between workforce and educational agencies and the use of high quality data to inform service providers and evaluate the outcomes of initiatives. States like [Kentucky](#) and [Mississippi](#) have used these grants to not only link systems, but also create publicly facing dashboards and report cards to assist stakeholders in drawing insights.

### TIP FOR LEADERS

- 1 Monitor developments within the discussions about the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization as these could impact state and institutional data, accountability and consequences.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census (2020). Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO). Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics. [https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo\\_experimental.html](https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo_experimental.html)



## Link non-credit and credit data systems to better track students in non-credit programs

### STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Administration

### POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

In addition to a lack of common metrics and definitions to understand post-traditional learners' experiences and outcomes, there are also gaps in the data due to separate systems that have not been integrated. At the institutional level, non-credit and credit programs within an institution often use different data systems and different metrics. While data systems of non-credit and credit programs within an institution often do not align, learners across both programs may move through both programs. Institutions need data systems that allow us to see all of our students across all programs.

Over the past five years, The Capital One Foundation partnered with thirteen community colleges across six different states to improve alignment between credit and non-credit programs. From this work, experts at Columbia University's Community College Research Center (CCRC) identified that institutions often do not have integrated data systems to track the progress of students in non-credit programs.<sup>12</sup> To combat common obstacles community college leaders face pertaining to credit alignment, a framework was established by the community college leaders and CCRC experts to assist others in the alignment process. The framework places emphasis on tracking to better understand non-credit learners and their postsecondary outcomes.

To start, CCRC recommends leaders identify which metrics non-credit and credit programs use and consider standardizing definitions for each of these metrics across relevant programs and platforms. Doing so will help align systems, track enrollments of students in non-credit programs and the degree to which they do or do not progress to credit programs.<sup>13</sup> Aligning data platforms may be the most challenging part of the process. Finally, give faculty, staff, and departments access to data tools to inform decision-making about alignment policies and practices.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cormier, M., Raufman, J., Cinelli, J., & Musa, K. (2020, November 9). Aligning credit/non-credit workforce programs: Lessons learned from the Capital One working group. *The Community College Research Center. Teacher's College, Columbia University*. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/credit-noncredit-workforce-alignment.html>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## Exemplars

**Collin College**, using the Capital One Foundation grant, designed a linked course model to align programs and data across credit and non-credit programs. The model holds non-credit and credit students to the same standards, expectations, and learning outcomes for a course. Students in non-credit programs may ask to have a completed non-credit course turned into college credit, allowing for multiple entry points for non credit students looking to enter a postsecondary pathway.

**California Community Colleges** until recently used different systems for learners in credit and non-credit programs and then basic information would be “transferred” from the non-credit collection system to their Colleague system. Today, non-credit learners enter the system through CCCApply (state-system) and are included in the data import to the local college system. Enrollment, participation, and outcome data are captured and included in the same system.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Take a collaborative approach to defining and measuring outcomes by including stakeholders from offices across the campus, including administration, academic affairs, enrollment, student affairs, institutional research, and information technology;<sup>15</sup> and
- 2 Couple quantitative data with qualitative data to learn more about why students are enrolling in non-credit programs; their educational and employment backgrounds; and their satisfaction with the services they are provided.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cormier, M., Raufman, J., Cinelli, J., & Musa, K. (2020, November 9). Aligning credit/non-credit workforce programs: Lessons learned from the Capital One working group. The Community College Research Center. Teacher's College, Columbia University. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/credit-noncredit-workforce-alignment.html>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid



## Transparently report on established goals for post-traditional learner enrollment and outcomes.

### **STAKEHOLDERS:**

Institutions, States

### **POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:**

All

Once institutions and states have a set definition for post-traditional learners and built capacity to measure postsecondary indicators and outcomes against that definition, there should be a move to create a public goal for post-traditional learners and efforts to transparently report on progress toward that goal. By creating an explicit goal for post-traditional learners, leaders create a public statement on directional efforts for which they could be held accountable. These goals should be incorporated into public-facing dashboards and annual reports. Regular reporting on outcomes for this population will help create a standard for accountability beyond what is currently in place.

While most states have goals and release reports about recent high school graduates and their participation in higher education, few have reports that look at post-traditional students – even those who transfer – specifically. In a few instances, states have made a conscious decision to include post-traditional learners in their attainment goal figures. Oregon, for example, has an “adult education and training goal” in addition to its goal for students in the traditional pipeline. The adult education and training goal is connected to job opportunities and industry to get 300,000 more Oregonians earning new degrees, certificates or credentials valued by industry. Recognizing substantial attainment gaps among low-income, rural and minoritized groups, the state also committed to reducing those attainment gaps by half during the decade. The simple act of setting a common goal for post-traditional learners creates the conditions that elevate expectations and lead to continuous improvement.

## Exemplars

**Ohio**, in an effort to streamline multiple efforts to better serve post-traditional learners across the state, launched the Finish for Your Future initiative. [Finish for Your Future](#) built on successful initiatives occurring in pockets throughout Ohio to put forward a series of recommendations to advance post-traditional learner success. One of these recommendations included recognizing the need to establish an annual report to assess the success of post-traditional learners, using data and statistics that already are tracked, collected, and reported. They recommended measuring enrollments, progress, completion and, where applicable, employment.

**Indiana** has long been a leader in postsecondary monitoring and reporting at the state level. Their [certificate report](#), [transfer report](#) and [enrollment dashboard](#) all provide valuable data relevant to older students and students who pursue degrees or transfer.

### TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Incorporate post-traditional learners as a key population in state attainment goals; and
- 2 Where possible, disaggregate the term post-traditional learner further to account for special populations, such as low-income, rural or minoritized groups, that experience greater barriers when pursuing higher education.



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