

A man and a woman are sitting at a desk, looking at a document together. The man is on the left, wearing a light-colored shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a grey sweater. They are both smiling and looking at the document. The background is a blurred office setting.

Action Guide for Adult-Ready Transformation Partnerships

»» Need for Partnerships

Postsecondary institutions and systems have long forged connections with industry and the community. However, these partnerships, whether it be through industry advisory councils or community-based access programs, have often been limited in their impact and scale, particularly for post-traditional learners. The reasons for limitations of these partnerships vary; from lack of receptivity among personnel to poor implementation to cultural disconnects between organizations. Post-traditional learners, however, expect these connections to be in place and functioning effectively. When they are not, they experience greater challenges in having to navigate the transitions across disconnected space on their own. Such individualized effort may not always result in the best possible outcomes for learners. More is needed to foster these connections and provide streamlined support across the entire post-traditional learner experience.

The current situation demands that postsecondary institutions do more to create deeper connections to industry and community to provide learners with an integrated experience from on-ramps through to off-ramps. Higher education institutions and systems need to go beyond mere connections with industry and the broader community. We must truly find means to systematically integrate work and learning and how we serve and support community members.

»» Value of Partnerships

Partnerships with entities outside of higher education can provide post-traditional learners with resources and support beyond what is available within the educational setting alone. Broader, established, systemized integration with industry and community will help learners in many ways. At the industry and industry-association level, integration would benefit post-traditional learners and institutions by providing better information about job openings and salaries, the knowledge and skills needed to be successful on the job, and the credentials needed for employment. This type of information will help institutions create programs that are relevant to labor market needs, and will help students with informed decision making about which programs to pursue. Established relationships with industry also provide connections that will allow for work-based learning opportunities, as well as providing connections to help graduates move from learning straight into work. Working more closely with community-based organizations can also be useful; institutions can leverage the expertise of these organizations to increase the likelihood of reaching targeted post-traditional populations.

»» Equity in Partnerships



When taking a more equity-minded approach to community and industry partnerships, seek out the “unusual” suspects. Look to corrections agencies, veterans affairs, community housing groups, faith-based organizations, and critical community-based organizations like the United Way. More likely than not, these are the places post-traditional learners look to first for support and resources to improve their lives. Fostering authentic partnerships that leverage the trust and goodwill already in place will help to build a more welcoming and inclusive community for learners.

Strategies & Actions: Partnerships

To better foster partnerships and connections for post-traditional learners, institutions, systems, and states should 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 next level are as follows:



STRATEGY #1:

Engage employers and workforce systems to promote program relevance

 TO IMPLEMENT	 TO IMPROVE	 TO GO NEXT LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborate with workforce systems to use labor market data to identify and be more explicit about high-value credentials and programs• In partnership with employers and industry associations, develop pathways aligned with labor market needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicate a team to forging, managing, and evaluating employer partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborate with employers to provide systematic applied learning experiences• Participate in or encourage regional consortia to develop sustainable regional talent ecosystems

STRATEGY #2:

Partner to provide critical wrap-around supports

 TO IMPLEMENT	 TO IMPROVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drive collaboration and information-sharing among local and state agencies to expand access to public benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with community-based and faith-based organizations to provide targeted, culturally-responsive supports to post-traditional learners



Strategy #1

Engage employers
and workforce systems
to promote program
relevance



TO IMPLEMENT

Collaborate with workforce systems to use labor market data to identify and be more explicit about high-value credentials and programs

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Labor market data has become an increasingly important tool for institutions and states to use to inform program development, content, and evaluation. The fast changing nature of industry is requiring keener and more regular attunement to shifts and growth in the labor market. Using labor market data will allow institutions and states to better respond to current employer needs, forecast coming employment trends, and determine where to invest resources programmatically region by region. It will better ensure that programs are preparing post-traditional learners with the skills and competencies needed for the workplace. It will help institutions and states understand their learners' employment placement and progression to determine impact and return on investment.

State policymakers and institutions play a crucial role in establishing clear definitions for quality credentials, based on labor market demand and wage outcomes. Not all credentials are valued equally, and poor-quality credentials can propagate educational and economic inequities.¹ States that have undertaken a rigorous process to identify in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations and associated non-degree credentials to formulate a "credentials of value" list are better positioned for stronger outcomes.² States and institutions that start by identifying credentials employers seek on the front end will provide more value for post-traditional learners and employers on the back end. Coupling state-level transparency about which non-degree credentials "count" with strong institution-level career counseling and self-advocacy strategies can lead more post-traditional learners to meaningful career paths with equitable outcomes.

There are different ways to connect to labor market data, which primarily consists of employment and wage data. Institutions and systems can partner with public workforce partners, such as workforce development boards, American Job Centers, state economic development agencies or commerce departments to understand learners' transition to the workforce.³ States can collaborate with their state's unemployment insurance (UI) agency to link employment and wage data into their state longitudinal data systems.⁴ Institutions, systems, and states can work with regional partners and data vendors to access the data that is required. These stakeholders can invest in new tools and platforms that make it easier to access, analyze, and represent key metrics and findings and update them on a consistent, regular basis.

For post-traditional learners seeking evidence of the value of a postsecondary credential and looking for clearer connections between learning and work, these efforts will enable institutions to be more explicit about pathways, the relevance of program content, and the transition into the workforce.

¹ Brock, T. & Slater, D. (2021). *Strategies for improving postsecondary credential attainment among Black, Hispanic, and Native American adults*. Community College Research Center. Teacher's College, Columbia University. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/credential-attainment-black-hispanic-native-american-adults.pdf>

² Valentine, J.L., & Clay, J. (2019). *Non-degree credentials provide value for adults in the labor market*. DVP-PRAXIS. <https://www.dvp-praxis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DVP-PRAXIS-Non-Degree-Credentials-and-Labor-Market-Outcomes.pdf>

³ Urban Institute. (2016). *Building America's workforce*. <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/building-americas-workforce/projects/connections-employment>

⁴ Whitfield, C., Armstrong, J. and Weeden, D. (2018). *The State of State Postsecondary Data Systems*. The State Higher Education Executive Officers. https://postsecondarydata.shceo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO_StrongFoundations_18.pdf

CASE STUDY

Reimagining Labor Market Data to Support Decision-making: Dallas College Labor Market Intelligence Center

BACKGROUND

Launched in 2015, Dallas College's Labor Market Intelligence Center (LMIC) offers postsecondary partners in the Dallas region access to data and decision-making support to understand the economic drivers of the region and ensure that postsecondary education and training programs equip learners with the skills most relevant to Dallas County businesses. These services extend to external partners including economic development agencies and small nonprofits whose goals and objectives are relevant to education and workforce alignment.

The LMIC was conceived as part of a larger vision for education and labor market alignment at Dallas College that Chancellor Joe May developed in partnership with Georgetown University's Center for Education and Workforce. By increasing labor market alignment, the College's goal is not only to engage, enroll, and complete more students in the Dallas region, but also shift the focus to the regional economy. That vision requires postsecondary institutions in the Dallas region to think beyond completion and put more emphasis on job placement as an outcome. The initial data infrastructure for LMIC was developed with a grant from the Capital One Foundation, but costs associated with maintaining that infrastructure, including software subscriptions, have now been assumed by the College.

GETTING STARTED

The LMIC team's effort began with educating internal stakeholders on why an emphasis on labor market alignment was critical for their college and region. Their main argument was that alignment was about the relevance and survival of higher education, and ultimately about the development and growth of the regional economy. Meanwhile, they used existing tools and data to engage with external partners including chambers of commerce, workforce development agencies, small nonprofits, and any entity that was relevant for education and workforce alignment.

Next, the LMIC team mapped existing needs and gaps in the workforce space to identify how their data could bring the most value to the community. They attended events and engaged with relevant stakeholders. Initial pushback came from stakeholders in the workforce field who considered the work of LMIC duplicative of the services offered by other workforce entities in the region. The LMIC team made a case for the need to focus specifically on the link between education and employment and argued that, compared to existing workforce entities, LMIC could have a more direct impact on decision-making around educational programs being offered and improve alignment with the labor market. Employers helped them in their case-making, as they saw an added value in having access to data that was not provided by other entities—such as information on demographics and population changes in the region—which gave them a more thorough understanding of the regional landscape.

Finally, the team gathered qualitative and quantitative data on labor market alignment across campuses and departments by working with Institutional Research, as well as external partners, and built the data infrastructure.

⁹ Daugherty, L., Johnson, W. R., & Berglund, T. (2020). *Connecting College Students to Alternative Sources of Support the Single Stop Community College Initiative and Postsecondary Outcomes*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1740-1.html

GETTING TO SCALE

After five years of implementation, LMIC is currently serving all Dallas College campuses, as well as feeder high school districts and transfer institutions, including the Dallas Independent School District and other independent school districts in the region, University of Northern Texas, Dallas, University of Texas, Dallas, University of Texas, Arlington, and Southern Methodist University.

In addition to offering information on in-demand jobs, associated wages, and required education and training to access those jobs, LMIC has expanded its focus to examine other socioeconomic barriers to education and jobs. In this way, postsecondary partners and employers can have a more nuanced understanding of the areas they serve, some of which have high poverty rates. LMIC now provides data on access to healthcare, childcare, and grocery stores/food in the region. The driver for this LMIC's expansion was acknowledging how basic needs insecurity impacts students' postsecondary access and success.

Staff capacity remains one of the biggest barriers to scaling further. While existing staff is adequate to process existing data requests, the team acknowledges that it has limited capacity to expand LMIC's influence and reach. The ongoing consolidation of the seven campuses at Dallas College will likely free up resources to grow the team and allow LMIC to be able to provide reports to various stakeholders on a monthly or quarterly basis.

NEXT STEPS

The team at LMIC reported that once they asserted their value and presence, more internal and external stakeholders started making data requests, especially to understand the changes occurring in the labor market as a result of the pandemic. For example, faculty were directed to LMIC by the Provost if they wanted to make curricular changes. Furthermore, employers became increasingly engaged as they saw LMIC as a new way to organize stakeholders around which discussions could be held to align education and training with their talent needs. Finally, the former LMIC director has been appointed Associate Chancellor of Economic Opportunity, which elevates the work and signals Dallas College's commitment to the initiative.

As a next step, the College is linking their Salesforce data to labor market information in order to better understand student outcomes.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Engage with stakeholders in the ecosystem in which the work will occur to assess how it can complement existing efforts and fill in gaps;
- 2 Build a presence in the field by attending relevant events to showcase the work;
- 3 Identify organizations that do not have access to the data, including small nonprofits, and proactively offer the services. Send frequent data reports to relevant stakeholders to build buy-in and demand for the work;
- 4 Feed labor market data into student-level data to better track outcomes beyond graduation and provide evidence of labor market alignment or lack thereof;
- 5 Analyze outcomes data of employer partnerships as examples of alignment (See Case Study on Columbus State employer partnerships in this Action Guide); and
- 6 Don't wait for the data infrastructure to be built to start. Use the tools and data at your disposal to build buy-in.



TO IMPLEMENT

In partnership with employers and industry associations, develop programs aligned with labor market needs

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty

**POST-TRADITIONAL
POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:**

All

Connecting post-traditional learners to labor market opportunities requires strategic coordination among multiple stakeholders, but perhaps the most important partnership for the development of strong industry-aligned pathways is the one between employers or employer associations and higher education institutions and their faculty. Industry-institution partnerships are innovative in nature, and can bring academic and social support, professional development, resource sustainability, and systemic enhancement to colleges serving high populations of adult learners.⁵

Successful partnerships are largely defined by a few best practices. In addition to collaborating on labor market analytics, strong industry-institution partnerships begin by establishing consensus among stakeholders of major priorities, challenges and strategic pathways. Oftentimes, this occurs through a recognized university liaison.⁶ Building on this foundation, employers and institutions can work together to profile in-demand competencies and map those competencies to the existing curriculum to identify potential gaps.⁷ Finally, to sustain this work, institutions and employers should work together to identify how resources (e.g., institutional funds, grants) and existing infrastructure can be best utilized to promote student and career success.⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mann, E. (2017). *Connecting community colleges with employers: A toolkit for building successful partnerships*. Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/gs_20170731_community_colleges_toolkit_final.pdf

⁷ Business Higher Education Forum. (2018). *Creating Purposeful Partnerships: Business and Higher Education Working Together to Build Regional Talent Ecosystems for the Digital Economy*. Retrieved 2020, from https://www.bhef.com/sites/default/files/BHEF_2018_CEO_playbook_0.pdf

⁸ Jobs for the Future (2019). *Employer Partnerships that Drive Systems Change*. Retrieved 2020, from https://www.heretohere.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Employer-Partnerships-that-Drive-Systems-Change_Single.pdf

CASE STUDY

Community College and Employer Partnership to Improve Equity: Columbus State Community College and Huntington Bank

BACKGROUND

Huntington Bank identified the need to further educate their frontline and entry-level staff who were predominantly people of color and/or women facing barriers to promotion for not having completed a bachelor's degree. In addition, Huntington realized that employees were not taking advantage of the existing tuition reimbursement program due to financial barriers.

Through a partnership with Columbus State Community College, Huntington leveraged their tuition reimbursement program to make direct, upfront payments to the college, diversify its talent pipeline, and reduce turnover. Columbus State proposed to adapt their 'Exact Track' program, a part-time five-year business program leading to a BA offered jointly with Franklin University, to be offered in eight-week modules. The employer requested that the program be offered on site at Huntington. This [tailored program](#) is offered in the evening on the same weekdays (e.g., Mondays and Wednesdays) for five years, which helps the students plan for family responsibilities. In addition, during each eight-week module, students take two classes, one in-person and one online, which provides additional flexibility.

GETTING STARTED

The first step was to assign faculty at Columbus State Community College to adapt course offerings to an 8-week modality. Huntington then appointed a program coordinator who could work with a peer at Columbus State to make programmatic decisions. This decision streamlined a process that was slower when college staff worked directly with leadership at Huntington. The employer then determined eligibility for the program and selected employees for the first cohort. Students were selected out of those entry-level employees without a bachelor's degree who had received the highest scores in the performance reviews and were interested in the program.

GETTING TO SCALE

The employer and the college determined scale jointly and addressed barriers to recruitment. Each cohort is capped at 25 students, based on preferred student to faculty ratio as well as fiscal constraints. Recruitment relied on a 5-year commitment from entry-level, high-performing employees working in Columbus, which made reaching the intended target of 25 students per cohort challenging. The fourth cohort (Fall 2021) will be offered statewide and completely online, allowing for more employees to take advantage of the program.

One of the challenges to scale is the financial model. The majority of students in the program are ineligible for Pell or state grants due to their income and, as a result, the employer covers most of the cost of tuition, fees, and books. During implementation, partners became aware that educational costs that go over the IRS cap for employer tuition assistance programs have a financial (tax) impact on students.

In the second year of the partnership, Columbus State raised tuition, and costs for Huntington went from \$5,250 per student to \$5,500 per student annually. The IRS indicates that employers can provide educational assistance up to \$5,250 per employee. Given that this is a five-year program, tuition increases will likely become a barrier in the future. Because of this, Huntington Bank is considering a "bonus/stipend" to the students to cover the tax impact of the amount over \$5,250.

NEXT STEPS

Columbus State believes that, compared to partnerships where the employer regards the postsecondary institution as a 'vendor', colleges and employers that work as thought-partners can more effectively tackle challenges. And data from the first cohort show positive outcomes:

- 80% of students are people of color and/or women, who are currently underrepresented in management positions at Huntington; and
- 90% of students were retained.

In addition to existing descriptive data, Huntington plans to conduct a return-on-investment study after the first cohort completes the program.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Conduct an intentional talent needs-assessment with the employer;
- 2 Serve employer and students' needs by being flexible and adapting curricula or delivery modes;
- 3 Engage adequate staff at the leadership level and at the program implementation level — both on the college and employer sides to tackle problems; and
- 4 Consider the implications of yearly IRS caps on employer tuition assistance programs when offering long-term credentials in partnership with employers. Breaking the programs into stackable credentials that stay below the yearly cap could be an option to optimize this funding stream.



Dedicate a team to forging, managing and evaluating employer partnerships

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions

POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Promoting relevant, industry-engaged pathways requires dedicated staff capacity. Yet too often, relationships with employers are one-offs between faculty or college leadership and industry leaders, and when those individuals inevitably transition, the partnerships are lost. Further, it is often the case that multiple areas of the college are engaging the same employer, sometimes the same individual, at once.⁹ This can lead to confusion among employers, administrators, and the students engaged in applied learning opportunities. For example, when St. John's College surveyed their employer partners, they found "streamlined communication was one of the primary obstacles" to working with postsecondary institutions.¹⁰

It is incumbent upon higher education institutions and administrators to develop an organized process for engaging with employers and employer associations. This means dedicating human resources, often a team of individuals, to nurture the partnership and solicit regular feedback on how the partnership is working. Industry partners and institutions should develop teams comprised of champions at the executive or C-suite level and mid-level.¹¹ While most of the work may be executed by program staff, according to AASCU, the "success of key institutional partnerships often pivots on the continued commitment by the institution's leader."¹² In addition, the president should have a trusted deputy overseeing the partnerships. This individual should be a high-ranking colleague with a track record for leading large-scale, high-profile projects.

⁹ Education Strategy Group. (2020). A more unified community college: Strategies and resources to align non-credit and credit pathways in community colleges. http://edstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A-More-Unified-Community-College_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ Hazell, C. (2020, October 15). How to Increase Adult Student Enrollment Through Organizational Partnerships. Retrieved November 02, 2020, from <https://abound.college/advice/how-to-increase-adult-student-enrollment-through-organizational-partnerships/>

¹¹ Business Higher Education Forum. (2018). *Creating Purposeful Partnerships: Business and Higher Education Working Together to Build Regional Talent Ecosystems for the Digital Economy*. Retrieved 2020, from https://www.bhef.com/sites/default/files/BHEF_2018_CEO_playbook_0.pdf

¹² American Association of State Colleges and Universities. (2018). *Making Partnerships Work: Principles, Guidelines and Advice for Public University Leaders*. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.aascu.org/policy/publications/Partnerships.pdf>

Exemplars

St. John's University relied heavily on faculty to develop relationships with third-party organizations. By encouraging faculty to leverage personal relationships with industry partners, administrators increased graduate job placement rates by 14%, a trend that has remained consistent over the past five years. For clarity, this kind of support did not require administrators to take over personal relationships on behalf of faculty; rather institutional leaders coordinated and supported faculty to strategically develop personal relationships that aligned with the university's initiative to increase job placement rates. Leaders trusted faculty who had a 'foot in the door' within organizations to utilize their connections for student benefit.¹⁴

CUNY Career Success Initiative's Sector Innovation Team serves as the 'front door' to employers seeking to engage with college campuses across New York. Through the Sector Innovation team, a team of five professional staff members, employers are able to serve on "academic advisory councils, participate in employee volunteer opportunities, and provide students with internships, career exploration, or experiential learning opportunities."¹⁵ Since 2018, over 300 employers have been engaged across the state from the financial, business, technology, and healthcare sectors.¹⁶

TIP FOR LEADERS

- 1 Encourage teams to create a central document that articulates the elements of an ongoing engagement strategy;
- 2 Identify and coordinate key campus stakeholders who have formal and informal relationships with industry employers (e.g., faculty, staff, career service personnel, alumni); and
- 3 Communicate with system-level officers to identify strategic priorities pertaining to employer relationships and job placement.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cunningham, J., Sigal, A., Johnson, H., & Di Bonaventura, J. (2019). *Employer partnerships that drive system change: Accelerating change at The City University of New York. HERE to HERE & JFF.* https://www.heretohere.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Employer-Partnerships-that-Drive-Systems-Change_Single.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid.



TO GO NEXT LEVEL

Collaborate with employers to provide systematic applied learning experiences

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, Faculty, States

POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Institutions and systems that are focused on preparing post-traditional learners should incorporate experiential and work-based learning into their programs. Post-traditional learners who have the opportunity to learn in the context of real-world or other applied settings, do well.¹⁷ Work-based learning can include internships, apprenticeships, and clinical experiences. Experiential learning can include hands-on experience in the relevant field, which is essential to prepare learners for the workplace.¹⁸

While several forms of work-based learning have long been offered through institutional settings, now is the time to go deeper and further. This is achieved by ensuring that offerings such as apprenticeships count for credit towards a degree. It is about expanding earn and learn programs to make them more of the rule for adult learners, rather than the exception. It is about working across a diversity of employers in a structured way to better upskill workers and create more direct pathways for learners.

Providing learning in context and through real-world application is just the first step. Connecting this learning to degree pathways at scale is the next step to ensure learners can properly signal their competencies and proficiencies to employers, further their education, and be competitive in the marketplace via their credentials. More colleges are creating and marketing earn and learn programs tailored to post-traditional learners, as are companies who seek to support their employees in accessing education as a benefit or as a direct part of their work experience. Others are partnering with regional employers to expand their existing models of work-based learning.

¹⁷ Eberly Center. (n.d.). *Principles of teaching and learning*. Carnegie Mellon University. <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/principles/>

¹⁸ Strada Institute for the Future of Work. (2020). *The new learning ecosystem*. Strada Education Network. <https://www.stradaeducation.org/report/the-new-learning-ecosystem/>

Exemplars

Austin Community College (ACC) in Texas created a 12-month earn and learn program to provide students with paid internships and apprenticeships in IT, manufacturing, and healthcare 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.¹⁹

Georgetown University Pivot Program in Washington DC is a selective program specifically designed for formerly incarcerated individuals. It is a full-time, 10-month program that blends education via a non-credit certificate in business and entrepreneurship with a three-month internship, and space to develop a business idea or pursue employment. Learners receive a weekly stipend across the duration of the program from the DC Department of Employment Services. Launched in 2018, Pivot has gone through two cohorts of 20 students each. Graduates start their own businesses or begin employment.

Colorado has used two Department of Labor grants to create a scalable model for colleges and employers to use to grow the number of apprenticeships in the state. Students can view available apprenticeship programs and employers can sign-up and be connected with a consultant and potential college partner who can help build the program. Statewide effort to identify pathways to award credit for work-based learning may enhance this effort.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 To promote scale, set targets for how many students participate in earn and learn programs; and
- 2 Target high-impact practices, such as work-based learning opportunities, to traditionally underrepresented groups.²⁰

¹⁹ Pruitt, S. (2019, November 21). ACC awarded \$250,000 to build apprenticeships in high-demand programs. Austin Community College District. <https://www.austincc.edu/news/2019/09/acc-awarded-250000-build-apprenticeships-high-demand-programs>

²⁰ Education Advisory Board. (2020). Is your college designed for post-traditional learners? 13 strategies to ensure you aren't underserving today's community college student. Education Advisory Board. <https://pages.eab.com/rs/732-GKV-655/images/NAV-PostTraditionalWP-PDF.pdf>

**TO GO NEXT LEVEL**

Participate in or encourage regional consortia to develop sustainable regional talent ecosystems

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

**POST-TRADITIONAL
POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:**

All

While developing employer and industry association partnerships at the institution level is an essential starting point for building more relevant programs, it's important to keep in mind that it's impossible for a single institution to address every industry's needs. Economies and learners are not limited by the bounds of a college or university's jurisdictional area. Regional partnerships acknowledge this and may even expand the reach of participating campuses. Further, working collaboratively with other postsecondary entities not only provides more freedom to build programs that play to each institution's strengths, but also avoids unnecessary competition with other schools. Attempting to launch programs for which there is little faculty expertise or infrastructure can come with some reputational risk.²¹

Increasingly, state, as well as federal, competitive grant programs aimed at increasing credit portability and talent development are requiring multi-institution collaborations. The goal behind these collaboratives is to address some of the limitations of single-institution approaches identified above. States should double down on grant programs designed to encourage these types of partnerships. For institutions without statewide incentives to partner, work with other local colleges and universities to understand how every school can collaborate to support the regional talent ecosystem.

²¹ Hazell, C. (2020, October 15). *How to Increase Adult Student Enrollment Through Organizational Partnerships*. <https://abound.college/advice/how-to-increase-adult-student-enrollment-through-organizational-partnerships/>

Exemplar

California passed [legislation](#) in 2016 to provide a recurring investment of \$248M for career and technical education (CTE). This fund directly supports the state's 115 community colleges. 60% of the funding goes directly to community colleges and 40% is invested in regional consortia in which colleges and employers work together to address unique needs in their regional economies. For example, [California's Central Mother Lode Regional Consortium](#) invested in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, health, and digital media career fields. Further, CTE Data Unlocked, a component of the program, helps colleges use CTE data to strengthen regional workforce plans by furthering local processes like program review, accreditation, and integrated planning. The Strong Workforce Program is expected to bring approximately one million CTE jobs to California.

TIP FOR LEADERS

- 1 Understand the value each university or college partner brings and, at the institutional-level, play to your strengths.



Strategy #2

Partner to provide
critical wrap-around
supports



TO IMPLEMENT

Drive collaboration and information-sharing among local and state agencies to expand access to public benefits

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions, States

POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

Institutions and states are recognizing the need to connect their students to public benefits that address their basic needs. There are many examples of efforts underway to collaborate with local and state agencies to expand programs and funding to better serve adult learners on this front. Campuses are working with human service and workforce agencies to help ensure students can access the public services they need to pay for food, childcare, housing, and medical costs, among other things.

Many students benefit from social safety-net programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program (WIC), housing, and childcare services. The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides state partner programs, which includes these programs, as well as veterans grants, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs for employees who lose their jobs or whose hours are reduced due to increased imports.

Because every state administers these programs differently, it is difficult to list one set of policy and practice reforms that would maximize alignment and increase student access to public benefits across all states. But, CLASP has worked directly with several states individually to find the best opportunities for alignment and from this engagement has discovered a set of common themes necessary for successful engagement. Specifically: 1) states must have a leader-champion; 2) states should connect this effort to their attainment goal or another statewide initiative; 3) states should sustain ongoing opportunities for discussion across agencies; 4) it is important to create shared terminology across agencies; and 5) states should engage in coalition building with state agencies and non-government partners, such as advocacy groups.²²

²² Walizer, L., *State Strategies for Addressing College Students' Basic Needs*; CLASP January 15, 2020, Retrieved November 7, from <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/state-strategies-addressing-college-students-basic-needs>

CASE STUDY

Leveraging Partners to Address Basic Needs Insecurity: Massachusetts Statewide Basic Needs Agenda for Postsecondary Education

BACKGROUND

As a result of a confluence of factors, including increased media and public attention given to basic needs insecurity among college students, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) launched a statewide basic needs agenda for postsecondary education.

To start, the Department encouraged campuses to participate in the [#RealCollege Survey](#) from the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, and convened a committee with other state agencies and campus staff to address basic needs insecurity. The first focus was housing insecurity, and Department leadership worked with the Office of Health and Human Services to identify funding for an on-campus housing pilot that launched in 2019. This program leveraged vacant dorm rooms to provide housing for students, as well as meal plans and support services. The pilot program is managed by regional teams, comprised of staff at a nearby community college, state university, and a community-based youth services provider in the area. Funding from the program comes from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, where leadership justified the investment stating that addressing homelessness early and getting these students on track to a degree, reduces housing insecurity in the long term.

Next, an anti-hunger advocate in the state served as a broker to connect relevant state agencies to think about ways to tackle food insecurity. With this multi-agency approach, Massachusetts became one of the first states to pursue an agenda to address basic needs insecurity for college students as a way to improve retention and completion.

GETTING STARTED

Leadership at the Department of Higher Education used the survey data collected in partnership with the Hope Center, as well as qualitative data collected on different campuses, to make a case for the need to advance a basic needs agenda at the state level. In addition, this agenda benefited from unique champions at the highest levels of state leadership — in higher education and health and human services — who had experienced housing and food insecurity first-hand while in college and were able to make compelling arguments to stakeholders. In their messaging, leadership at the Department was careful to frame the agenda as one of basic needs insecurity and not of homelessness, to build support for a broader agenda that also includes technology access, transportation, and child care.

Next, the state's director of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness lobbied for the Department of Housing and Community Development to repurpose an 11-bedroom house north of Boston, previously used by clients of the Department of Mental Health, as a living and learning community for college students. More recently, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance for institutions to reach out to students who became eligible for SNAP due to the program's temporary expansion. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education worked with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), which administers SNAP in the state, on a way to streamline access to SNAP for college students. Leadership at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education ran an outreach campaign by sending out a letter signed by the Commissioner of Higher Education, Carlos Santiago, to all college students in the state who were eligible for SNAP expansion. In the letter, the Commissioner states that he benefited from accessing food stamps while in college, which brought further media attention to the campaign. DTA agreed to use the letter as proof of SNAP eligibility and committed to minimize additional requirements for students.

GETTING TO SCALE

The housing program is a pilot intended to provide evidence about its efficacy and build impactful, lasting partnerships between campuses and youth service providers. The program currently serves only 36 students and 77% of students from the original group remain in college. A private foundation has expressed interest in the program and may fund its expansion.

With regards to the outreach campaign for the SNAP expansion, DHE is currently pursuing a data-share agreement with DTA and DTE to examine how many of those students ended up benefiting and measure the impact of the campaign.

Next, the Department of Higher Education will be convening a basic needs advisory committee to work on a Basic Needs Strategic Plan and expand access to mental health supports for students.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Use stimulus funding, SNAP expansion, and other federal and state programs to help with outreach, engagement, and student take up;
- 2 Use personal narratives to bring media and public attention to the issue and speak to students; and
- 3 Establish data share agreements on the front end to measure outcomes. See [Data Action Guide](#) on data integration leading to cross sector initiatives.



Liaise with community-based organizations to provide targeted, culturally-responsive supports to post-traditional learners

STAKEHOLDERS:

Institutions

POST-TRADITIONAL POPULATIONS TO CONSIDER:

All

In the broader ecosystem of preparing post-traditional learners for work, institutions must realize that they cannot be all things to all students and that they need others to provide support in a multitude of ways. In many cases, entities outside of education may be better suited and specialized to provide more culturally-responsive supports to these learners. Partnering with community organizations who are deeply rooted in serving their local communities and who are committed to social and economic mobility is critical.

Partnerships with the community can address a range of supports for learners and the institution. Partnerships can be about expanding enrollment pipelines and understanding how to better connect with specific populations. They can be about increasing access and helping prospective students walk through the process to gain financial aid, become a student, and register for classes. They can assist with providing for students' basic needs. They can help learners connect their prior learning to degree programs and career advancement.

Connect to partners across the local and regional community that serve specific populations well and offer services and resources that institutions are not able to offer on their own. While these community-based organizations (CBOs) are often expert at serving these students, capacity to take on new partnerships or initiatives may be limited. To address this, assign dedicated staff to support partnerships, build relationships with partner leads at CBOs, and find points of alignment and integration. At the state level, states should invest in capacity-building at local CBOs to ensure these partnerships are viable.

Exemplars

Mi Casa Resource Center. As a CBO that has been serving the Latino community in Denver for more than 40 years, Mi Casa provided financial services training to help community members gain employment in the banking industry. In 2019, through a collaboration with the Community College of Aurora (CCA) and Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver), Mi Casa created pathways for its learners to gain college credit for their financial services training and go on to pursue additional education and a degree in related areas. The goal is to support the economic mobility of this population. Mi Casa has been very well positioned to both understand the needs of the population it serves and provide additional support services to facilitate their learners' progression into and through these new pathways.²³

United Way of King County Bridge to Finish. In Seattle, Washington, the Bridge to Finish program operates benefit hubs at ten area community and technical colleges to help students stay in school and complete their programs. These physical locations provide students with services such as one-time emergency grants, a food pantry, tax services, financial coaching, and housing support. Services are available at times that are oriented to post-traditional learners and information is available in multiple languages. During the pandemic, Bridge to Finish sites moved their services to an online platform. The program served 7,000 students last year, provided more than 18,000 connections to resources and support, and saw a 12% increase in persistence for students of color (UWKC, n.d.)

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Identify geographic or population gaps in your student body and map community-based organizations in those locales or that specialize in serving populations of interest; and
- 2 Use memorandums of understanding or other agreements to formalize partnership and ensure a common understanding of goals and roles.

²³ Johnson, J. & Glover, H. (2020, June 5). Many ways of knowing: Connecting Native American skills to degree pathways. Medium. <https://medium.com/todays-students-tomorrow-s-talent/many-ways-of-knowing-connecting-native-american-skills-to-degree-pathways-5e35eec3492>



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