

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

POWERHOUSE PARTNERSHIPS

Community Colleges and Workforce Boards Working Together

This report describes the activities and strategies of a wide variety of partnerships between community colleges and workforce boards, with key takeaways starting on page 9 that can assist other community colleges and workforce organizations to solidify their collaborations and further their mutual goals.

Working together can lead to tangible rewards—we all know this is true. But we also know it can be challenging to create partnerships across organizations with different missions, cultures, practices, funding sources, and approaches.

Many community colleges and public workforce organizations—state workforce agencies, state and local workforce development boards (WDBs) and American Job Centers (AJCs)¹—have overcome these challenges to have a larger impact together than they could have alone in helping people prepare for jobs and employers find a skilled labor force.

Building such partnerships is an essential element of the U.S. Department of Labor grant program called Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT). This program provided nearly \$2 billion over a seven-year period to help the nation's community colleges deliver industry-aligned credentials for unemployed and underemployed adults.

Many of the examples in this report illustrate partnerships that emerged out of TAACCCT, while others are longstanding relationships that pre-dated the program.



“I WANT US TO STOP THINKING ABOUT OURSELVES AS...AGENCIES, BUREAUS, DIVISIONS...WE ARE A GROUP OF FOLKS THAT HAVE BEEN GIVEN A TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY TO BETTER THE LIVES OF OTHERS THROUGH OUR CORE MISSION OF EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT.”

—CELINA BUSSEY

Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions

The first set of stories focuses on statewide and regional efforts to identify needs in the local labor market and to develop programs to meet them. The second set delves into the activities and lessons learned from serving “common customers”—individual students, employers, and jobseekers. In most cases, these two purposes are not mutually exclusive, and colleges and public workforce agencies come together to do both. But looking at them separately is helpful for homing in on the particular activities needed in each instance.

The common thread in these stories, whether the focus is service delivery or labor market planning, is that, like all relationships, successful partnerships don’t happen overnight. They require deliberate planning, focus, time, and resources. ■

ALIGNING COLLEGE PROGRAMS & LABOR MARKET NEEDS

The following stories illustrate long-term strategic alliances between community colleges and workforce boards that have come together to analyze local, regional, and statewide industries and occupations, and to design community college programs that prepare people with the skills necessary for immediate jobs and career advancement. Together, these partnerships are increasing their collective impact on the vitality of their local economies.



WISCONSIN

Community College Partner

Wisconsin Technical College System

Workforce Board Partner

Department of Workforce Development

Location Statewide

Goal To bring dedicated and directed cohesion to existing practices and take career pathway systems in Wisconsin to greater scale and alignment.

In Wisconsin, Career Pathways Are a Statewide Affair

In Wisconsin, a major statewide career pathway effort is underway to align the programs of the 16 colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) with labor market needs. Career pathways have been a focus for the workforce system and colleges in Wisconsin dating back to 2007, supported through a series of private and federal grants and state policy initiatives. Their efforts received an added boost when, in 2015, WTCS received additional funds to scale career pathways and build a system as part of its TAACCCT grant. Those funds supported a multi-level statewide initiative to drive into greater alignment the services and programs administered by the WTCS system, the state’s workforce and economic development departments, secondary schools, veteran-serving organizations, local workforce boards, adult literacy providers, and other stakeholders.

The funding came at an opportune time, when the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) was engaged in an effort to plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA requires collaboration across the multiple stakeholders that make up the workforce system. Wisconsin took the opportunity to use its TAACCCT funds to support its WIOA planning, and to expand and scale career pathways with particular focus on the state’s technical colleges. According to Scott DuBenske, education director with the WTCS, a key to keeping the partnership together has been the mutual understanding of its importance and the commitment of the individuals around the table.

“One of the challenges of doing this kind of creative, multi-stakeholder work is simply time constraints. Everyone has multiple demands on their time. But everyone at the table understood that no one agency could do all of the things we were committed to. It truly takes a well-functioning system.”

The effort is guided by a 14-member Pathways Committee, which oversees technical assistance, professional development, shared learning, and data analysis to measure progress. The statewide effort is designed to support the development of local career pathways. DuBenske explained, “Wisconsin is a large state with a great deal of variation among regional labor markets. In our plan, colleges will continue to rely on advisory committees made up of local business and

“THERE’S AN ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL LEARNING AMONG THE COMMITTEE. AS WE HAVE BUILT ELEMENTS OF OUR SECTOR AND CAREER PATHWAYS WORK, WE HAVE TESTED THEM OUT AND LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE.”

Scott DuBenske, Wisconsin Technical College System

industry to develop and support new programs, new career pathways, and stackable credentials. They will also work with local workforce boards and economic development agencies to support sector partnerships, and with job centers to connect individuals with the right program to meet their skill development needs and career goals.”

Career pathway coordinators who have been established at every college serve as the link between the statewide plan and local activity. These career pathway coordinators function as the coordinating hub for developing and implementing career pathways in each locality. They have seven core responsibilities:

1. Coordinate across college departments and systems to accommodate career pathways and the adult learners pursuing a pathway credential.
2. Collaborate with faculty and staff to improve curriculum delivery methods.
3. Coordinate with education, workforce, and business partners to develop and utilize career pathways.
4. Bring the appropriate experts and resources together to create and improve career pathway components and assist them to prepare applications for embedded technical diplomas and career pathway certificates for state approval.
5. Guide development of career pathway maps and communication tools to inform industry, students, and policymakers about pathways that the college has developed.

6. Monitor progress, facilitate improvement processes, and report on the impact of career pathways.
7. Collaborate with professionals at other colleges and WTCS.

Meanwhile, each local WDB is engaged in convening employers, educators, and other stakeholders by sector to develop strategies to meet that industry’s talent needs. The career pathway coordinators then develop the services and mechanisms, working with the local AJC staff, to help students access and move along the pathway of education and training opportunities and into employment.

DuBenske is hopeful that these efforts to scale career pathways will be successful, based on Wisconsin’s history thus far. “There’s an atmosphere of mutual learning among the pathways committee. As we have built elements of our sector and career pathways work, we have tested them out, stepped back to observe, learned from the experience, and then made adjustments. We’ll continue to operate that way through this new phase of scaling our system.”



Community College Partner

Community Colleges of Spokane

Workforce Board Partner

Spokane Area Workforce Development Council

Location Spokane, Washington

Goal To improve strategy development and information sharing between the colleges and workforce system to help build a stronger middle class.

In Spokane, a Chance to Share Information and Save Money

Coordinating the collection and use of labor market data is one way that community colleges and workforce development boards can integrate their work. In Spokane, it was also aided by a joint leadership position developed through their partnership. At the Community Colleges of Spokane, a community college district made

up of two community colleges and a district office, Mark Mattke plays two roles: chief workforce officer for the community college district and chief executive officer of the local workforce development board, the Spokane Area Workforce Development Council. As Mattke explained,

“This arrangement came about when both organizations were looking for new opportunities to serve the community and deal with budget pressures, so sharing the cost of this key position made sense.”

Mattke’s dual role serves both the community college district and the Workforce Development Board (WDB), unifying the two in strategy development and information sharing. The Community Colleges of Spokane used information from the workforce development council about industry needs, credential requirements, and average wages for jobs in the local industry. During planning meetings, this data was compared to colleges’ program information. These meetings were attended by the colleges’ vice presidents for instruction and learning, the deans of career and technical programs, and the district’s chief workforce officer, provost, and other internal staff. They reviewed the information to determine whether their programs were meeting the goal of helping students join the middle class.

The close relationship of the WDB with the community college district is further evidenced by co-investment in a shared business engagement manager position. The organizations share the cost of this position to provide outreach to businesses in the region, identifying their training and human capital needs and developing solutions that leverage the expertise and resources of both the colleges and the WDB.

Mattke is also working with college leadership to expand services available to students and the customers of the AJC. Their goal was to have all students enrolled as AJC customers so they could access career workshops and other job-search assistance and increase the available talent pool for employers. According to Mattke, “Change doesn’t occur immediately, but the understanding and trust that have developed between the colleges and WDB staffs have yielded many positive results, and they continue to find ways to integrate their work.”

VIRGINIA



Community College Partner

Tidewater Community College

Workforce Board Partner

Opportunity Inc.

Location Hampton Roads, Virginia (area)

Goal To increase availability and attainment of industry-recognized credentials.

Virginia is for Communicators

Across Virginia, workforce priorities mandated at the state level drove community college and WDB collaborations like the one between Tidewater Community College and Opportunity Inc., a WDB in a region that spans eight communities. The high percentage of jobs requiring technical skills pushed state leaders to pursue policies that would help more people acquire the skills needed to get jobs today and in the future. Among these policies were incentives for community colleges to develop programs that will triple the number of industry-recognized credentials earned by Virginia community college students.

With those incentives, Tidewater was eager to work more closely with Opportunity Inc.

But it takes more than state directives to create a working relationship. Shawn Avery, president of Opportunity Inc., and Corey McCray, vice president of Workforce Solutions at Tidewater, insisted it was their constant communication that fueled the collaboration between their organizations. “And,” said Avery, “the respect we have for each other’s roles.”

The primary work involved analyzing local labor market needs by drawing on data provided by Opportunity Inc. staff. Avery and his team identified skill gaps and brought in educational partners to discuss how these gaps could be resolved. The two organizations are also connected at the board level when the president of Tidewater joined the board of Opportunity Inc. in 2015.

The two institutions are the joint recipients of multiple grants and are working on apprenticeship programs as part of Tidewater’s Apprenticeship Institute.

Opportunity Inc.'s role is to identify employers while Tidewater developed the program and delivered the training. Because of their partnership, both groups are enthusiastic about the new opportunities the apprenticeship programs brought to their common customers: individuals seeking career advancement and employers in need of skilled workers.

WICHITA

Community College Partner

Wichita Area Technical College, Wichita State University, Hutchinson Community College, Butler Community College, and Cowley Community College

Workforce Board Partner

Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas

Location Wichita, Kansas (area)

Goal To address needs for a trained workforce in multiple industries.

In Wichita, It Helps to Understand What the Other Half Does

The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas has been working with local colleges since the 1990s, when they came together to address the need for a trained workforce in the aviation industry. Wichita is the manufacturing hub for some of the country's major aviation employers, and its need for skilled workers was keen. To address the region's workforce training needs in aviation, the Workforce Alliance served as the convener, bringing together employers in the area to discuss workforce challenges and develop solutions with the local colleges. Together with major area employers including Boeing and Cessna, and partnering colleges Wichita Area Technical College, Wichita State University, Hutchinson Community College, and Butler Community College, they built the National Center for Aviation Training. Since coming together around the aviation initiative, the Alliance and its partnering colleges have built systems that ensure an ongoing partnership that can respond to the workforce training needs of employers and the community in any industry.

Keith Lawing, chief executive officer of the Workforce Alliance, explains that the role of the Workforce Alliance

has been the convener, bringing together employers and local colleges to discuss workforce challenges and potential solutions. Lawing notes that the key to success is for the educators and employers to listen to each other.

"What trips partnerships up," he observes, "is when educators don't listen to employers, or vice versa. I see my role as helping the educators and employers around the table listen to each other, to develop solutions to their common challenges, together."

Lawing notes that these conversations, in addition to building programs that align with industry skill needs, have resulted in other valuable program changes, such as program schedules that are more flexible than the typical semester schedule. He says that the modular, accelerated training that many colleges have developed through TAACCCT has been a welcome change for employers and jobseekers seeking training that starts immediately, not at the beginning of the next academic calendar.

For each specific project, the alliance and its industry and college partners develop a memorandum of understanding outlining their roles and defining the processes for reporting, data collection, and customer service. Establishing common goals and metrics has been a requirement of each grant, but this also helps support their collaboration, ensuring that all organizations in the partnership were rowing in the same direction.

Lawing stressed the need to maintain the relationship between the alliance and the colleges: "I meet regularly with the presidents of each of the four consortium colleges. And it's critical that we work to build and maintain relationships between frontline staff." He said there can be friction between staffs when they don't fully understand each other's services, processes, and funding sources. Early in the partnership, he said, some alliance staff felt that the college staff thought of them as an "ATM machine" and would send people to the alliance to receive funding for training costs without understanding the eligibility requirements and limitations of workforce system funding.

One solution was regular meetings between the alliance staff and the admissions and recruiting staff of each of the colleges. The college staffs were regularly invited to the alliance offices to learn about its services, while campus staff brought in the alliance teams to tour their facilities and learn about the admissions process and the

services that were available on campus. To help maintain regular connections, the alliance hosted an 8 a.m. meeting every Friday that AJC and college staff could attend to keep each other informed of activities at their organizations or focus on specific areas for training.

The partnership between the alliance and its college partners continues to grow. The partners learned that they could raise funds to support their initiatives more effectively when they worked together. Each successful venture deepens the commitment to their partnership, and each organization recognizes that its success is dependent upon the work pursued together.

SERVING THE COMMON CUSTOMER

Another goal that drives partnerships is a desire to better serve students, jobseekers, and employer customers. Community colleges, for instance, may need additional capacity to help students seek employment after graduation. An AJC may be trying to help a new employer develop customized training. By partnering, both groups can pool resources to meet these mutual goals.

The examples below highlight partnerships involving community colleges, AJCs, and/or state and local WDBs. In each of the four examples, the organizations involved joined forces over an immediate need and came to appreciate the resources and strengths that each partner brought to the table.

MISSOURI

Community College Partner

Missouri Community College Association representing 13 community colleges

Workforce Board Partner

Division of Workforce Development

Location Statewide

Goal To improve career training and job placement of adult learners in multiple industries.

Show-Me State Proves the Value of Partnering

Missouri's 14 local workforce development boards and 13 community colleges collaborated under three rounds of TAACCCT grants to improve career training and job placement of adult learners in multiple industries. Both parties agreed to provide services for the grant's target population, which they found were their common customers: Trade Act Assistance–eligible workers, unemployed and underemployed adults, veterans, and others.

The partnership, called MoWINS, began when state officials from the Division of Workforce Development (DWD) met with leaders of the Missouri Community College Association to propose that they work together on a TAACCCT grant proposal to address the high demand for a skilled workforce talent pool. According to Dawn Busick-Drinkard, MoWINS grant director, "This was historic, not only because of the collaboration between the colleges and the workforce boards, but because collaboration was unusual among the colleges themselves. Missouri has a highly decentralized system, where each college is autonomous and has no central regulatory body such as a board of regents or state higher education agency. The collaboration on TAACCCT initiatives was a first."

As a first step, leaders of the colleges and the DWD agreed that all participants in the college programs developed through the grant would be enrolled at the college and as customers of the state workforce system. To do this, systems and tools, such as referral forms and performance-reporting tools, had to be developed.

Busick-Drinkard said that as the TAACCCT programs were implemented and added support was provided, the colleges and workforce partners "began to see increased completion rates and increases in employment attainment" among students.

Communication was also critical, Busick-Drinkard said. MoWINS used regular meetings at the regional and state levels to keep its partners informed. Representatives of colleges and workforce agencies also served on common boards, task forces, and workgroups, where they reviewed the performance of their common target population. The colleges, WDBs, and AJCs often made joint presentations in these forums to share their best practices. Staff across all the institutions were kept up

to date through monthly newsletters that highlighted participants' success stories.

The work in Missouri helped the workforce agencies and colleges see the benefits of partnering. It also motivated them to develop systems and partnerships beyond the TAACCCT grant. To do so, a statewide memorandum of understanding was written to set up a process for the ongoing integration of data, including data on student enrollment, credential attainment, college completion, and employment. This integrated data system, which allows the community colleges and workforce system to track the progress of individuals through college and into employment, is a national model. It serves to help students and college and workforce leaders assess the effectiveness of programs and work toward closer alignment between the college and workforce system.

The success of the collaboration led to an agreement by DWD to fund staffing of a new entity, the Missouri Workforce Development Network. The network is being developed as a way to ensure collaboration on workforce issues among colleges, public workforce, and economic development agencies. Through the network, colleges can serve the needs of employers and act as a single door for employers and workforce agencies to enter in order to develop programs and identify pools of talent. It also allows for long-term collaboration to plan for the current and future workforce needs across Missouri.

NEW MEXICO

Community College Partner

11 out of the 16 community colleges in New Mexico

Workforce Board Partner

New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, Department of Higher Education, local workforce development boards

Location Statewide

Goal To create strategic alignment between higher education and the state's workforce system that would result in more hiring, job retention, and better wages for workers.

In New Mexico, R-E-S-P-E-C-T the Expert

In New Mexico, a partnership involving 11 community colleges, the state Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS), and the state Department of Higher Education grew out of the state's SunPATH consortium, supported by a TAACCCT grant. The partners sought to build a strategic alignment that would result in more hiring, job retention, and better wages for workers. According to Celina Bussey, cabinet secretary for DWS, the SunPATH partners "rolled up our sleeves to see what this would look like if we really aligned missions, if we approached this work between community colleges and the workforce system in a very different way moving forward, not just for the grant."

In addition to the state-level partners, individual colleges began to meet and work with their local WDBs. Bussey observed that what helped those relationships move forward was when the colleges began to seek the WDB's expertise in employer engagement and job placement.

"That really showed that they recognized the value we brought to the table. Mutual respect for each other's areas of expertise is critical for the success of these partnerships," Bussey said.

The first operational activity of the partnership involved placing DWS staff on each of the 11 college campuses. DWS was responsible for hiring, training, and providing oversight, while the colleges provided office space, phones, and computers. Once hired and placed, the staff—called job development career coaches—worked with the SunPATH team at each college, providing services to students entering the college's health care or technology career pathways. The coaches' responsibilities included providing career readiness workshops on such topics as resume development and professional behavior on the job. They also organized mock interviews and job fairs and assisted with job placement. They helped students access services available under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Trade Adjustment Act, and from the state's Human Services Department, among other resources.

The SunPATH team chose to locate the coaches at the colleges to be more accessible to students involved in SunPATH programs. But deciding to locate staff of one agency at the site of another requires thoughtful planning. Bussey said that locating the coaches, who were DWS employees, at the colleges was done with careful consideration to what each employee would

need to be successful. “Just because they were a Workforce Solutions employee, we knew they would still need direction, oversight, and assistance of the community college partner while on campus. The new model was a test and an experiment, and we were tremendously pleased by the successful outcomes,” Bussey said.

“First, we had to find the individuals on those campuses to provide appropriate support for DWS staff. And we had to ensure that those employees had the right location...on the campus so they could help students access the array of services they might need.” The partnership has been so successful that both state agencies and their local college and workforce board counterparts have committed to working more closely moving forward. In addition, every college in the consortium is planning to maintain the job development career coaches as one way to expand workforce services at the community colleges.

WISCONSIN

Community College Partner

Western Technical College (part of the statewide INTERFACE Consortium)

Workforce Board Partner

Workforce Connections Inc.

Location Western region of Wisconsin

Goal To meet the needs of individuals in the region for skill-building and employment, and the needs of employers to find well-trained workers.

In Wisconsin, Success Means Speaking the Same “Language” and Connecting to the Right Network

The colleges of the TAACCCT-funded INTERFACE Consortium and their local workforce board partners provide examples of the ways that colleges and local WDBs in Wisconsin began to work together as a result of the statewide career pathway initiative described in the first section. While connections between the colleges and public workforce system were supported by the statewide effort, the work of building working relationships occurred at the local level. Prior to the

grant, noted Director Kathy Spada, the colleges and WDBs worked together to varying degrees, but they were not all communicating and collaborating with each other in regular, sustained ways. She viewed the state career pathways effort, combined with the INTERFACE grant to build local industry-aligned programs, as an opportunity to have strategic conversations with workforce partners, increase staff buy-in on both sides of the partnership, and lower any barriers to collaboration.

For Tonya Wagner, program manager at Western Technical College, the way to build a relationship with Workforce Connections Inc., the local WDB, and its AJC, the Workforce Development Center of Western Wisconsin, was to emphasize the shared value of the work they were embarking on. During meetings she organized, she would regularly point out to leadership and staff the value to each organization of working together. For example, by collaborating to recruit students and support their progress, the college could meet outcomes under TAACCCT, and Workforce Connections could count those outcomes toward its performance metrics. In addition, collaborating to reach out to employers was mutually beneficial because it helped the college place its students and connected Workforce Connections’ employer customers with well-trained employees.

She also found it was important to understand the technical language and jargon of the workforce system before the groups could have a productive conversation. For example, while the college would refer to its participants as “students,” the career center was referring to its “customers.” This seemingly small semantic difference, she explained, was emblematic of ways they thought differently about their work. With greater understanding of each other, they were able to begin their work together. Initially, the partnership began with the AJC helping to recruit students for certain college programs and the college offering courses in basic technology skills at the AJC.

As their partnership grew, they set up structures for communication that recognized each staff member’s role and made sure to involve individuals at the appropriate level. That meant a meeting at the leadership level, such as the college president, would also include the director of Workforce Connections, while a meeting to discuss operations would involve the college’s project staff and the direct service staff of the workforce development center.

As Wagner observed, “It comes down to realizing that there are networks of people within each organization, and you have to understand how those networks connect to the work.”

MINNESOTA

Community College Partner

South Central College, lead for the Mn-AMP consortium

Workforce Board Partner

Mankato and Faribault Workforce Centers

Location Mankato and Faribault, Minnesota

Goal Improving job placement and other career services for the AJC and college customers.

In Minnesota, We Bring the Services to You

The Minnesota Advanced Manufacturing Partnership (MnAMP) is a TAACCCT-funded statewide consortium of 12 community and technical colleges that worked to achieve its goal of closing the manufacturing skills gap through stronger alliances between the community colleges, the Minnesota Workforce Centers, and manufacturers. The activities and levels of the partnerships varied across the state based on the populations being served. Anne Willaert, director of MnAMP, said that, through this effort, colleges were able to augment the workforce center staff to provide additional support to the populations served under the grant.

Each college had a unique partnership with their local workforce center. Some workforce centers are located right on campus and worked directly with the college to provide workforce-readiness skills, including employer job fairs, resume writing, and other services. Many of the colleges are located in rural areas of Minnesota, and partners knew that transportation could be a major barrier to accessing services for their target population. So South Central College, along with a number of other colleges, arranged to have the workforce centers offer on-campus workshops in high-demand topics.

“These sessions bring services to students where they are, rather than expecting that the students will go to the workforce centers. That can be a challenge given many of the rural college locations,” Willaert said.

Job placement, registered apprenticeships, and programs that MnAMP called “Learn, Work, Earn” were the specific goals of MnAMP. Learn, Work, Earn is a work-based learning model that involves college faculty and employers in delivery of the training. Many of the colleges funded their local AJC’s to hire a business service representative to assist the college in building relationships with employers. The business service representative would seek out the employers and set up meetings between the AJC, the college, and the regional manufacturing employers to learn about the area’s workforce needs and share what the college and workforce centers had to offer. When they identified an employer interested in Learn, Work, Earn, they would work with that industry partner to establish ways to “skill-up” their incumbent workforce or work with the college to offer work-based training to students. This is a win for both parties. Students can master their technical skills, receive an academic degree, and graduate virtually debt-free while earning wages. The industry partner receives a quality employee that they train with a comprehensive understanding of their company needs.

Willaert said that, although TAACCCT funds supported many of the positions through the partnerships, the structural changes in the way the colleges collaborate with the workforce system and employers would continue, even after the grant expires. And, she added, they have received an added boost through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. “WIOA, with its requirements for collaboration, will assist in building stronger relationships and partnerships. We’ve been working in silos for so long. This will really help us all work better together.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Strategy and Planning

- ▶ **Align the work of the partnership with the goals and priorities of other large-scale statewide or regional initiatives.** Doing so will help the partnership be more effective and generate greater impact. It will also be easier to maintain—partnership members can be part of a single strategy and meetings focused on that strategy, rather than having their time and attention divided across initiatives.

- ▶ **Jointly and strategically engage employer partners.** Analyze together the gaps in programs and services that are needed to meet the local workforce challenges and determine together how those gaps will be filled. How can each organization in the partnership contribute to filling them?
- ▶ **Develop a common understanding of the local labor market data and build a strategy from that.** Establish a system of collecting and analyzing the data regularly. Determine which staff, from which organizations, will develop a regular report of labor market data, and establish regular meetings for partners to assess the data together.
- ▶ **Establish common metrics,** outcome goals, and data collection methods.
- ▶ **Build leader-to-leader and staff-to-staff relationships.** From the beginning, it's important to identify the key stakeholders at each organization and, in particular, the points of contact. If there is a change in staffing or point of contact, then there should be a process for informing those who need to know. This should be at both the direct service staff level and the leadership level.
- ▶ **Have a written agreement.** Having a document that specifies the roles and responsibilities of each organization in the partnership is critical for clarity and mutual responsiveness.
- ▶ **Develop strategies together for recruitment of target populations** to broaden the reach of marketing efforts and to maximize resources.
 - **For community colleges:** Partnering allows the colleges to widen the base for recruitment and expand the school population to adults seeking retraining or employers seeking to build employee skills, which is important in an era of declining enrollment.
 - **For workforce systems:** Working with colleges to recruit students helps AJCs broaden access to postsecondary education, training options, and family-supporting jobs for its jobseekers and business customers.

Funding

- ▶ **Learn about each other's funding streams.** In addition to learning about the culture and processes of the partner organization, colleges and workforce staff should know about the options each has to

offer its students/participants in areas such as financial aid or WIOA vouchers. For the workforce system experiencing decline in its WIOA allocation, it's important to understand how to access Pell Grants and other financial aid for customers, which helps the WDB expand access to training.

- ▶ **Look for opportunities to share the costs** of personnel, resources, office space, etc.
- ▶ **Develop grant proposals together.** Public and private funders are often more interested in proposals that involve strong partnerships rather than those from individual organizations.
- ▶ **Some grants require that educational institutions take the lead.** Others require a workforce system leader. A strong partnership can help all parties secure additional funds and contribute to their common goals.

Systems and Processes

- ▶ **Develop staff knowledge of each other's systems.** This not only means becoming familiar with each other's jargon or technical language but also understanding how each serves its customers. Knowing how each partner works and serves customers can help facilitate better customer support. This can be anything from outreach and recruitment, to screening, customized training, apprenticeship, or job placement activities. When possible, look for ways to partner in these activities or coordinate more efficiently.
 - **For community colleges:** It's important for college staff and leadership to recognize the business engagement capacity of the workforce system. By collaborating to outreach to employers, the college benefits from the workforce system network, and the workforce system is able to expand the services it offers to employers by introducing them to a partner that can tailor programming to their needs and provide a source of talented workers.
 - **For workforce systems:** Workforce system staff can better serve their customers when they understand the local college—the short-term and longer-term certificate and degree programs it has to offer, the process of applying for admission and financial aid, and the student supports and services it has to offer.

CONCLUSION

With rapidly changing demand for skills and credentials in today's job market, there's a growing imperative for colleges to align their programs with industry needs. A growing need for skilled workers means that, increasingly, workforce boards need to help their job-seeking customers access postsecondary credentials and help their employer customers access a skilled workforce. While the advantages of partnerships between community colleges and workforce boards are clear, success in any solid relationship takes work. Communication in multiple forms is vital. Partners should share resources and best practices and explore common funding streams to maximize the benefits. They should also be able to share struggles and keep each other informed.

Ultimately, the sense of trust that comes from knowing one's partner is focusing on shared goals and a common mission, rather than only their own institutional priorities, is a critical element to a successful collaboration. And for its long-term sustainability, strong partnerships need to be supported by institutional structures, shared systems and processes that integrate the work of the partnerships' members, such as MOUs, integrated recruitment and enrollment strategies, shared staff, and structured communication processes. In community college and workforce system partnerships, they share an overall goal of building a skilled and employed workforce. Starting with the end in mind can provide the foundation of a partnership that stays constant as the relationship continues to shift and grow.

ENDNOTE

1 In each state, state workforce development boards (WDBs) are charged with broad oversight of WIOA funding and oversee the work of regional workforce development boards. Those boards, which are comprised of employers, educators, service providers, and others, are responsible for analysis of the local labor market and planning for the expenditure of training funds to meet local needs. Local WDBs also oversee the work of American Job Centers (under a variety of structures.) The AJCs provide direct services to individuals seeking training and/or employment, and employers seeking qualified employees.

- ▶ **Co-enroll students when possible.** In many cases, colleges and one-stop career centers are co-enrolling students as AJC customers to provide students full access to career center services and assist in data collection.
- ▶ **Integrate systems when possible.** Look for ways to integrate systems, particularly around common assessments, student/customer intake, screening for eligibility, and data collection to track student/customer progress. You want to be able to communicate the work and effectiveness of your partnership, and that can only be done if you're able to share a story of success.

Staffing

- ▶ **Recognize that as staff leave and positions change,** the staff will need regular training about the roles of partnering organizations.
- ▶ **Taking advantage of times of transition** in an organization's leadership or staff can offer opportunities to change the working relationship between partners, and further revise efforts.

Communication

- ▶ **Continue to build and maintain systems of communication** and be sure that communication is occurring at all levels—from executive leaders to direct service staff—through regular meetings and other channels.
- ▶ **Recognize that a strong level of trust** between the organizations is essential to long-term accomplishments and act in ways that foster that trust.
- ▶ **Always keep in touch.** This doesn't only apply to keeping each other informed about the work and progress through regular scheduled meetings, but also about each other's work and culture. Staff of both institutions need to avoid jargon and technical language that can become a barrier to doing the actual work.
- ▶ **Establish specific methods of communication** (newsletters, project updates, federal guidance, and potential meetings) across both organizations.
- ▶ **Be sure that communication is occurring at all levels,** from executive-level leaders to direct-service staff, through regular meetings and other channels of communication.

This project has been funded, either wholly or in part, with Federal funds from the Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration under Contract Number DOL-ETA-14-C-0034 with Jobs for the Future. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE