



COURSES TO EMPLOYMENT

# Partnering to Create Paths to Education and Careers

MAUREEN CONWAY / AMY BLAIR / MATT HELMER

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# Executive Summary

**A**fter years of upheaval, the American economy is showing signs of improvement. But, many workers remain out of jobs as they struggle to regain their financial footing, and the path forward may require them to learn new skills. Often, the best option for low-income adult learners is a training or educational program at a community college.

Around the country, community colleges are partnering with nonprofit organizations to launch a range of innovative approaches to educating adult learners, especially low-income adults who often require more intensive assistance to succeed. This report provides an overview of one set of programs developed through partnerships between community colleges and nonprofits. The Courses to Employment (C2E) demonstration was a three-year initiative designed to learn how such partnerships can help low-income adults succeed in post-secondary education and, ultimately, the workforce. The initiative was funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and implemented by The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI).

The initiative grew out of the recognition that traditional approaches to higher education are not adequately serving many low-income students, as demonstrated by poor completion rates in academic and training programs. Too often, these adult students are grappling with significant challenges that make it difficult to complete coursework, whether because of financial stress or finding the time to balance work, school and family needs. Many require assistance to navigate the foreign culture of higher education, and many lack the background needed to find and land appropriate jobs once they complete their training.

Industry-specific or sectoral workforce initiatives housed in nonprofit organizations have shown promise in addressing barriers that adult job seekers face and in helping these job seekers improve their skills and navigate their regional labor market. But, these initiatives typically have remained very small-scale. In addition, these initiatives often have lacked the ability to help their trainees access the additional education and credentials that would help them advance further in their chosen fields.

In Courses to Employment, AspenWSI sought to identify partnerships that brought together the assets of a community college and a workforce nonprofit in developing and implementing strategies designed to meet the needs of low-income adult workers and job seekers and the needs of their regional labor market. Six programs were chosen in late 2007 through a competitive selection process and received financial support from the foundation and administrative support from AspenWSI. The six partnerships selected to be part of C2E offer low-income participants a range of academic and non-academic supports to help them achieve educational and employment goals related to a particular industry sector. The partnerships are:

- The Automobile Career Pathways Project in Seattle;
- Capital IDEA and Austin Community College in Austin, Texas;
- Carreras en Salud (Careers in Health) in Chicago;
- The Training Futures program in Fairfax County, Virginia;
- The Logistics/Transportation Academy in Los Angeles;
- The Flint Healthcare Career Pathways Project in Flint, Michigan.

## THE STRUCTURE OF C2E PROGRAMS

C2E is premised on the idea that by partnering, colleges and nonprofits expand their capacity and are able to leverage resources to serve more students, particularly those who are

disadvantaged, more effectively. The C2E partnerships use a range of workforce development approaches that focus on non-traditional students, typically low-income, working adults, and that:

- Combine the strengths of community colleges and local workforce nonprofits to serve students more effectively than either could alone;
- Target a specific industry or cluster of occupations, developing a deep understanding of the interrelationships between business competitiveness and the workforce needs of the targeted industry;
- Support workers in improving their workplace skills, enhancing their ability to compete for higher-quality jobs;
- Support students in persisting on an education pathway, providing motivational support and counseling, as well as access to needed social services and academic supports, including basic skills development;
- Provide labor market navigation services that help students find jobs and build the professional networks and communication skills they need to retain jobs and succeed within a local industry.

The C2E initiatives, while sharing similar goals, are organized in their own ways. The various sets of partnering organizations, for example, handle the responsibility for instruction and training in different fashions. Some partnerships focus on vocational skills training; others work to have students obtain associate degrees; and still others offer students the opportunity to take a break from training to work, with an option to return later. The partnerships also rely on a wide mix of funding.

But all of their strategies rely on three common elements:

- A high-quality education program;
- A range of student academic and non-academic support services;
- An industry strategy that focuses on meeting business needs and assisting students to enter and succeed in the local labor market.

## FINDINGS

AspenWSI conducted research on the six programs to document, describe and define this emerging field of practice. The research explored questions about operations, funding, student characteristics and outcomes, institutional change, business engagement, and opportunities for taking such programs to a larger scale.

Findings from the participant outcome studies show the C2E collaborative approach to be a promising and effective strategy for serving low-income adults in community college. High percentages of participants completed programs. Most graduates obtained employment after training and earned higher wages than they did prior to training. And, many graduates continued to do well in their education and employment experiences well after their initial training and job placement. In all, the outcomes the partnerships achieved contrast sharply with national statistics on completion at community colleges.

Among the C2E partnerships, there were some variations in the degree of earnings gains. Longer-term programs, such as those in Austin and Chicago, saw lower rates of participants completing a certificate or degree program than did shorter-term programs, but participants who did complete these programs saw higher earnings and wage gains. On the other hand, shorter-term programs such as the ones in Seattle, Los Angeles and Virginia, achieved higher program completion and job placement rates, but wages were not as high as those for longer-term programs.

## CONCLUSION

The C2E project has reinforced the understanding that adult learners need assistance with navigating college systems. This would include assistance in understanding college processes such as registration and financial aid, as well as course sequencing, drop-and-add policies, availability of student services, and many other processes. A further step would be to redesign some of these processes, making them more clear and convenient for today's time-stressed students. Once training is completed, students require additional help making the transition into the labor market and developing new professional networks.

While the partnership model has a common strategic framework, several factors influence the C2E partnerships' structure and specific mix of services. The C2E partnerships operate in areas with different local, state, and philanthropic funding resources and opportunities. They had different capacities and experiences prior to collaboration. They manage different geographic challenges in terms of distance, transportation infrastructure, and resources needed to help students get between home, class, work and other places. They are focused on different local industries, with varying cultures, regulations, and needs for skills and credentials. These factors, and others, have a significant effect on the shape of a program and how responsibilities are divided between a college and its nonprofit partner. Programs assess all these factors and develop a tailored mix of services and education strategies that help adult students achieve specific education and employment goals. There is no one recipe for a successful C2E partnership.

In sum, when viewed in the context of general college completion rates, the positive outcomes observed at C2E sites indicate that these collaborative models warrant further research, experimentation and support.



# Introduction

Throughout the current economic recession, new automobile service technicians have been earning technical skills certificates and getting jobs in Seattle. Even while local automobile dealerships have closed their doors, employment opportunities for people with the right types of skills have continued to be available in a wide variety of automotive-related businesses. The success is the result of an innovative approach to training provided by Shoreline Community College and the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County. This partnership, which used on-the-ground research to identify specific jobs and the skills needed to get them, has helped scores of new automotive service technicians launch new careers — even during the height of the recession.

The General Services Technician (GST) program trains mostly low-income, immigrant and first-time college students for their first jobs in the automobile service industry. Building on Shoreline Community College's manufacturer-sponsored associate's degree programs, the GST offers training to students who are not academically prepared to enter highly competitive A.A.S. programs but can, with the right education approach and appropriate supports, successfully complete a rigorous technical skills training program.

A pillar of the GST program is its use of an Integrated Basic Education Skills Training (I-BEST) approach that allows students to receive help with reading, writing, math and English-language skills at the same time they are receiving automotive skills training, which reduces the time and cost of earning the GST certificate. The program also provides more than academic help to students to make sure they persist in training. The college partners with the nonprofit Workforce Development Council to provide students with financial support and an extensive package of wrap-around services to address the myriad issues that adults face in attending school while working to support themselves and their families. A third critical factor in the program's success is that GST students are provided with a Career Advancement Navigator who has extensive knowledge of the local automobile service sector and works to connect employers and individual students and arrange internships, make employment referrals, and troubleshoot issues that arise as students make the transition from training to work.

The GST certificate program is an example of a new wave of partnerships between community colleges and local nonprofit organizations that are providing well-designed career pathways for students while meeting the local hiring needs of employers.

There is little dispute that people who increase their post-secondary education attainment tend to become more competitive in the workplace and earn higher incomes. As more Americans attend post-secondary programs, the quality of the workforce grows and the national economy strengthens. Given that, higher education and workforce leaders have focused on developing programs that allow more adults who are beyond the traditional college age to attend school or take part in vocational training.

The reality, though, is that a large segment of the population has been poorly served by traditional approaches to higher education and is failing to complete academic and training programs. Many of these adults face considerable challenges to achieving these goals. Some struggle to pay for school or manage the time needed for work, family and classes. Some need hands-on assistance entering and remaining in the foreign culture of higher education. And, many lack the connections or knowledge that might allow them to navigate the labor market successfully on their own.

As a nation, we need to find better ways to allow adults to begin and complete higher education. Improving the system will benefit these adults' taking part and help the nation build a more-skilled workforce, which in turn increases the competitiveness of American businesses.

The connection between education and employment looms large in our national conversation about helping people find jobs — so much so that one might think education institutions are well-connected to all segments of their labor markets and provide natural entry points to jobs. However, when viewed from the perspective of individuals seeking to acquire skills that will prepare them for jobs, navigating the maze of higher education and then using a new certificate or degree to find employment can be complex and confusing. Further, given the expense of higher education, the opportunity cost, in terms of time spent on education-related activities rather than work, and the uncertain payoff of a particular degree or course of study, pursuing post-secondary credentials carries considerable risk for an individual student.

Moreover, while it may be the goal of the student to use education to get a good job, education institutions focus on education, tracking issues such as student persistence and completion of education programs. In contrast, workforce service organizations are focused on helping their customers find jobs.

Workforce service organizations often encourage their clients to participate in education and training in order to compete for better jobs, which is where the natural partnership with institutions of higher education comes into play. But, when one organization is measured by how many students complete education programs, and another is measured by helping people find jobs, the goals can come into conflict. For example, a student completing a short-term office services certificate program may be better served by not taking a full-time job and continuing to pursue an education program, even though this is a “bad” outcome for the sponsoring workforce services organization. Similarly, a student in a green building technology degree program may be better off suspending his studies and taking a job with a local contractor who is finally hiring, earning an income and getting valuable job experience, but this non-completion is seen as a “bad” outcome for the education institution.

Courses to Employment initiatives, which involve a partnership between at least one community college and at least one workforce services nonprofit, provide ways to bring the complementary functions of an education institution and a workforce services nonprofit together in ways that can focus on meeting the needs of particular students to balance both education and employment goals.

We call this work Courses to Employment (C2E) not only to reflect that these initiatives offer a variety of courses, or classes, which together provide students with skills needed for employment, but also to reflect that this work can encompass a variety of courses, or pathways, through a combination of education, training and work experiences that lead to sustained quality employment.

Similar to the General Services Technician program in Seattle, workforce-focused partnerships between community colleges and nonprofit organizations are operating in many communities around the country. These partnerships have been started because both the colleges and the nonprofits recognize that they do not have the ability alone to offer the required education, training and support services. Individually, they may also lack the needed connections to local employers or the resources required by students, particularly those with low incomes and inadequate academic preparation, to achieve both education and employment goals.

These partnerships provide a range of services to students to help them enter and stay in education and training programs, overcome personal obstacles, and successfully enter the workforce. In these partnerships, colleges and nonprofit organizations agree on the goals and divide up the responsibilities, based on a variety of factors, and the resulting organizational relationships vary widely.

This paper reviews results of a group of these partnerships, which were chosen to be part of C2E, a demonstration that operated from 2008 to 2010 with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. C2E was designed to examine how six partnership programs help low-income adults achieve greater success in post-secondary education and, ultimately, the workforce. C2E builds on previous AspenWSI research and evaluation of sectoral approaches for improving low-income adults’ employment outcomes.

The bottom line is that these six partnerships — located in Texas, California, Virginia, Washington, Illinois and Michigan — offer promising approaches for providing better training and employment services to low-income adult workers. Our review concludes that the models used in these examples can and should be adopted by other local colleges and nonprofits.

This paper will be of interest to people and organizations involved in the workforce, education and economic-development arenas, including higher education leaders, nonprofits, workforce development programs, policymakers, philanthropic funders and others. Lessons gleaned from the six sites will be of value to those seeking to start or sustain other similar partnerships.

In the following sections, this paper provides a summary of the six C2E programs. It highlights their central components, details key outcomes from the sites, and discusses the key factors that influence the design of these partnerships. In a methodology section, we explain how the Aspen research was undertaken and the questions we sought to answer.

Finally, the paper concludes with conclusions and recommendations for policy makers, investors, community colleges, nonprofits and researchers.

# Courses to Employment Demonstration and Research Methodology

The Courses to Employment (C2E) demonstration was a three-year initiative designed to learn how partnerships between community colleges and nonprofit organizations can help low-income adults succeed in post-secondary education and, ultimately, the workforce. At the outset of the C2E project, we saw the partnering of community colleges and nonprofit organizations as a promising approach to improving the effectiveness and scale of services for low-income populations. The field of practitioners and organizations engaged in this type of partnership is new but rapidly expanding. Thus, our research approach was exploratory and designed to engage a wide variety of stakeholders as we sought to learn about and describe the different strategies employed by a range of partnerships, and to document, describe and define this emerging field of practice. C2E research was conducted on six partnerships that were selected competitively in late 2007 from a pool of 89 applicants.

The C2E research builds upon what has been learned through previous AspenWSI research and evaluation conducted over the past two decades — research that has identified the promise of sectoral approaches for improving low-income adults' employment outcomes. In many communities and for many industries, no single education or community-based organization has all of the capacities and resources in-house to implement a sectoral employment development strategy that understands and responds effectively to the needs of industry while also meeting the needs of the large number of low-income adults who need workforce development services. The basic premise behind C2E is that by partnering, colleges and nonprofits expand their capacity and are able to leverage resources to serve more students, particularly disadvantaged students, more effectively.

Courses to Employment research activities consisted of a variety of strategies to engage and learn about the six partnerships' work. Our extensive research agenda was designed to explore questions about operations, funding, student characteristics and outcomes, institutional change, business engagement, and opportunities for scale (see sidebar for list of research questions).

AspenWSI staff conducted annual site visits to each of the six partnership sites. Site visits included focus groups with student participants; a review of financial and operations documents; and interviews with college and nonprofit leadership, faculty and staff serving a wide variety of functions, public- and private-sector investors, workforce board leaders, and business representatives, among others. To learn about the education and employment outcomes of students, AspenWSI worked with each site to develop longitudinal participant data studies, which are described in more detail later in this publication. And, we convened bi-annual meetings at which partnership leaders visited their peers' programs, heard about what AspenWSI was learning through research activities, and had opportunities for peer support and learning. In

## WHAT ARE C2E STRATEGIES?

C2E strategies are workforce development approaches that focus on non-traditional students, typically low-income, working adults and that:

- **Combine the strengths of community colleges and local workforce nonprofits** to serve students more effectively than either could alone;
- **Target a specific industry or cluster of occupations**, developing a deep understanding of the interrelationships between business competitiveness and the workforce needs of the targeted industry;
- **Support workers in improving their workplace skills**, enhancing their ability to compete for higher-quality jobs;
- **Support students in persisting on an education pathway**, providing motivational support and counseling, as well as access to needed social services and academic supports, including basic skills development; and
- **Provide labor market navigation services** that help students find jobs and build the professional networks and communication skills they need to retain jobs and succeed within a local industry.

later years of C2E, we expanded participation at these meetings to include members of the host site's community college, workforce development, and public and private investor communities to foster dialogue based on our ongoing research.

## **C2E RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are the roles, responsibilities, tasks and services involved in collaboration to better serve low-income adults? Which are taken on by colleges and which by nonprofits?
- How do policies, funding, governing and capacity issues enable, or restrict, the college or nonprofit organization in serving different roles or providing specific services? What institutional variables affect flexibility, authority, efficiency or other aspects of successful collaboration?
- How are the non-academic needs of low-income adults met, and how does this relate to education and employment persistence and success? What are the costs of non-academic support services and how are these funded?
- What are the education, employment and income experiences of participants? How do these relate to outcomes of similar groups outside this demonstration?
- What does a successful collaboration cost? What are the elements of these costs, and how are they financed? What financial and other benefits accrue over time, to the college, the nonprofit, business, worker and other stakeholders? How are these benefits measured?
- Does this type of collaboration offer opportunities for “scaling up” to address a community-wide need in a more systemic way? Can collaboration between a college and nonprofit strengthen the ability of partner organizations to address systemic problems? What types of problems? In what ways?
- Can collaboration improve relationships with businesses? How are the needs, interests and outcomes for business balanced with those of low-income adult students?

# Courses to Employment Partnerships

C2E was a three-year demonstration project funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and implemented by The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI). Six programs were chosen through a competitive selection process and received financial support from the Foundation and was administered by AspenWSI.

The six partnerships, as summarized here, offer low-income participants a range of academic and non-academic supports to help them achieve educational and employment goals related to a particular industry sector.

- In Washington state, the Automobile Career Pathways Project is a partnership between the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County and Shoreline Community College. The partnership offers a General Service Technician (GST) certificate program, which prepares students with low basic skills or limited English for entry-level careers in automotive servicing. The GST program provides two semesters of technical training integrated with basic English and math skills, followed by a one-semester internship with an automotive services employer. In addition, students receive services from the project's Career Navigator, who helps students obtain resources to cover tuition and other academic expenses, as well as living expenses such as rent, transportation, child care and other personal needs. The Career Navigator often works with college faculty in arranging internships and employment opportunities following the GST program and helps participants plan for further education and career advancement after completing the program.
- In central Texas, a partnership between Capital IDEA and Austin Community College provides education and employment assistance to students looking to move into nursing and other healthcare fields. Capital IDEA provides students with intensive support services and case management; financial assistance with tuition, fees and books; help covering the costs of child care, transportation and emergency living expenses; and access to study groups and tutoring. Capital IDEA also offers an alternative remedial program for students not ready for college-level instruction; the program was designed in conjunction with the college and is operated by the college for Capital IDEA students.
- Carreras en Salud (Careers in Health) in Chicago is a partnership between the Instituto del Progreso Latino, Association House of Chicago, Wright College Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center and the National Council of La Raza. Carreras en Salud works to address the shortage of bilingual healthcare providers in the Chicago area and to provide career advancement opportunities to low-income Latino workers. Carreras en Salud offers an educational pathway that allows students to enter and exit over time as they make incremental educational advances and gain employment experiences at each step in the career ladder. The educational pathway includes training for four occupations: certified nursing assistant, certified medical assistant, licensed practical nurse and registered nurse. To prepare students for these certificate and degree courses, Carreras en Salud offers pre-college training at the nonprofit. In addition, participants can access tuition assistance and a range of counseling and asset-building services.
- The Training Futures program in Fairfax County, Virginia, is a partnership between Northern Virginia Family Services and the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). Training Futures' curriculum provides 25 weeks of training in office skills. Participants are also enrolled at NOVA and are eligible for up to 17 college credits upon completion of the program. The program assists non-traditional students by providing supportive services to help them meet family needs; additional classroom time to aid students with limited English skills; assistance in navigating college enrollment and financial aid processes; and

on-the-job experience through internships, mentoring and coaching by volunteers from the business community.

- The Logistics/Transportation Academy in Los Angeles is a broad partnership involving Community Career Development, Inc., Los Angeles Valley College, East Los Angeles College and Los Angeles City College. The Logistics/Transportation Academy prepares low-income adults to enter a range of opportunities related to logistics and transportation. The project includes a bridge program specifically for the local transit authority that provides pre-employment training to help fill vacant bus operator positions. The partnership initially worked with industry partners to create a series of industry-specific training modules that lead students to obtain a certificate or associate's degree that prepares them for jobs in transportation and logistics businesses. Because of the downturn in the economy, however, the partnership redesigned its programs to prepare individuals for entry-level security jobs and opportunities to advance in that field. The program provides participants with case management help and assistance covering the costs of child care, transportation, tuition, books and other expenses. The program also provides workshops to help some participants expunge criminal offenses from their records.
- In Michigan, the Flint Healthcare Career Pathways Project is a partnership involving Mott Community College and Flint STRIVE. The project helps low-income residents of Genesee County advance from entry-level and certified nursing assistant jobs into high-demand nursing and allied health positions. The partnership has worked with the public workforce system and other nonprofit organizations in the region to provide students with financial assistance for tuition, emergency assistance funds, case management and motivational support, and other services. The partnership works with students over several years as they pursue degrees in nursing and allied health.

# Components and Activities of C2E Partnerships

No two C2E initiatives are organized precisely the same way. In some partnerships, the community college provides all of the instruction and training while in others, the nonprofit shares this responsibility. Some partnerships focus on short-term vocational skills training and others support students through longer pathways to associate's degrees, while still others offer students various points at which they can stop and work, with the option to come back at a later time. The mix of funding also varies among the different partnerships.<sup>1</sup> But, all share a strategy framework composed of three common elements as seen in the diagram below: a high-quality education program, a range of student academic and non-academic support services, and an industry strategy that focuses on meeting business needs and assisting students to enter and succeed in the local labor market.

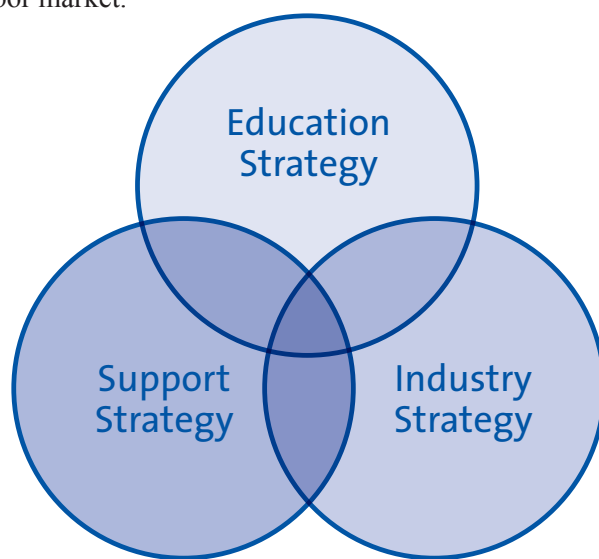


Figure 1: C2E Approach

We define this framework of education, support service and industry strategies used by community college and nonprofit partners to serve adult learners as the *C2E Approach*.

As seen in the diagram, these three strategies overlap with one another. The education strategy a partnership uses is also heavily connected and intertwined with the support service and industry strategy it is employing. For example, the education strategy and support strategy a partnership develops to train students is informed by the information it gathers through its industry strategy in which businesses or employers are asked about industry-needed skills and the level of demand for workers with these skills. This information obviously informs a curriculum, but it may also inform recruitment and support service strategies. For example, coaching students about the importance of a clean driving record and helping students address outstanding fines or other driver's license issues is critical to student success in automotive services, but less important in nursing. Though the community college-nonprofit partnerships share this common strategy framework broadly, the mix of activities used by partnerships to implement these strategies can vary widely. Below, we provide examples of how C2E partnerships implement these strategies differently.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the partnerships' financial sources of support and how partnerships combined multiple resources to support their strategies, please see: Maureen Conway, *The Price of Persistence: How Nonprofit – Community College Partnerships Manage and Blend Diverse Funding Streams* (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, February 2011).

## **EDUCATION STRATEGY: HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

A high-quality education program is in many ways the bedrock of the partnerships. The education program is pivotal to meeting the learning and skill needs of participants, as well as the workforce needs of local industry. Participants served by nonprofit-community college partnerships are most often adults. They have arrived at the doors of the nonprofit or community college primarily seeking one thing — a job. As such, the first mark of a high-quality education program is that it has a clear link to the employment opportunities the partnership has identified as being in demand through its industry engagement strategy.

The second mark of a high-quality education program is that it meets adult learners where they are by providing appropriate technical skills training and basic skills development. Many students have never attended college, some never finished high school, and for those who did reach higher levels of educational attainment, it may have been a number of years since their last academic experience. As such, many of the partnerships have set up their education strategies to include basic skills instruction and, if needed, English-language development, while promoting success in the necessary technical training. Partners may also employ intensive teaching methods that incorporate motivational support to build confidence among a population that has not experienced educational success in the past or has been away from education for some time.

For example, we again cite Seattle’s General Services Technician (GST) program, designed to provide automotive service skills training to students in need of adult basic education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. GST courses are taught by a team consisting of a technical instructor and an ESL/ABE instructor, using Washington State’s Integrated Basic Education Skills Training or I-BEST approach. This approach allows adult learners to develop basic skills and technical skills simultaneously instead of separately. Students who complete the GST program earn a certificate that is comprised of 36 credit hours of classroom training and a nine-credit-hour internship, over an academic year.

A very different example is found at Training Futures in Northern Virginia, which prepares students for a variety of office services jobs while providing them an opportunity to earn college credits that can be applied to a number of certificates or degrees in business. This model simulates the work environment, combining learning about many of the cultural norms and practices that job seekers will need to succeed in the workplace together with technical skills training and education. The model also allows students to earn a significant number of college credits before they ever have to set foot on the college campus, because students are co-enrolled with the college while they study at the Training Futures facility. For students who have been out of school for some time, who are unfamiliar with college systems and who lack confidence that they can succeed in college or benefit from a college experience, this co-enrollment experience is critical to building their confidence and motivation. In addition, for the targeted occupations, Training Futures has found that “some college” is preferred by many employers, so for those who need to move immediately to jobs, the program provides a rare opportunity to add that credential to their resume. Training Futures students typically earn 17 credits in the five-month program.

## **STUDENT SUPPORTS**

Adult learners often need a range of academic and non-academic support services while in training. Adult learners may not be familiar with community college systems and processes such as registration and financial aid. As noted earlier, they may also need to brush up on basic academic skills or English language skills. Many adult learners have other work and family responsibilities to meet, so juggling academics with other priorities can be challenging. Low-income adults or those who never took college classes before may lack the self-esteem and confidence they need to be successful. As a result, these partnerships must provide a range of support services to students, focused on preparing them for education and training, keeping them



enrolled, and readying them to succeed in the workplace. These services, though, must be tailored to meet the different needs of students.

A key consideration is that many students need assistance with college processes such as filling out college applications or FAFSA forms, which many C2E partnerships provide. Often, students also need monetary support in addition to financial aid to complete courses and pay for materials. C2E partnerships pay for these additional academic expenses through a blend of financing sources, including the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), scholarship funds and philanthropic support.

In training, adult learners may need additional assistance mastering basic or technical skills. Extra tutoring is often incorporated into the mix of activities partnerships provide to meet this need. Non-academic needs also arise while students are in training. For example, students may need help solving a childcare or transportation issue. In all of the C2E partnerships, intensive case management services were provided to identify and address obstacles as soon as possible. In some partnerships, such as between Capital IDEA and ACC, information about attendance and student behavior is shared between counselors and instructors at the college and with case managers at the nonprofit to create an early warning system that allows the program to deal with personal or academic issues students are facing.

One participant in the Carreras en Salud program in Chicago described how the financial support allowed her to focus more on her studies:

*Carreras pays for my tuition, and then they also give me like transportation costs, and help with that. I know that that's taking a lot of the work that I would have to do, to give me time to study or to dedicate to school, that's how it's helping me.*

For many students, motivational support is critical in helping them overcome challenges, persevere and complete the program. This support can be especially important for students who have low self-esteem, have lived on low incomes for years, and are new to college.

In Austin, Capital IDEA provides a forum for students to meet weekly throughout the program with an assigned career counselor and with other participants enrolled in the same developmental course or college occupational track for one-hour “Vision, Initiative, Perseverance” (VIP) peer support sessions, guided by Capital IDEA staff counselors. Sessions are held at locations and times that are convenient to students — usually where they attend classes. Discussions in VIP sessions include topics such as career opportunities, study skills and childcare challenges. The sessions also provide opportunities for the students simply to vent to one another about challenges they are experiencing, share successes they are achieving, or receive encouragement and support from their peers and counselor.

*I was the first person in my family to go to college. The idea that there was something better out there...I had heard stories, but it wasn't anything I thought was possible for me or my family.*

– Capital IDEA participant who overcame being a high school dropout with a criminal record to become a registered nurse working in a hospice.

In Northern Virginia, Training Futures, in which students are preparing for administrative and professional office occupations, participants are immersed in a training environment that simulates a professional office. This new approach helps participants re-envision themselves as successful college students and career professionals. One means for promoting this transformation is through an activity Training Futures calls “quotes bombardment.” During the six months of training, students reflect on more than 500 motivational and inspirational quotes. One participant said that the program’s personal support bolstered her determination:

*I love the atmosphere. It's very supportive. And it makes learning so much easier. You don't feel threatened or criticized and you just go at your own pace. And it gives you better belief in yourself. It just makes you see like there's a light down at the end of that tunnel when I get there. And it's very bright. And it's just like every day I wake up and it's like I can't wait to get here.*

To provide a comprehensive set of services, partnerships often must rely on a variety of other community partners and institutions. For example, partnerships may refer out to other organizations for services related to domestic abuse, housing assistance or other emergency supports such as food or utility assistance. Thus, a key role for the partnerships is coordinating these referrals for students who otherwise may get lost trying to obtain assistance.

Finally, these programs must be adept at assembling the required funding to provide what can be an intensive set of supports. Funding sources can include federal, state and local public programs, philanthropic gifts and investments. Funding sources change frequently, and the partnerships must remain flexible as sources emerge and end.

In Flint, for example, Mott Community College has taken advantage of state workforce funding to support low-income students pursuing healthcare degrees. The Michigan Regional Skills Alliance initiative, designed to create community-based partnerships to address local workforce and economic development needs, provided funding for Genesee County's Healthcare Professionals for Michigan's Future (HPMF) program from 2005 to 2007. Participants enrolled in HPMF received supportive services through a local faith-based organization, as well as assistance in enrolling in college healthcare education programs.

When funding for this program was exhausted, Mott Community College continued to support these students by enrolling them in another state program – No Worker Left Behind (NWLB). NWLB provides workers who are unemployed or under-employed with up to \$10,000 in post-secondary assistance for education-related expenses (including tuition, books, materials, counseling and career advising). NWLB funds are flexible enough that the college can use them to support students and cover other expenses such as child care.

## **INDUSTRY STRATEGY**

To be effective, the C2E partnerships engage industry and employers to understand the needs of the local labor market and prepare students to navigate that market successfully. Traditionally, community colleges have used industry advisory panels to help establish and update curricula and inform their course and program offerings. Nonprofits, on the other hand, typically engage industry and employers directly to gather information about current job openings, projections of demand for different positions, and other pertinent industry-specific knowledge that allows them to prepare students for employment and career advancement. In the C2E partnerships, these traditional trends generally hold but also may blur, as technical teachers from community college may help with job placement, or nonprofit staff members engage industry representatives to inform its curriculum design for entry-level steps on the education pathway.

C2E partnerships engage industry at various points to achieve these different, but related, objectives of education and employment. This engagement process allows them to assess and understand trends within the local labor market, determine the market's needs for new workers, establish programs that adequately prepare students to fill those needs, and appropriately recruit and screen students to fill those programs.

In Los Angeles, a C2E partnership helped the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) fill a shortage of bus operators. MTA was spending heavily on recruitment and screening, only to find that recruits were ill-prepared to complete training successfully. Los Angeles Valley College worked closely with MTA's human resources department to design a two-week Bus

Operator Bridge training to pre-train applicants for MTA employment in on-the-job training. While LAVC provides the instruction, nonprofit Community Career Development (CCD) provides staff to manage the bridge program and works with MTA to develop processes to recruit and screen participants for the training and to provide participants with the non-academic supports they need to complete training and be successful on the job. The program is offered quarterly and has been a major factor in MTA closing its operator shortage and successfully expanding recruitment and employment to include large numbers of low-income residents that MTA had not successfully reached in the past. MTA reports that bridge participants are their most successful trainees.

A key component of the success of the MTA program was the nonprofit's ability to know how to screen and recruit participants to meet what the employer wanted. C2E partners engage industry to find out the specific and detailed skill sets, aptitudes, interests and characteristics employers are looking for in an employee. This information not only allows C2E partners to provide employers with the labor pool they need, but also helps partners provide effective career counseling to students.

C2E partnerships also use information from employers to develop services provided in tandem with the education program to prepare students to compete more effectively for work when they complete training and to help them attach to the labor market more easily. Partnerships use various techniques to expose students to information about the workplace culture including industry attendance policies and on-the-job behavioral norms. For example, in Northern Virginia, training is offered in an office environment and policies about professional attire and attendance are enforced during training so that students develop habits of behavior that will help them succeed in an office environment. In Seattle, automotive certificate training takes place in the Professional Automotive Training Center, which also houses four automobile manufacturer-sponsored associate's-degree trainings, again simulating an environment similar to automotive work. In addition, the Puget Sound Auto Dealers Association maintains offices on the Shoreline College campus, providing faculty and counselors with the opportunity to connect with a regional network of employers. Both the Northern Virginia and the Seattle programs incorporate internships into the entry-level training programs to further expose and educate students about what is required to break into, and succeed in, the target industry.

To help place participants into employment, the C2E partnerships, and the nonprofit in particular, systematically collect information about employment and career opportunities both in aggregate within an industry sector as well as with individual employers. In the first instance, trends in the industry can be identified that allow programs to steer students, who are a good fit for the industry and job, toward occupations in demand and away from those that are falling out of demand. In Austin, Capital IDEA convenes a wide variety of healthcare employers to stay abreast of what occupations hospitals and other employers are hiring for currently and expect to hire for in the short term. This information helps Capital IDEA steer participants to healthcare programs at Austin Community College that are most likely to lead to a job. As a result, in some years, Capital IDEA may enroll 10 participants in training to be dental hygienists or physical therapy assistants, and in others, enroll none in those programs.

Partnerships must have regularly updated information about employment opportunities with employers as well as inform participants about job openings. Job developers with many of the nonprofit organizations work with employers directly to know where and when openings occur and to promote program graduates for available jobs. Part of this industry engagement involves research to understand how workers advance in the workplace within local industry. Again, the more C2E partners know about how a worker advances in a particular industry, the better career counseling they are able to provide to the student.

**Table 1** lists a range of activities we observed C2E partnerships using to serve their participants and industry partners. It is important to note that this is not a comprehensive list of the activities partnerships can choose from or implement. As discussed earlier, C2E partnerships have a common strategic framework that integrates education, support service and industry strategies. Within that framework, however, is a wide variety of specific activities and services. We present these example activities below to show the range of services and activities partnerships could consider within each strategy.

## Table 1: C2E Partnership Activities by Strategy

Education Strategy Activities	
<i>Activities to meet the educational needs of participants and the workforce skill needs of business</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Individualized work with students to plan education steps/program</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Basic skills instruction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> GED preparation and testing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> English as a Second Language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Occupation-contextualized basic skill or ESL Instruction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pre-College “bridge” courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> College entrance exam preparation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student peer/study groups</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Study skills instruction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Academic tutoring</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Instruction to prepare for on-line coursework</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Licensure exam preparation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Non-credit technical skills training</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> For-credit certificate or degree programs</li> </ul>
Support Strategy Activities	
<i>Activities to help students manage personal, family or other issues in order to promote success in college and the labor market</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Case management/coordination of personal support services</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Guided student financial aid application assistance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Guided college registration and enrollment assistance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other college navigation services</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assistance with academic and financial issues related to previous college enrollment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Financial assistance for tuition, college fees, licensure fees, books</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assistance obtaining public benefits (food stamps, TANF, Medicare)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Transportation assistance (bus passes, gas vouchers, driver’s licensing, parking, carpooling)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Childcare assistance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Legal assistance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Housing assistance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assistance obtaining clothing, footwear, tools</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Emergency assistance for utilities, food, housing, car repairs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Family engagement activities to foster student support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Counselor-led peer support groups</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Motivational support activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Financial literacy instruction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Time management instruction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communication skills development</li> </ul>
Industry Strategy Activities	
<i>Activities to align training with businesses’ needs; assist participants to choose, enter and advance along a career pathway</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with employers to identify specific job and career opportunities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify/develop courses and credentials linked to jobs and career paths</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify/develop interim work experience opportunities to complement education</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Applicant assessment relative to specific job/industry requirements and conditions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with employers to inform curriculum design</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with employers to build networks for job referral</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with employers to develop and coordinate internship programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with employers to obtain and coordinate mentors in the industry</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Customized pre-employment training</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student/graduate job search assistance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Industry-appropriate resume development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Industry-appropriate networking tools and opportunities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student job placement and follow-up career navigation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Counseling/supports to help students remain in jobs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Incumbent worker training</li> </ul>

Although C2E partnerships have a common strategic framework, each partnership has a unique mix of activities to implement the three strategies within its approach. For example, one partnership may use motivational sessions and internships, while another may choose to offer mentoring services and preparation for a state licensing exam. The mixing and blending of these activities by partnerships is driven by four factors, which we address in the next section.

## THE STORY OF “ANDREA:” OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

When Andrea came to Capital IDEA for assistance to pursue a degree in nursing, she was working as an office assistant for a healthcare provider earning \$7 an hour without benefits while raising three young children with her husband. Capital IDEA placed Andrea into its College Prep Academy in January 2004. Three months later, she passed the college entrance exams with high marks and began to take nursing prerequisite courses at Austin Community College.

As she started the prerequisite coursework, serious health issues caused Andrea to miss classes and work. She also fell behind on her utility bills. CI granted her financial support to meet her obligations and helped her to assess and adjust her personal budget.

Andrea hoped to gain admission to the Associates Degree in Nursing (ADN) program. But, by the end of 2005, her grades had slipped below the GPA required by ACC’s health sciences division. With the help of her Capital IDEA counselor, Andrea came up with a plan for how she would raise her GPA. She studied diligently and scored well on the health education assessment exams. As a result, her nursing GPA went up sufficiently to qualify her for entrance into the ADN program. She was accepted into the ADN program at ACC in August 2006.

Once enrolled in the nursing program, Capital IDEA gave Andrea book and uniform vouchers, paid for her mandatory background check and Lab Pack, and through referrals, helped her obtain assistance with child care and utility costs from other social service providers.

In July 2007, the local Worksource Center used WIA funding to co-enroll Andrea, and she began to use public-sector support for tuition, books and other educational expenses, while Capital IDEA provided tutoring. Over the next year, her income began to rise as she found part-time employment at a local hospital. With her income rising slightly, the childcare assistance she had been receiving through a local nonprofit organization was suspended when her earnings crept above the eligibility limit. Capital IDEA stepped in to provide the needed assistance until Andrea could complete the academic program and secure a better-paying position.

At the end of 2008, Andrea graduated from the ADN program and began work as a registered nurse. She was placed in a full-time position earning \$21.50 an hour with benefits. In 2009, Andrea continued to work in the healthcare field and had annual earnings of nearly \$57,000.

# Drivers of Partnership Design

As we have seen, C2E partnerships integrate three basic strategies devoted to education, support services and industry engagement. However, as we also discussed above, the integration of these strategies varies considerably. Partnerships also differ in how they structure the roles and responsibilities each partner plays. C2E partnerships develop and integrate strategies based on a range of conditions and factors. During our work with C2E programs, we identified four categories of factors that influence how these partnerships are designed and the roles played by the partnering organizations:

- Student needs
- Business needs
- Institutional capacities and characteristics
- Policy and funding environment

Importantly, though we separately discuss each of these drivers below, these drivers are not mutually exclusive in shaping partnership design or service strategy. For instance, meeting a student's need to buy a car so she can make it to work on time is also meeting the need of the business that requires the worker to show up on time for work. The ability of the partnership to help the worker get the car may be shaped by an institution's network of community partners and may also depend on program funding or legal policies that affect a student's ability to get a driver's license. And the importance of having a car is shaped by an area's regional transportation infrastructure, as well as the location and hours of employment.

## STUDENT NEEDS

Students arrive at these programs with varying needs. Partnership creation and design will flow in large measure from efforts to address those needs. First and foremost, students need a job. Thus, the link to employment in these partnerships is front and center in the program design. To reach that employment goal, however, participants in these partnerships need a range of academic and non-academic supports.

In academics, students arrive needing and/or desiring some form of technical skills training to obtain or upgrade employment. However, they may also need help mastering or brushing-up on their basic math, reading, writing or English-language skills. Some participants need assistance initially to earn their GED, to prepare for a college entrance exam, or to learn study skills. Other students may need to develop soft skills related to time management or conflict resolution, and many students will need ongoing tutoring throughout their basic or technical skills training.

Programs take different tacks to balance this complicated set of student needs in the academic arena. To meet students' basic and technical skill needs in a more efficient and engaging way, a few of the partnerships contextualize the basic skills training for the targeted industry of employment. For example, Latino participants in Carreras en Salud who are interested in pursuing nursing training often have low levels of English proficiency. To meet these needs, the partnership provides ESL courses designed to foster employment in the healthcare industry by focusing on building students' knowledge of medical and nursing terminology. This approach allows students to improve their English and begin learning the employment subject matter simultaneously, and move more rapidly into training to become Certified Nursing Assistants and Licensed Practical Nurses. Similarly, the General Service Technician program at Shoreline uses an I-BEST model in the classroom in which two teachers, one devoted to basic skills instruction and one devoted to automotive repair content, provide students with instruction to allow them to develop their basic skills and automotive repair skills at the same time.

In Austin, participants often need basic skills remediation to pass the state of Texas' mandatory higher education entrance exam and to succeed in college. The partnership created the College Preparatory Academy, a 12-week intensive basic skills remediation program to prepare students for the exam and college courses. The academy is a full-time boot camp focused on reading,

writing, math and study skills. The academy is taught by ACC instructors who use an accelerated curriculum that allows students to move quickly through the basic skills development coursework and then into for-credit technical skills training and academic coursework.

Aside from these formal academic efforts, program design must factor in the reality that students require assistance navigating and surviving in the academic world. This includes help with registration, enrollment and financial aid. In addition, students need help dealing with other issues that can derail their participation, including problems with child care, housing, transportation, domestic violence and substance abuse. Students may benefit from support services that address other personal issues or provide motivational help.

Participants in Seattle's GST program are mainly low-income, have little to no college experience, and may have limited work experience, especially in the automotive sector. The nonprofit WDC hired a Career Navigator, who is given broad latitude by the college to work with students and college faculty and staff to help students first to get the support services they need to complete training, and then to secure employment and pursue additional education opportunities. In this capacity, the Career Navigator helps students find internships and full-time employment and provides information about education options beyond the basic GST, taking into account practical realities, such as where a student is living or working, or how a student's employment experience has influenced his or her career goals.

Finally, the needs of students influence how these partnerships develop strategies for job placement in specific industries. For example, Training Futures students often lack work experience that would prepare and qualify them for employment in a professional office environment. The partnership in Northern Virginia has identified employers willing to provide internships and volunteers who serve as mentors, conduct mock job interviews, and give students experience interacting with professionals in a simulated office training environment.

## **BUSINESS NEEDS**

The needs of industry sectors and specific businesses heavily influence the shape of the C2E partnerships. Businesses with hiring opportunities may require candidates with a certain skill set; a specific degree, certificate or credential; special abilities (such as speaking Spanish and English); or may require new employees to start work with a set of tools, a uniform or a car. Employers may also want training for their incumbent workers or assistance with developing or defining career pathways. These needs may change over time as the needs of businesses served change, but are always a key factor in how partnerships are designed.

As the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants and communities has grown in Chicago, hospitals and other healthcare employers need more bilingual nurses and certified nursing assistants. Carreras en Salud developed an educational pathway for the Latino community to respond to this industry need. After more than five years of operations, the Carreras en Salud program has had an important impact on the local healthcare workforce and on the economic well-being of many residents in the Latino community. Since the program began, the number of Latino licensed practical nurses (LPN) graduating annually in Illinois has increased from 42 in 2005 to 138 in 2009. In 2005, only seven Latinos graduated from the LPN nursing program at Wilbur Wright College; in 2009, 52 Latino nurses graduated from Wright. Carreras graduated more than 170 LPN students between 2005 and 2009. Students who graduated prior to 2009 earned a median income of more than \$33,000 in 2009. Through the Carreras en Salud program, Chicago's shortage of Latino healthcare professionals is beginning to be addressed, and many low-income workers in the city are now on a career track and better able to support their families.

As mentioned earlier, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority struggled for years to recruit a diverse population of bus operator applicants and to retain workers. After consultation with the MTA, the partnership designed a two-week bridge program and recruiting strategy that brought in and prepared a more diverse set of qualified applicants. Now, MTA has bus operators from many more of the neighborhoods in which its buses operate, thus better reflecting the diversity of its ridership. And, because it has access to a better prepared applicant pool, the MTA

has also been able to reduce its vacancy rate, which, it reports, has saved substantial amounts of money by reducing overtime wages paid to bus operators.

## **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS**

The look and design of C2E partnerships are heavily influenced by the institutional design, strengths and organizational cultures at nonprofits and community colleges. Additionally, staff personalities and leadership styles figure into how partnerships are established and the approaches they employ in education, student support, and job development strategies.

In Chicago, the Instituto del Progreso Latino (IDPL) had a long-term relationship with the Latino community. This history and IDPL's effective English-language programs were factors in IDPL being the main outreach mechanism, as well as the ESL provider for participants preparing to pursue nursing training at Wright College's Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center. At the same time, the college leadership was open to new approaches to increase the college's capacity and was willing to modify admissions procedures in its nursing program, which allowed the partnership to forge a new education path for Latinos.

In Virginia, the leadership of Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) recognized that the college was not providing adequate support services to disadvantaged students, which led to its partnership with Northern Virginia Family Service on Training Futures. Over time, NOVA invested in a college advisor's position to work with students completing short-term programs with a number of nonprofit partners, including Training Futures. The advisor helps these students transition from the more sheltered college environment of the nonprofits into more mainstream college coursework.

In Washington, Shoreline Community College had a strong relationship with the Puget Sound Automobile Dealers' Association (PSADA), which had sponsored the college's automobile training facilities. Having this relationship and the physical capacity helped the partnership create the GST program to train low-income individuals (who do not qualify academically for a manufacturer's training program) and place them in jobs. Shoreline Community College had strong relationships with auto dealers, but it did not have such relationships with independent repair shops and other automobile-related businesses that need skilled workers. To meet that need, the nonprofit Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County financed a Career/Advancement Navigator to create new business connections for the GST program. The navigator has developed relationships and found job openings with more independent shops than the college could identify on its own.

## **FUNDING AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

All of the C2E partnerships are affected by state and local policies, as well as by the availability and interests of local philanthropy. The realities of public and private funding, in the types of funding available and the continuity of funding over time, are important factors in designing C2E partnerships, affecting staffing, programming, support services and other aspects of the partnerships. In addition, the history and culture of the local nonprofit sector is important, influencing the types of services for which C2E partners can refer students to other organizations and that need to be integrated into the partnership's program design.

In the funding arena, local policies affect how partnerships offer services. In Texas, the city of Austin and Travis County provide general revenue funds that Capital IDEA can use for support services for participants as well as pay for tuition at Austin Community College. This allows students to keep Pell Grants and use those funds for income support. This support also provides a base of funding that Capital IDEA can complement with other grants and contracts that may be more restrictive in terms of uses (e.g., only for books) or beneficiaries (e.g., only for youth), extending their ability to support students' educational success.

This ability to patch different funding sources together in order to build a funding structure that can be not only flexible in responding to the needs of business, but also consistent in its support of students and provision of service was key across the partnerships we studied. The details of the



strategy, however, varied greatly. In Michigan and Washington, state funding sources, rather than city or county, were pivotal to the work taking place during the course of our study. In Northern Virginia, a wide range of public contracts, philanthropic grants, and extensive use of volunteer services and in-kind support from business sponsors was important to the work.

And, of course, the incentives and requirements associated with funding streams are critically important. In Washington state, the I-BEST program, mentioned earlier, funds and encourages the integration of adult basic education or English-language skills with technical training. In Chicago, this work was undertaken in pre-college courses offered by the nonprofit partner and supported through a variety of philanthropic sponsors, as well as local workforce funding, since there is not an explicit public policy and funding stream to support such education strategies in the college setting.

# Courses to Employment: Key Outcomes

**F**indings from the participant outcome studies show the C2E collaborative approach to be a promising and effective strategy for serving low-income adults in community colleges. High percentages of participants completed programs. Most graduates obtained employment after training and earned higher wages than they did prior to training. And, many graduates continued to do well in their education and employment experiences well after their initial training and job placement. In this section, we offer highlights of the education and employment outcomes experienced by students served by C2E partnerships, as well as a note on the methodology used to examine student outcomes at the six C2E partnerships and some of the institutional data challenges encountered in this study.

## PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES STUDY METHODOLOGY

Documenting the experiences and outcomes of students engaged in partnership-supported education and employment development activities was a critical C2E research activity. Throughout the three-year project, AspenWSI worked with each partnership to develop and implement a longitudinal participant study to learn about education and employment progress and outcomes related to the service strategy each employed.

Because of the diversity of the partnership sites' education and employment goals, strategies, education pathways, duration of programming and employment environment, each C2E partnership was studied independently. The data studies used a non-experimental design, and outcomes were evaluated based on pre- and post-participation education and employment status, and where appropriate, interim education milestones.

Through the C2E data studies, we sought to learn about the characteristics of students served, the educational progress that students achieved, and the changes in employment status and earnings both over time and relative to changes in education status. We deliberately excluded a meta-analysis of findings across programs. At this early stage in the development of an emerging field of practice, we believe strongly that information about outcomes is most useful when viewed in context with information about specific service delivery context.

This C2E research component was designed not only to inform key questions about participant outcomes, but also to help build capacity within each partnership for ongoing data management and learning independent of AspenWSI. Each of the outcomes studies was developed based on the existing data management systems in use by individual partnerships. Each site received substantial technical assistance from AspenWSI in assessing their existing systems, and all made modifications in response to specific input.

In no case did either the nonprofit or community college partner have all of the information needed to inform questions about both education and employment outcomes. The nonprofits generally could track and manage data related to the components of education programming that they provide independent of the college (e.g., pre-college coursework), extensive data detailing participant characteristics at enrollment, and data on employment status at different points in time. The colleges had data related to student coursework completed within their institution and, in some cases, at other colleges within their larger system.

On a case-by-case basis, AspenWSI researchers worked with the partnerships to build new data sets that merged data contributed by both partners. Only two partnerships had data-sharing agreements allowing the nonprofit access to college transcript data. And, none of the partnerships had data systems that consolidated both nonprofit and college data. In several cases, we supplemented partners' data with data from public wage records. For each site for which this data source was successfully obtained, negotiating access required a different approach. (See the box "Challenges and Considerations Associated with Designing Collaborative Participant

Outcomes Studies” for a list of challenges that affect the ability of nonprofit-community college partnerships to assess the outcomes of their work together.)

In this section of this report, we provide selected highlights of findings from the C2E data studies. Readers who want to learn more can find the individual data studies on our website at <http://www.aspenwsi.org/research-resources/sector-and-community-colleges/>. Each of these reports includes a detailed description of data sources and methodology, and more comprehensive highlights of findings, charts, and detailed tables that afford readers an extensive examination of the education and employment experiences of students over time.

## CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH DESIGNING COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES STUDIES

- Colleges and nonprofits are evaluated based on different metrics and timelines; their existing data systems reflect these differences.
- To date, we have seen that nonprofits usually take the lead in creating and managing data systems that can account for both employment and education outcomes.
- Nonprofits generally lack adequate resources for building and maintaining sophisticated data tracking and analysis capacity.
- Employment outcomes data is difficult and expensive to collect and maintain. Few nonprofits have access to public wage record data that may reduce this burden.
- Colleges typically do not maintain capacity to track employment outcomes, with exceptions for special grant-funded programs.
- Nonprofits are generally evaluated on employment outcomes. They need education data to explain outcomes for participants who forego employment in the short term to pursue education.
- Multi-year education programs need clearly defined measures of interim progress.
- Colleges and nonprofits must negotiate data-sharing agreements to be able to inform their questions about education progress and outcomes.
- Student privacy must be protected.

## EDUCATION OUTCOMES

The context for understanding outcomes of community college students is complicated. The mission of community colleges is to serve students with a great diversity of goals. Some students enroll with the intent of taking an individual course — for personal or professional purposes. Some enroll to launch their post-secondary education but intend to transfer to a four-year college or university. Still others enroll with the intent to complete a two-year associate’s degree or a shorter occupation-specific or technical skills certificate. Students also come with widely varying levels of academic preparation and understanding of college demands. Comprehensive assessment of community college outcomes requires consideration of this range of students and goals.

Much of the national data on community colleges shows that completion rates at community colleges have been markedly low, and this context is helpful to understanding the work of C2E partnerships and the successes of their students. Up until very recently, the only data available on community college outcomes has been for first-time college students who enroll full-time in the fall semester. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), only 22 percent of these full-time students who enrolled in a community college in 2003-2004 earned a certificate

or associate's degree at any institution within six years.<sup>2</sup> While this data is helpful for drawing attention to the issue of low graduation rates in our community colleges, it fails to consider the 40 percent of students who attend part time. Students who are in developmental education or remedial coursework are also not included in this data.<sup>3</sup>

New data released in 2010 for 33 states by Complete College America has expanded the scope of available information.<sup>4</sup> This data, which accounts for all students who began community college coursework in 2005, shows that 50 percent of students seeking an associate's degree required remediation before they could enroll in for-credit courses. Only 13.9 percent of students who enrolled in an associate's degree program earned a two-year associate's degree within three years, and 22.6 percent of students who enrolled in a one-year certificate program earned a certificate within 1.5 years. Data on subsets of students who had to start in remedial education; enrolled part-time; or were African American, Hispanic, older than 25 years of age, or low-income (measured by Pell Grant receipts) show lower completion rates.<sup>5</sup> This is important to note, because 75 percent of public college students are balancing some combination of family responsibility, jobs and classes.<sup>6</sup>

These data highlight how difficult it is for community college students. Students are increasingly under-prepared academically, have low incomes, must work, and struggle to complete certificate and degree programs. For the C2E partnerships designed to help students earn certificates and associate's degrees, it is instructive, and encouraging, to see their students' outcomes. But, we still lack benchmarks for shorter-term academic and technical skills programs that we know are helpful for individuals launching new careers and preparing them to succeed in college-level coursework in the future.

C2E partnerships employ different educational strategies and aim for different educational outcomes based on the population they serve, the barriers those populations face, and the occupational industry they target. For example, some partnerships work to prepare students for employment through a mix of for-credit and non-credit vocational training. Other partnerships provide college preparatory instruction or bridge classes in addition to college training, and some target for-credit college certificates and degrees. The level of financial and other supports available to students also differs among the partnerships. For example, some students receive assistance from industry-focused navigators or intensive advising from counselors who help participants navigate the college system.

Despite differences in goals, strategies and available resources, each C2E partnership was effective in helping large proportions of students meet their educational goals. In the following bullets, we highlight student educational outcomes. Given the complexity of understanding student outcomes, we also provide context for understanding how these outcomes relate to the partnerships' different service approaches, which in turn are built on meeting varying educational and occupational goals of their students.

- In Austin, Capital IDEA and Austin Community College provide the College Preparatory Academy, a 12-week course to prepare for the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) discussed earlier. Capital IDEA-supported students receive extensive non-academic supports both while they are preparing for ACC for-credit, college-level coursework in the Academy and continuing throughout their enrollment in pre-requisites and then nursing or allied healthcare education programs. Capital IDEA counselors work with students on budgeting, strategies for managing family responsibilities, meeting transportation needs and other issues to help students dedicate time to their studies. More than one-third (36.1 percent) of the 991 Capital IDEA-supported students in the C2E study enrolled in the College Prep Academy, which allowed them

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<sup>2</sup> Radford, A.W., L. Berkner, S.C. Wheelless and B. Shepherd. *Persistence and Attainment of 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students: After 6 Years* (NCES 2011-151). (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics). Retrieved February 2, 2010, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

<sup>3</sup> Radford, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Complete College America, Retrieved March 1, 2012, Time is the Enemy, [http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Time Is the Enemy, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Time Is the Enemy, 2.

to bypass traditional developmental education coursework. Eighty-one percent (289 students) completed the Academy and passed the THEA. Almost 70 percent of all 991 students in the study enrolled in college-level coursework that is required prior to admission into a healthcare education program. When our study period ended, 34 percent had completed pre-requisites and another 22 percent were still enrolled in pre-requisite coursework. During the study period, 368 students were admitted to and enrolled in a healthcare education program; 52.4 percent graduated with degrees in nursing, radiation technology, ultrasound technology, and other allied health professions. Thirty percent of these students were still actively enrolled in their education program at the time our study period ended.

- In Virginia, Training Futures is designed to give students the training needed to get a job, an opportunity to earn credits toward a business administration certificate, the encouragement to believe they can achieve a degree or certificate, and a practical understanding of how to take the next step in college when they are ready. The six-month program has a completion rate of 94 percent. Participants in Training Futures are eligible to earn up to 17 college credits for the program, approximately half of the credits needed for one of the college's business skills certificates. In our study, 84.2 percent of graduates earned college credit for completing Training Futures, with a median of 17 college credits earned. While most students go to work after Training Futures, many students also continue their education at NOVA. A little less than a third of Training Futures' graduates enrolled in additional coursework at Northern Virginia Community College after completing Training Futures. These continuing students successfully completed 76 percent of the courses they enrolled in after Training Futures. In addition, toward the end of our research, the partnership began offering Training Futures graduates special counseling services from newly hired NOVA staff to help more students continue on at NOVA. After implementing this strategy, the partnerships saw the percentage of Training Futures graduates continuing on at NOVA rise from 18 percent to 46 percent.
- In Chicago, during the study period from 2005 to early 2010, Carreras en Salud supported 185 students as they completed Certified Nursing Assistant training and graduated 171 participants from an LPN program. During nursing training, participants could take advantage of extra tutoring and receive assistance from their case manager at IDPL. Nearly 90 percent of Carreras students who entered an LPN program completed the program (excluding students still in training when the study concluded). Slightly more than 15 percent of the 174 students who completed LPN training with Carreras En Salud entered a Registered Nurse program afterward. As of Spring 2010, 15 of these 26 students had completed their RN program earning an associate's degree in nursing, with the remaining 11 still taking classes.
- In Seattle, 64 percent of the 126 participants in the data study completed the entire three quarters to earn the General Service Technician certificate. Of those graduates, 77 percent had not attended college previously. After the GST program, 35 participants enrolled in a dealer-sponsored training program leading to an Applied Associate in Arts and Science degree, and 22 students had completed this more advanced degree by the time the study had ended. Students who received services from the Career Navigator were more likely to complete GST and pursue an associate's degree than students who did not receive these intensive counseling and case management services.

## EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

For low-income adults, transitioning from community college to meaningful employment that uses newly developed skills can be extremely challenging. Conducting job searches, filling out employment applications, writing resumes and cover letters, and interviewing for jobs are all learned skills. Building and taking advantage of personal and professional networks to aid in job searches can be difficult for low-income adults, whose friends and family usually lack connections and may also be displaced from the labor market.

As we noted in the introduction to this paper, a common assumption in policy discussions is that completing higher education programs leads to better employment and earnings. Public data generally support this notion. The U.S. Census reports that adults over the age of 25 who have completed an associate's degree earn a median salary of approximately \$37,000.<sup>7</sup> But, little is known about the job placement rates and earnings of students who complete certificates and degrees from specific colleges or in specific occupational degree or certificate programs. Community colleges, usually focused on tracking academic data such as enrollment, course progress and completion, rarely track information about the employment and earnings outcomes of their students. As a result, we know little about which community college programs provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their local labor market.

Our C2E data studies were designed to inform questions about the employment and income experiences of partnerships' participants. With minor variance by program, we collected data on participants' pre- and post-training employment status, wages, hours worked and type of position held. Some participants, at the beginning of their enrollment in a C2E partnership program, were working, but in jobs that paid low wages and had no clear advancement pathway. Many participants were unemployed. It is important to note that C2E outcome studies took place during the most severe nationwide recession in modern times. The numbers of unemployed Americans grew over the course of the studies as did demand for workforce services. Program leaders faced unprecedented challenges in identifying good employment opportunities and serving rapidly growing numbers of individuals seeking education and employment services.

- In Virginia, 51 percent of participants were employed when they enrolled in Training Futures. Those who were employed earned a median of \$10.29 per hour and worked a median of 30 hours per week. Many of these participants, who represent dozens of ethnic backgrounds and native languages, worked in low-wage jobs, such as cashiers or parking lot attendants. During training, participants learned computer, writing, math and communication skills; completed internships; networked with and were mentored by business professionals; and were immersed in an office culture and environment. Within a few months of completing their training for careers in office occupations, 84 percent of Training Futures' graduates were employed, most typically as administrative assistants. In their initial job after Training Futures, participants worked a median of 40 hours per week and earned a median wage of \$13.31 per hour, an increase of \$3.02 per hour, or 29.3 percent, for those who were working when they enrolled. Interestingly, the most common source of permanent job for graduates was the internship they completed while enrolled in training. Graduates took a median of only one month after completing Training Futures to obtain their initial job.
- In Seattle, GST participants represented a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and included many students who were foreign-born and non-native speakers of English. Median age at enrollment was 25, and 87 percent of students were male. Only 42 percent were employed when they began GST, and they were earning a median wage of \$9.02 per hour. During training, participants completed internships, developed their English language skills, learned the ins and outs of a dealership or garage, and received job placement and job search assistance from their case managers, as well as the Career Navigator. After completing the GST program, 89 percent of graduates obtained employment, and 78 percent obtained employment in an automotive skills-related position. In this initial job, graduates earned a median of \$10 per hour. Over time, graduates' employment experiences continued to improve. One year after completing the GST program, 90 percent of graduates were employed, 84 percent were working full time at a median hourly wage of \$11.81, and 66

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census data. Retrieved from the American Association of Community Colleges website on January 6, 2011, from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Trends/Pages/earningsbyattainment.aspx>.

percent were working in the auto sector. Two years after finishing the program, 91 percent of graduates were employed. Median wage at that point increased to \$12.50 per hour.

- In Los Angeles, from 2006 to early 2010, Los Angeles Valley College instructors provided training through the bus operator bridge program in basic academic skills and soft skills, assistance with getting a commercial driver's license, and assistance applying for a bus operator trainee position with the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). During this time, MTA hired 360 of the 362 program graduates who passed a required background check for their paid on-the-job training program. Of those 360 participants, 217 successfully completed paid on-the-job training and were hired into permanent bus operator positions. These participants, of whom 61 percent were African American and the median age was 41, earned a median hourly wage of \$14.38, a 30.7 percent increase for those who were employed in the six months prior to entering the bridge program. As they began their new jobs, the bus operators continued to receive case management and support from nonprofit Community Career Development staff. As of March 2010, 96.3 percent of the 217 employees were still employed by MTA, a retention rate that MTA reports is higher than retention for operators hired through other sources.
- In Austin, 193 Austin Community College students, supported by Capital IDEA, graduated with a healthcare degree or advanced certificate between 2003 and 2008. Among them, 85 percent were employed in the year prior to enrolling, earning a median annual income of \$13,545. Forty-six percent worked in a healthcare setting prior to enrolling. With the assistance of Capital IDEA staff, participants were steered toward an occupation that was both in demand in the local labor market and a good fit for the participants' interests and needs. Throughout their engagement with Capital IDEA, participants received support from their career counselors and other Capital IDEA staff to help them maintain their motivation. Participants also received assistance translating their new degrees into good jobs, with coaching on job search skills, resume-building, job interview preparation, and employment application assistance (especially critical with online application processes, which can be difficult to navigate). In the year following their graduation with a healthcare degree or advanced certificate, 96 percent of these students were employed; 92 percent were employed in health care. Graduates earned a median income of \$44,222.

The C2E approach is clearly promising for helping adult learners gain skills and credentials in community college. Of equal importance, these types of partnerships are also helping students leverage new skills and credentials to obtain employment and earn higher wages — even during the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. These partnerships typically work with students who, while not presenting the most promising profile for college success, nonetheless represent a huge and growing segment of community college student bodies. These include older students, first-generation students, students who are not academically prepared, students who work and have family responsibilities, and students who are self-supporting and earn low incomes. Through C2E partnerships, which bring creative educational design, tailored supports, and industry focus together, these students can succeed in education programs and, importantly, capitalize on this success in their local labor market.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

As we look to strengthen the U.S. economy, we know that we must find better ways to prepare low-income adults for jobs. Based on federal Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, approximately 70 percent of the country's workforce in 2020 will consist of people who were already in the labor market in 2011.<sup>8</sup>

Community colleges across the country serve large numbers of this population of adults, who often work, but lack skills to get to better-wage jobs. However, we know that community colleges, working alone, have been hard-pressed to develop programs that effectively meet the needs of both adult students and local employers seeking qualified employees. This population of students can face many obstacles, including inadequate academic skills, financial burdens that make it hard to pay for college, and busy family and work schedules that leave little time for classes or training.

The C2E partnership model deserves more attention for its ability to help students overcome obstacles to success and effectively address workforce education needs.

The following are some of the conclusions we have drawn from the C2E demonstration project:

## ***Outcomes show a promising approach to serving low-income adults***

Results for these partnerships show that participants complete programs, obtain jobs and experience wage gains. The outcomes the partnerships achieved contrast sharply with national statistics on completion at community colleges. Among the C2E partnerships, there were some variations in the degree of earnings gains across programs. Longer-term programs, such as in Austin and Chicago, saw lower rates of participants completing a certificate or degree program than did shorter-term programs, but participants who did complete these programs saw higher earnings and wage gains. On the other hand, shorter-term programs such as in Seattle, Los Angeles and Virginia, achieved higher program completion and job placement rates, but wages were not as high as those for longer-term programs. These results raise questions for program operators and managers about refining recruitment, screening and other elements of their strategies. Overall, however, viewed in the context of general college completion rates, the positive outcomes we have seen through our research indicate that these collaborative models warrant further research and experimentation.

## ***Adult learners need assistance with navigating college systems and careers***

Community colleges are generally not set up to adequately serve low-income adult learners. A key step would be to help students learn to navigate the college campus and its systems and avoid some of the college "traps" that derail too many adult students. This would include assistance in understanding college processes such as registration and financial aid, as well as course sequencing, drop-and-add policies, availability of student services, and myriad other processes. A further step would be to redesign some of these processes, making them more clear and convenient for today's time-stressed students. Adult students need help finding information about what kinds of skills are in demand locally, and they would benefit from career counseling throughout training to help them establish goals, milestones, and the education and interim employment steps that will help them achieve their goals. Once training is completed, students require additional help making the transition into the labor market and developing new professional networks.

## ***While the partnership model has a common strategic framework, partnerships vary in structure and services***

Many factors influence the structure and activities of the community college-nonprofit partnerships highlighted in this report. While all of the C2E partnerships utilize education, support service, and industry strategies, the goals and exact mix of services related to these strategies vary considerably. The six C2E partnerships operate in different areas with different local, state and philanthropic funding resources and opportunities. They had different capacities and experiences prior to collaboration. They

<sup>8</sup> Calculated by authors based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). Civilian labor force, by age, sex, race, and ethnicity, 1990, 2000, 2010, and projected 2020. Retrieved on February 3, 2012, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t06.htm>.



have different local industries. All of these factors have a significant effect on the shape of a program and how responsibilities are divided between a college and its nonprofit partner. Programs assess all these factors and develop a tailored mix of services and education strategies that help adult students achieve specific education and employment goals. One program may choose to offer tutoring services in-house, while another may refer students to an outside program. Geography and transportation infrastructure play a role as programs help students get from home to school, work, childcare facilities, grocery stores or other destinations. Some programs can provide transportation vouchers; others may provide gas cards, organize car pools, or work with participants on car-purchase programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our experiences and learning through the C2E demonstration leads us to offer the following recommendations for policymakers, investors, community colleges, nonprofits and researchers.

### *For Policy Makers*

- People who need to build skills to get a better job often need assistance managing their ongoing life challenges – such as child care or housing – while they attempt to secure better jobs. In many cases low-wage workers must work long hours to earn enough income to support their families, leaving little time for classwork and skills training. The cost of supplemental funding to pay for student expenses such as transportation assistance and books, or to support additional staff to help students stay enrolled and employed is relatively modest. But, such expenditures are critical in ensuring that larger public investments in college students – such as Pell Grants or state investments in higher education – are not wasted. Policy makers should work to see that complementary funding sources are available, so that adult students can not only enroll in school, but also complete education programs.
- Data on employment experiences of college students should be made easier to obtain and use. Policies regulating access to and use of public wage record data should be reviewed with an eye toward its use by nonprofit workforce service providers and colleges. Employment and earnings data is critical for ongoing management of education programs with employment goals (arguably all education programs). In the current operating environment, few colleges track employment outcomes. Nonprofit workforce service providers do track employment outcomes, but they must develop capacity to collect and manage this type of data, and too frequently the task proves tremendously burdensome. While public wage record data has limitations, in many states it is an under-used resource that could assist with performance management and evaluation at much lower cost than status quo data management practices.

### *For Investors*

- Community college-nonprofit partnerships offer an excellent opportunity for public and philanthropic investors to build a skilled workforce and help low-income adults improve their economic standing. Investors should seek opportunities to encourage and build more of these collaborative efforts.
- While investors often prefer to pay for direct services, they should also consider supporting the development of organizational capacity needed to build an effective partnership. Creating and sustaining these partnerships requires the partners to build relationships, reach agreement on goals and strategies, resolve conflicts, and jointly review and evaluate their performance. The resources for this work are crucial to ensuring the partnership's success, especially in the long term.
- The C2E partnerships faced challenges collecting data and evaluating their performance. Investors can support partnerships as they work to overcome data-collection issues. All too often, outcomes data are viewed as an opportunity to judge organizational performance, rather than as an opportunity to support learning and improvement. While accountability is clearly important, investors need to balance this goal against the need to encourage the use of data to promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

## ***For Community Colleges***

- Colleges should recognize that the C2E partnership approach is a promising strategy for improving student completion rates, particularly for low-income adults who struggle to finish programs. With public funding for community colleges being cut, nonprofits with experience in training and providing other services to adults can be good partners. Colleges should carefully examine nonprofits' work to see how they can be integrated into a partnership that shares similar or complementary goals.
- Nonprofits can help colleges expand their reach and serve larger numbers of students more efficiently. Not all community college students need the kinds of counseling, support and industry navigation services described in this paper. Working with organizations that have a specialization in providing these services and are knowledgeable about the needs of local low-income adult learners allows colleges to avoid building new capacity that not all of their students need. At the same time, through partnership activities, we have seen that colleges see opportunities to make institutional changes that can benefit much larger numbers of students.
- Partnerships can help colleges ensure that education programs are geared toward local employment opportunities. Working with an organization focused on helping individuals connect to jobs can help colleges assess whether their educational programming is truly furthering the employment ambitions of the students they serve, as well as meeting local business needs for skilled workers.

## ***For Nonprofits***

- Colleges offer a wider variety of training than most nonprofits and can give students opportunities for degrees and certificates that can make a significant difference in their future employment and earnings. By partnering with colleges, nonprofits can do more to help low-income adult workers advance economically. By partnering with community colleges, nonprofits can give the people they serve access to a wider variety of learning opportunities.
- To partner with a community college, which can be organizationally complex, a nonprofit leader may need to explore several different departments within the college before finding the right opportunity for collaboration. Community colleges are diverse institutions, and spending time learning about the goals and history of a particular college may be helpful in considering whether the institutional missions are likely to be aligned. In some cases, the college that is geographically closest may not be the best fit.
- Partners need time to develop trust and confidence in one another. Launching partnerships at a smaller scale can provide some early trust building before moving on to larger scale efforts. In addition, memoranda of agreement or other written documents can help clarify expectations and responsibilities as a partnership gets underway.

## ***For Researchers***

- Courses to Employment research shows that low-income participants of partnership programs have achieved promising education and employment outcomes. The Courses to Employment project took a deliberately exploratory approach to the research, addressing a wide range of questions about how partnerships work, as well as examining what they achieve. Many of the initiatives studied were in a relatively early stage and had not yet achieved the scale of service delivery they ultimately hope to reach. As the field grows and develops, more rigorous research is warranted for these strategies.
- We have documented only a few of the existing partnership models. While it is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all model, research is nonetheless needed to better understand which practices are effective in what environments. Additional documentation is essential for community college and nonprofit leaders working to build collaborative efforts that will improve the skills of their adult students and clients.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT



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*“Community colleges like NOVA, working together with nonprofit community-based organizations like NVFS Training Futures, are demonstrating life-transforming college and career advancement outcomes for laid-off and low-wage workers, while also delivering skilled and motivated new workers for employers. Together, community colleges and CBOs can use the findings in Aspen’s C2E report to systematically re-align America’s workforce system to create new opportunities for workers, employers, and entire communities.”*

**Bob Templin, President**  
*Northern Virginia Community College*

*“C2E is the culmination of so much of Aspen’s great work over many years, and clearly demonstrates how effective education-industry-community partnerships can help today’s community college students reach their education and employment goals. This report provides a clear roadmap for success for the workforce development and education sectors. Well done!!”*

**Eleni Papadakis, Executive Director**  
*WA Workforce Training and Education  
Coordinating Board*

*“The collaboration between Metro, Los Angeles Valley College Job Training, and Community Career Development has greatly helped us meet our workforce needs, and it has helped the people of Los Angeles County who rely on us to provide essential transportation services to get to work, school, medical appointments, and other destinations. This report details how this type of collaboration works, and offers information for other communities seeking to address similar workforce challenges.”*

**Don Ott, Executive Officer, Administration**  
*Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro)*



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