NGA Center for BEST PRACTICES

Issue Brief

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The Pathways to Advancement Project: How States Can Expand Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Working Adults

Executive Summary

Two of the highest priorities for any governor are economic competitiveness and education. Governors in many states are increasingly seeing these two priorities as intertwined. As a result, many governors are developing new initiatives in science, technology, engineering, and math education in order to compete for high-skill, high-wage jobs. Too often, however, states' efforts to increase economic competitiveness and raise the skills of the workforce focus primarily on K-12 education or workers with advanced degrees, leaving out vast numbers of Americans in the middle who are already in the workforce but lack a college degree or credential.

The Pathways to Advancement initiative was launched by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) to help governors and their policy advisors examine options and develop strategies for expanding working adults' access to and completion of postsecondary education.[1] In September 2003, the NGA Center issued a request for proposals for states that wanted to participate in an action learning academy to change their policies and practices related to higher education financing, program and accreditation requirements, and student aid to enable greater numbers of adults to earn postsecondary education credentials. It indicated that the states selected to participate would receive technical support from the NGA Center, FutureWorks, Inc., and experts in education, economic development, and related fields at the Pathways to Advancement policy academy, as well as a $50,000 grant for travel to the policy academy meetings, for peer-review sessions in partner states, and to help support state-specific research, evaluation, and consensus-building activities related to improving postsecondary education for working adults. Financial support for the project was provided by the Lumina Foundation for Education.

Ultimately, nine states were selected to participate in the Pathways to Advancement project: **Arkansas, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, and Pennsylvania**.[2] As a condition of participation in the project, each of the nine states assembled a state team of executive advisors from the governor's office, officials from state agencies such as postsecondary education, adult education, workforce development, welfare, and economic development, and other key individuals in and out of government. Over the course of the two-year project, the state Pathways to Advancement teams evaluated education, workforce, welfare, and economic development policies in their own states with a view toward helping working

adults earn college and other post-high school degrees. The state teams also met collectively twice to engage in cross-team analysis and critiques of policy proposals and to learn from the Pathways to Advancement policy academy faculty of national and state policy experts in higher education, economic development, and other related fields.

What was the outcome of states' participation in the Pathways to Advancement project? In all nine participating states, being involved in the project helped raise the level of visibility and importance of adult postsecondary education and workforce education among policymakers and the public. It also helped to catalyze significant policy changes in participating states, leading many of them to modify their processes for addressing key issues of postsecondary education and economic advancement to include a focus on the adult workforce in the state. The experiences of the nine Pathways to Advancement states offer valuable lessons for governors and state policymakers in other states that want to improve the skills and economic competitiveness of their adult workforce.

Why Focus on Improving Postsecondary Education for Working Adults?

Although 43 percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 in the United States have completed no education beyond high school, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the primary source of employees in the United States for the next 20 to 30 years will be current workers. Current workers will serve as the source of 65 percent of the 2020 U.S. workforce and 43 percent of the 2030 U.S. workforce.[3] The potential pool of skilled workers among prime-age adults—defined here as the nearly 50 million people aged 18 to 44 with a high school diploma or less—is equal to the next 17 years of high school graduating classes.[4] If current trends continue, however, approximately two-thirds (65 percent) of the 2020 workforce in states will have a high school degree but no college degree or certificate.

A renewed focus on improving the access to and completion of postsecondary education among working adults can benefit states in a number of important ways. First, strategies that boost working adults' postsecondary education can help states become more economically competitive. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that between 2004 and 2014, 24 of the 30 fastest-growing occupations in the United States will be filled by people who have postsecondary educational or training credentials—either an occupational certificate or a college degree. In addition, occupational projections and direct observation of organizational trends in the workplace suggest that employers' demand for skilled U.S. workers will continue to grow over time.[5] States that help lower skilled youths and adults develop skills and earn postsecondary credentials in high demand will find it easier to compete for these jobs.

Second, strategies that boost working adults' postsecondary education can boost states' economic growth. There is considerable evidence that the states with the best educated workforces have the strongest economies, and the relationship between overall levels of education and economic performance is becoming stronger over time. Between 1980 and 2000, economic growth in areas with high proportions of adults with college degrees was nearly 3.5 times as rapid as economic growth in places with lower proportions of college-educated adults. A college-educated workforce is better able respond to economic downturns than a less well-educated workforce and more able to generate and attract high value investment to a state that leads to further job and wealth creation.[6]

Third, strategies that improve the postsecondary education of working adults can help states increase the prosperity of working families. Currently, about one in four working families in the United States is classified as low income.[7] Although several factors contribute to this situation, postsecondary education or training that allows low-wage workers to qualify for better jobs can help raise family incomes. As the *Wall Street Journal* recently noted, U.S. employers are now paying college-educated workers 75 percent more than they are paying workers with only a high school diploma, whereas employers back in the 1980s paid college-educated workers just 40 percent more.[8] Given the widening gap between the earnings of high school graduates and workers with college credentials, states with higher proportions of lower-skilled adults are likely to experience declining incomes for their citizens.

The Pathways to Advancement Project

In 2003, recognizing the economic and demographic trends just described, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) launched the Pathways to Advancement project, to help states to assess and change their policies and practices pertaining to higher education financing, program and accreditation requirements, and student financial aid with the objective of increasing the number of adults gaining access to postsecondary education and earning postsecondary education credentials.

In September 2003, the NGA Center issued a request for proposals for states that wanted to participate in an "action learning academy" as part of the Pathways to Advancement project. The request for proposals indicated that each state selected would receive technical support and a $50,000 grant for travel to the Pathways to Advancement policy academy meetings, for peer-review sessions in partner states, and to help support state-specific research, evaluation, and consensus-building activities related to improving postsecondary educational opportunities for working adults. Financial support for the project was provided by the Lumina Foundation for Education.

Nine states were selected to participate in the Pathways to Advancement project: **Arkansas, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, and Pennsylvania.** Each of the nine states assembled a cross-agency team of executive advisors from the governor's office, relevant state agencies (e.g., postsecondary education, adult education, workforce development, welfare, and economic development), and other key individuals in and out of government. Over the course of the project, the Pathways to Advancement state teams evaluated education, workforce, welfare, and economic development policies in their own states with a view toward helping working adults earn college and other post-high school degrees. They also met collectively twice to engage in cross-team analysis and critiques of policy proposals and to get advice from a faculty of national and state policy experts in higher education, economic development, and other related fields.

Policy Changes in States Participating in the Pathways to Advancement Project

In **Arkansas, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon,** and **Pennsylvania,** participating in the Pathways to Advancement project elevated the importance of workforce education and skill building into statewide policy discussions and agenda-setting efforts**.** It also helped to catalyze significant policy changes in these states. As described below, each of the nine Pathways to Advancement states adopted one or more of the following policies:

1. Linking workforce education and economic development policies
2. Making postsecondary education and training more affordable for adults
3. Establishing career pathways in key economic sectors
4. Facilitating successful transitions from adult education to postsecondary education
5. Targeting disadvantaged adult populations
6. Using labor market and education data to inform policy and program decisions

1. Linking Workforce Education and Economic Development Policies

In today's economic environment, linking postsecondary workforce education and economic development efforts is increasingly important. Employers are putting skilled workers high on the list of factors they look for when deciding where to locate or expand. In addition, many employers, especially in the health care sector, now seek access to college-credit programs for their workers, not just short-term or on-the-job training, to provide for gains in skills, increased productivity, and workplace innovation. Workforce education provided by community colleges is especially appealing to employers.

The states that participated in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy sought to link postsecondary workforce education and economic development in the state in various ways. In **Pennsylvania** and **Hawaii,** for example, engaging employers on workforce development issues was the central focus. **Pennsylvania** created an Industry Partnership Worker Training fund (a $5 million investment for two consecutive years) to encourage employers across the state in targeted industry clusters to support training and education for their workers as an investment in high future productivity. In addition, Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell developed the Job Ready Media Campaign to garner public and business support for a comprehensive workforce development strategy recommended by the state's Pathways to Advancement team. As of February 2007, Pennsylvania had involved more than 13 percent of its businesses in some form of workforce development—a significant increase from the 1 percent of businesses involved just three years before.

Hawaii has created a unified vision that links higher education and workforce development in the state to the state's economic development goals. The Hawaii Workforce Development Council is using a modified version of the state's workforce development plan that focuses less on serving individual workers and more on addressing the labor market issues facing the state in its efforts to grow and diversify the economy. The University of Hawaii changed its budget request format to the Hawaii state legislature to organize its priorities around the economic competitiveness issues raised by Hawaii's Pathways to Advancement team. The 2007 Hawaii Innovation Initiative of Governor Linda Lingle reflects Hawaii's unified vision. An Innovation Council created as part of the governor's initiative is responsible for making recommendations to align Hawaii's higher education programs with the state's economic development goals, which include shifting the state's economy from one that is based on land development to one that better supports investments in science, technology, and innovation. To support the Innovation Initiative, Hawaii's state legislature has approved $5 million to create a variety of new career and technical education programs in high schools, community colleges, and the University of Hawaii.

A few states participating in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy changed governance or oversight of state programs to better align workforce development, economic development, and higher education policies. To ensure common leadership over all education programs serving adults, **Ohio** moved postsecondary, noncredit workforce education and adult education and

English language programs from the state department of education to the state board of regents, which governs community colleges. **Kansas** moved workforce development programs from the state department of human resources to the state department of commerce. It also established a liaison position between the state board of regents and the state department of commerce that is co-funded by the two entities. In both Ohio and Kansas, these organizational changes ensure that postsecondary educational offerings and programs are better aligned with the changing needs of the state's labor market and economy.

Other Pathways to Advancement states focused on ways to improve the use of regional planning and economic data to guide coordinated economic and workforce development policymaking. **Kansas**, for example, created the Kansas Works Initiative, which empowers an executive team across programs and agencies to use data on employer demand for workers and skills to guide coordinated decision making in economic development, workforce development, and higher education. In **Michigan**, business-driven, business-focused partnerships that address workforce issues in a specific region and industry sector—known as Michigan Regional Skills Alliances—have helped focus state economic development efforts more on the importance of a skilled workforce through regional partnerships of employers and workforce education providers.

2. Making Postsecondary Education and Training More Affordable for Adults

One crucial way that states can ensure that adult workers make investments to improve their productivity and skills are by keeping the price of postsecondary education within the reach of low- and moderate-income adults. States generally have two tools at their disposal to make postsecondary education more affordable for working adults: keeping tuition low and providing working adults with financial aid.

In many states, policymakers do not have direct control over tuition because the amount is set by individual institutions or multi-institution governing boards.[9] Furthermore, tuition is not the biggest expense for working adults seeking postsecondary credentials; the biggest expense is living expenses for themselves, and often their families, while they are in school. In 2005, the average cost of tuition and fees at public, two-year colleges—where most low-wage adult workers enroll—was $2,191; for commuter students at such colleges, the total average cost including living expenses was $11,692 (such students' living expenses were more than twice as much as tuition and fees).[10]

Given this situation, states should try to find ways to redesign their postsecondary financial aid policies and programs to address the overall affordability challenge for working adults who want postsecondary education. They can start to improve the affordability of postsecondary education for adult workers by creating adult-friendly state financial aid programs. Adult-friendly financial aid programs typically feature more inclusive standards of eligibility for financial aid, making such aid available for students attending school less than half time who are enrolled in certificate or degree programs, for students taking remedial and noncredit occupational programs if articulated to certificates and degrees,[11] and for students taking short modules as part of certificate or degree programs.[12]

Illinois offers a need-based student financial aid program called the Monetary Award Program that contributes towards tuition and fees for students who do not have a bachelor's degree, including students who attend school less than half time. In fiscal year 2008, the Monetary Award Program paid out a total of approximately $383.8 million to more than 145,543 students.[13] Another state, **Georgia,** offers Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally or HOPE Grants (not to be confused with the state's merit-based HOPE Scholarships) to any Georgia resident regardless of income. Georgia's HOPE Grants cover tuition, books, and fees for technical certificates and

diplomas (but not degrees) at public institutions; they can cover developmental education; they are available to students enrolled less than half time; and they can be combined with federal Pell Grants.

Several states increased funding for existing state financial assistance program as a result of their participation in the Pathways to Advancement project. **Arkansas**, for example, allocated an additional $3.7 million for need-based financial assistance for working adults enrolled in postsecondary education part time. **Oregon** has made the state's existing need-based financial aid program for postsecondary education available to working adults. In 2005, Oregon made part-time students eligible for Oregon Opportunity Grants with no restrictions on age or years after high school graduation. In 2007, the state expanded financial aid thresholds for independent students (i.e., adults), allowing parents in families of four, for example, to qualify for some level of aid with income close to 300 percent of the poverty level.

Beyond adding dollars to existing state financial assistance programs, some Pathways to Advancement states created new assistance programs to make postsecondary education more affordable for adult workers. The **Massachusetts** Pathways to Advancement state team influenced the state legislature in 2006 to include as part of the 2006 Economic Stimulus Bill a $1.5 million Educational Rewards Grant Program for low-income incumbent workers to enable them to receive education to transition into jobs in targeted high-demand occupations. This grant program, which is to serve as a last resort after all other federal and state resources have been exhausted to meet postsecondary education enrollment costs, allows recipients to use up to 30 percent of the grant for living expenses. In 2005-06, the **Pennsylvania** Department of Labor and Industry, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, launched the Worker Advancement Grant for Education (WAGE) program to increase the postsecondary education attainment of adults in the state. Pennsylvania's WAGE program provides a block grant to postsecondary institutions that have applied and been determined eligible to participate. Institutions then establish and award grants to adult students who meet eligibility guidelines. Pennsylvania invests approximately $10 million a year through WAGE for almost 3,000 nontraditional students across 186 institutions across the state.

One state that has gone in a completely different direction to help adult workers finance their postsecondary education is **Maine.** In collaboration with a national nonprofit organization called the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning, Maine has established the first statewide Lifelong Learning Account (LiLA) program. LiLAs are employer-matched, portable, employee-owned accounts used to finance education and training. In Maine, the accounts are financed with federal special project dollars and contributions from the Maine Finance Authority (not state revenues); a state tax credit is also available for LiLAs. So far 10 companies have signed on to have their employees participate in Maine's LiLA program**. Hawaii** is seeking to develop a statewide LiLA program as part of Governor Lingle's ongoing Hawaii Innovation Initiative.

3. Establishing Career Pathways in Key Economic Sectors

A career pathway is a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector.[14] Although community colleges are likely to be key in career pathways, one principle of career pathways is the importance of involving all levels of the educational system (secondary and higher education, adult basic education/literacy, etc.), as well as important systems such as economic and workforce development and human services.

Developing career pathways in key economic sectors can help link education and training programs to the occupational needs of employers. The goal is to reform educational and training systems so that they offer a seamless continuum of learning that matches the skill levels needed by employers. The career pathway framework can be applied at the state level, as well as at the regional level, and its use across the country is growing.

The Pathways to Advancement states were exposed to the career pathways concept at their initial cross-state meeting at the Pathways to Advancement policy academy. They also were informed that expert assistance was available if they wanted to implement a career pathways initiative. Two of the nine states—**Arkansas** and **Oregon—**fully embraced the full concept of career pathways and committed to a statewide career pathways program. As described below, these two states have achieved notable progress in the implementation of career pathways and continue their efforts today.

Arkansas, with leadership from Governor Mike Beebe's office and the support of several Pathways to Advancement team stakeholders, committed to implementing a career pathways framework in the state's 22 community colleges. The Arkansas legislature allocated $8 million per year for two years to finance career pathway efforts in individual community colleges and to support the Arkansas Department of Higher Education in guiding and managing the career pathways initiative. The individual community colleges in Arkansas identify key economic sectors and work to develop and strengthen educational courses and programming in those sectors, as well as to develop intensive student support service systems. A number of the community colleges have focused their efforts on addressing the needs of lower skilled workers and workers for entry-level positions (employers in the state cited problems findings qualified workers for entry-level positions). Of particular note are efforts that have aligned the state's adult basic education and literacy system with the state's community college system to facilitate the transition of adults who have earned a general equivalency diploma (GED) into postsecondary education.

Oregon has focused its career pathway program on the state's community college system, too, with the objective of developing career pathway initiatives in each of the state's 17 community colleges. Senior staff from Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski's office assumed responsibility for developing and guiding implementation of the statewide career pathway initiative, and in doing so, leveraged resources from Oregon's Workforce Investment Act and federal Perkins Act programs to support the effort. Although the focus of local efforts related to career pathways in Oregon varies, such efforts typically encompass a broad range of transitions across the educational spectrum, including transitions from secondary to postsecondary education; from precollege adult education and training to credit postsecondary education (bridge programs); and from community college postsecondary to higher education. To guide and measure the success of its career pathways effort and progress at the 17 community colleges, Oregon has identified the following outcomes as goals: (1) increase the number of Oregonians accessing postsecondary education; (2) increase the number of Oregonians who persist and attain postsecondary degrees and credentials; (3) decrease the need for remediation at postsecondary level; (4) increase entry into employment and further education; and (5) increase wage gain over time for completers of credentials, certificates, degrees. A state evaluation of Oregon's career pathways efforts is now underway.

Some additional states participating in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy have undertaken other career pathways initiatives. **Hawaii**, focusing on one key aspect of the career pathways concept—the transition from high school to postsecondary via dual enrollment—has

funded a $5 million academy that will develop skilled workers for the construction industry. **Pennsylvania** and **Ohio** both passed legislation requiring better course articulation and admissions and placement standards between the state's two- and four-year educational institutions.

4. Facilitating Successful Transitions from Adult Education to Postsecondary Education

In order to advance educationally and economically, adult workers must be able to move seamlessly across different levels of education to build their skills and credentials and connect to higher wage jobs. Unfortunately, unacceptably high numbers of adult learners end their progress through the educational system without earning a marketable degree because of leaks at key transition points—from adult education and English literacy to postsecondary education, from developmental education to college-level coursework, from noncredit workforce and technical training to credit-bearing postsecondary education, and from associates degree to baccalaureate entry and completion.

A study of the 16 southern states found that, on average, only 1 of every 100 young adults (18 years of age or older) without a high school diploma eventually earns a GED.[15] Persistence and degree completion among individuals with a GED or high school diploma are not impressive either. In one state, more than half of the students who enter noncredit vocational and basic skills classes (including English as a second language) leave community college after their first year and only about 1 in 10 students eventually earns a credential or transfers to a four-year college or university.[16]

To facilitate successful educational transitions for adults and lower skilled students generally, some states that participated in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy have been strengthening formal linkages both within and across the systems of adult and developmental education, workforce development, K-12 and postsecondary education and removing barriers to transitions among these systems. **Oregon**, for example, has developed six career pathways bridge courses for pre-college students that are being pilot tested at nine colleges referred to as Oregon Pathways for Adult Basic Skills (OPABS). Curriculum for these six bridge courses rolls out to all of Oregon's community colleges in July 2009. In addition, Oregon has developed a Career Pathways Roadmap Webtool used by the community colleges to develop roadmaps for their websites. A Plan of Study template is currently being added to the Webtool for the state's high schools and community colleges so they are able to map the plans of study for career and technical education. In July 2007, the Oregon State Board of Education approved the Career Pathways Certificate (12-44 credits) as a new credential within the Associate of Applied Science degree. To date, more than 100 certificates have been developed at eleven of the state's seventeen community colleges.

Another state, **Ohio,** has adopted the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Policy to improve the ability of students to transfer effectively between secondary and adult career and technical education institutions and postsecondary educational institutions in the state. In addition, Ohio's board of regents and department of education have developed the Career-Technical Credit Transfer Initiative (CT^2) to ensure that students at adult or secondary career-technical education institutions in the state can transfer specified technical courses that meet recognized industry standards to postsecondary institutions in the state. The CT^2 initiative is designed to link noncredit, career-technical programs to credit-bearing courses in two high-priority areas across the state—namely, health care and engineering. Institutions must work together to define and measure learning outcomes and submit a collaborative program for review by joint faculty panels

to ensure rigor and standards for credit transfers.[17] Finally, at the urging of Ohio's Pathways to Advancement team, Governor Bob Taft convened the Ohio Workforce Education and Training Advisory Council (WETAC) in July 2006. WETAC subsequently recommended that Ohio create a more seamless course articulation and transfer model throughout the full range of adult, workforce, and postsecondary education programs and that it shift the administration of adult education and the state's career centers into a restructured board of regents. In January 2007, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland created a working group to review and implement these and other recommendations of WETAC.

Other leading-edge states, including **Kentucky** and **Hawaii**, have formalized a policy goal of improved student transitions and are developing and using indicators of success towards meeting this goal. **Kentucky** was the first to do this. In 2000, the Kentucky legislature passed a comprehensive adult education reform law that committed the state to improving the transitions of adult learners into postsecondary education. The 2000 law also mandated assessment and placement of students and formalized a pathway for students from adult education to developmental education and then on to credit classes. Now Kentucky Adult Education measures progress towards student transition and other goals each year and awards performance funding to counties in the state that meet or exceed their performance targets. Through its efforts, Kentucky Adult Education has been able to improve the percentage of GED graduates in Kentucky who enroll in postsecondary education within two years of completing their GEDs from 12 percent in 1998 to 21 percent in 2006. In 2007, Kentucky also began awarding performance funding to programs that are successful in transitioning GED graduates into postsecondary programs.[18]

As a result of participating in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy, **Hawaii** has introduced legislation to create a cross-agency advisory board modeled on Kentucky's state adult education policy council.[19] This board would have oversight authority for adult community schools and postsecondary education. The idea is that the board could ensure better coordination and improve articulation between adult education and postsecondary education with the goal of facilitating transitions.

Several states, including **Massachusetts** and **Pennsylvania**, have sought to promote practices at the local and institutional level with potential to improve adults' transitions. These states have concentrated their energies on building the capacity of colleges and providers to do this work and catalyzing and disseminating promising practices. **Massachusetts** provides seed funding and implementation assistance to colleges and providers to collaborate on local transitions plans to meet statewide goals.[20] The Massachusetts Pathways to Advancement team helped to expand the state's current Adult Basic Education to College Transitions pilot to all 15 community colleges in Massachusetts. **Pennsylvania** has developed a pilot project called Career Gateway that links adults entering GED and adult diploma programs to postsecondary education—and ultimately to high-wage and high-demand jobs.

5. Targeting Education and Skill-Building Initiatives to Disadvantaged Adult Populations

There is evidence that more than 30 states will face skill shortages over the next 20 years even if they significantly improve high school graduation and college entry rates.[21] Thus, states have both a need and an opportunity to increase the education and skill levels of underserved adult workers who may have never participated in or benefited from workforce training. To improve the education and skills of specific workers who do not qualify for other more traditional means of assistance, some states participating in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy have opted to create new funding pools from state revenues and other sources. Other Pathways to

Advancement states have expanded the use of existing funds such as state Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grants to serve the education and skills training needs of specific underserved populations.

Maine is a prime example of a Pathways state that identified several important gaps where workers were not well served by the current education and workforce systems and then created new funding to address these gaps. First, as noted earlier, Maine established the first statewide Lifelong Learning Account (LiLA) program, which is directed at workers in small businesses that typically do not offer tuition reimbursement assistance. Second, Maine created the Competitiveness Skills Scholarship Program. With funding at close to $5 million over two years starting in 2008, this program will enable workers in Maine who do not qualify for traditional college financial aid to apply for grant resources that support their efforts to gain a college certificate or degree in high-growth occupations. The scholarship funds are targeted to workers with earnings less than 200 percent of poverty. Maine's unemployment insurance system is helping to finance this effort.

Michigan is another state that has recognized the importance of efforts to improve the education and skill levels of underserved populations. When Michigan's Pathways to Advancement team led by a key gubernatorial policy official entered the Pathways to Advancement policy academy, the Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth convened by Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm was just getting under way. A key goal articulated by the Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth in December 2004 was to double the number of college graduates in Michigan over the next 10 years. Two findings from an analysis of postsecondary and labor market data in the state led the Commission on Higher Education and Governor Granholm to give considerable attention to the importance of adult workers in increasing the number of Michigan residents with postsecondary credentials. One was that it would be very difficult or impossible to achieve this goal by focusing on future high school graduates. The other finding was that a number of adult workers in Michigan were already taking postsecondary classes, albeit in a limited way; a number of adult workers in the state had taken postsecondary classes previously but had not completed a certificate or degree; and adult students' success in getting a postsecondary certificate or degree in the state was unacceptably low.

These findings also led Michigan to take several tangible policy actions to encourage and help low-skilled adult workers in the state to earn postsecondary credentials. First, Michigan implemented a public statewide Return to Learn campaign to encourage adult workers to access postsecondary education. Second, Michigan shaped the state's Regional Skills Alliance program to give more attention to the needs of low-skilled adult workers. Third, in 2006, Governor Granholm proposed a new No Worker Left Behind initiative to provide resources so that displaced adult workers could obtain up to two years of free tuition at any Michigan community college or other approved training program. In its first year, Michigan's No Worker Left Behind program has helped more than 31,000 unemployed and underemployed workers in Michigan get training for new careers in high-demand employment sectors.[22] Moreover, the adult workforce is now a key part of policy discussions focused on strengthening Michigan's economy and increasing the prosperity of working families.

Arkansas, Hawaii, Ohio, and **Pennsylvania** are four other states that have made significant progress in bringing the issue of low-skilled workers into the state policymaking process. The specific efforts these four states adopted were unique, but all four states used the Pathways to Advancement process to broaden the pool of stakeholders concerned about these issues. **Hawaii**

and **Pennsylvania** worked closely with key representatives of the economic development and employer communities, resulting in a number of specific actions to improve state adult education and training policies. In **Arkansas,** the Pathways to Advancement team brought together representatives from the state TANF agency and from the state's postsecondary educational system (and their association) to figure how to address the skills needed of an adult population with special needs. And in **Ohio**, the governor created a specific council comprised of a number of stakeholders and gave it a several-month mandate to recommend how best to align the state's adult career education system with its postsecondary educational system.

Arkansas is an example of a Pathways state that redirected existing resources to help meet the education and skill needs of a targeted population that was not being well served by existing education and workforce systems. Governor Beebe's office, working closely with Arkansas' TANF agency and higher education department, allocated $16 million dollars of TANF funds to support the development and implementation of the career pathways programs in the state. In addition to being used to support curriculum and program development at colleges, these TANF funds are being used to provide tuition grants for the students. The TANF program's flexible eligibility requirements allowed Arkansas to target career pathways resources to serve both TANF recipients and individuals with earnings up to 250 percent of the poverty level who were at risk of needing TANF. Arkansas' approach is innovative and notable because most states limit the ability of TANF recipients to engage in education and training. In fact, despite the flexibility states have under federal law to use TANF funds to support education for many more low-income parents, only 7.6 percent of TANF participants nationally were enrolled in education and training in 2004.[23]

Making postsecondary education more affordable to low-income workers is a key goal in many Pathways to Advancement states. A number of states, including **Massachusetts, Michigan,** and **Pennsylvania** acted on this issue by developing programs that provided new pools of financial aid to specific population. **Massachusetts** developed the Education Rewards Program, which provides college aid assistance to dislocated workers and with incomes less than 200 percent of the poverty level. **Pennsylvania** established a new fund called WAGE (Worker Advancement Grant for Education) to help adult workers who are not eligible for traditional financial aid access resources to help pay for their postsecondary education efforts. And as noted elsewhere, **Michigan** is proposing to refocus its dislocated and trade adjustment resources to support dislocated workers in their efforts to obtain up to two years of postsecondary education and training.

6. Using Labor Market and Education Data to Inform Policy and Program Decisions

To strengthen educational and employment outcomes, it is important that states have a solid understanding of the current performance of their various education and workforce development providers and institutions and an ability to follow and report on their performance over time. States can use labor market and education data to help ensure that colleges and universities train employees prepared for the jobs they are needed for and are hired to do.

Currently, however, most states do not have the ability to track student access, persistence, and transitions as they move across various education and workforce development providers and systems into the workforce, and then back into higher education.[24] According to a 2008 survey by the Data Quality Campaign, only 28 states report having the ability to link data systems for PK-12 and postsecondary education.[25] Linking data that across educational systems enables states to figure out how many students do and do not complete a certificate or degree program

and to develop policy solutions (e.g., child care support or stipends for transportation costs) that allow students to complete such a program.

Identifying labor market outcomes for students and workforce training participants requires connecting the records of students and workforce participants to unemployment insurance wage record files. In many states, educational and unemployment record systems are maintained by different departments, and it is difficult to analyze data across departmental boundaries.[26]

A few states have found ways to integrate data across diverse public systems. **Florida** was the first state to integrate its education and training data resources across all public education sectors, Pre-K-20. While other states have now moved to a similar capability, none but Florida have done so in a single, permanent repository—the Education Data Warehouse (EDW). There are many characteristics of the EDW that allow data to be joined across time, education sectors, and programs. These include the development and use of an anonymous identification number that preserves the identity of every student who enters Florida's public education system at any level from 1995 forward. The Course Code Directory for K-12 and the Common Course Numbering System for postsecondary education are "lynch pin" tools which are essential parts of facilitating the linkages between individual students, individual staff, facilities, and finance information. They are also integral to discussions on how to align secondary and postsecondary programs (e.g., articulation of policies and programs).

There are additional features that make Florida's approach truly unique. The state's ability to match student data to detailed Florida employment data both while enrolled and once they leave the system is a feature not found in any other state. This capacity includes the Florida labor market as well as federal and postal service employment and military enlistment. Several agencies including the Department of Children and Families, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, and other state agencies have partnered with the Florida Department of Education (lead agency) to collect this data. As a result, Florida's education data are joined with workforce, public assistance, corrections and foster care through these partnerships. Because of these partnerships, the Florida system is able to quantify the overlaps between education, training, and social services as well as transitions between them. One example is that Florida's database captures outcomes for students who transition from one system to another, and it can measure student employment and earnings outcomes by connecting to the state's wage record files.

Over the course of the Pathways to Advancement project, several states made progress in improving their data systems. **Arkansas** and **Michigan** initiated efforts to build a comprehensive and integrated student data system that would allow them to track key indicators such as student enrollment and persistence, degree and credential completion, and earnings over time. In both states, these efforts involved collaboration between the state adult and postsecondary education agency and the state workforce development agency. Arkansas is now one of only six states with all 10 essential components of a longitudinal data system, according to the Data Quality Campaign.[27]

Some states have recognized that they need better data to align higher education activities with economic development and the demands of the labor market. As noted earlier, **Ohio** Governor Strickland has empowered a taskforce to review and implement the recommendations of the state's Workforce Education and Training Advisory Council (WETAC). One of WETAC's recommendations was that Ohio establish common progress indicators across education and workforce agencies and programs. In **Arkansas,** the department of economic development has begun to use labor market data and information on state economic development priorities more

systematically to align the state's higher education offerings and the state's economic needs and goals. **Kansas** is undertaking a similar effort called the Kansas Works initiative, which empowers an executive team across programs and agencies to use data on employer demand for workers and skills to guide coordinated decision making in economic development, workforce development, and higher education.

Lessons for Other States

The experiences of the nine states that participated in the Pathways to Advancement project offer important lessons for other states in developing strategies for expanding working adults' access to and completion of postsecondary education. States that want to follow the lead of the Pathways to Advancement states should begin with the following steps:[28]

- Step 1: Actively involve the governor in building and sustaining momentum for system-wide change.
- Step 2: Convene a broad-based group of state policymakers and other key individuals able to work across traditional policy silos.
- Step 3: Examine state postsecondary education, workforce, and economic policies to help set priorities and benchmark state needs.

Step 1: Actively involve the governor in building and sustaining momentum for system-wide change

Of the nine Pathways to Advancement states, the states that had the greatest success in developing and implementing strategies for expanding working adults' access to and completion of postsecondary education were those in which the governor and senior staff were actively involved in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy and strongly supported the state team's vision and strategy. Six of the nine states participating in the Pathways to Advancement project had strong gubernatorial involvement and support. In four of these states, participation in the Pathways to Advancement project helped catalyze wide-ranging new initiatives around adult postsecondary education and workforce/economic development and led directly to a number of key policy changes in these areas, along with major new financial resource commitments. The other two states with strong gubernatorial involvement were able to build upon and helped extend gubernatorial-led work related to postsecondary education for working adults that was already underway.

Beyond showing support and building momentum for change on postsecondary education and workforce/economic development issues, governors can lead on these issues by articulating a clear and consistent policy vision and strategy and ensuring that the executive agency level leaders share this vision. In the Pathways to Advancement states that were most successful, the messages coming from the governor's advisors and the agency heads on the state teams were consistent and reinforced each other, helping to sustain momentum for policy change.

Step 2: Convene a broad-based group of state policymakers and other key individuals able to work across traditional state policy silos

The regular convening of the state teams and other key stakeholders to meet and discuss strategies for expanding working adults' access to and completion of postsecondary education clearly enhanced the impact of the Pathways to Advancement project. Meetings of policymakers and other key stakeholders, both within states and at the Pathways to Advancement policy

academy, helped to raise the visibility of adult postsecondary education and workforce and economic development issues and added political momentum to the deliberations. Such meetings also provided the numerous opportunities for participants to deliberate, disagree, test ideas and policy options, and build consensus on vision and strategy. By providing a rare opportunity for individuals to meet away from their jobs, regular meetings of state teams were also helpful for developing and implementing policy proposals that cut across traditional agency boundaries.

Two of the more successful Pathways to Advancement states, **Arkansas** and **Hawaii,** engaged groups and individuals from outside government on their state teams. Arkansas involved the Southern Good Faith Fund, a nonprofit statewide advocacy group; and Hawaii involved Enterprise Honolulu, a nonprofit economic development organization led by the private sector. Participants in both states reported that these groups from outside government brought fresh energy and new perspectives to the state Pathways to Advancement team's deliberations and also broadened support for the team's work among stakeholders outside of government. In addition, the Southern Good Faith Fund brought advocacy experience and strong connections to the state legislature in Arkansas, thereby making a major contribution to the success of Pathways to Advancement initiatives in that state.

Step 3: Examine state postsecondary education, workforce, and economic policies to help set priorities and benchmark state needs

At the beginning of the Pathways to Advancement project, the NGA Center and its partners worked with the nine participating states to conduct an analysis of each state's policies and performance of the state's postsecondary and workforce education. This upfront analytic work proved invaluable in helping the state teams to clarify their goals in the Pathways to Advancement policy academy and to identify potential focus areas and policy strategies. In some of the participating states, the findings from the analysis led the teams to focus on workforce and economic development concerns; in other states, the findings led the teams to focus on other pressing needs around, for example, affordability and financial aid,

For states wishing to emulate the Pathways to Advancement process, performing an initial assessment of data and policy is essential to set a direction and develop priorities for the work ahead. Given the scope and complexity of the policy issues surrounding the adult workforce, it is only by stepping back and looking at the data that states can begin to see where they currently stand and to figure out where they need to go. An initial assessment can also help raise awareness of the limitations of data available in a state. Many states are unable to track outcomes across their postsecondary education and workforce systems and are unable to follow individuals to determine their labor market outcomes. Looking at what questions can and cannot be answered upfront may lead a state to choose to make improvements in postsecondary education and workforce data systems part of its focus.

Conclusion

Governors who want to emulate the successes of the states participating in the Pathways to Advancement project must start by recognizing the critical importance of the adult workforce to their state's economic future. In addition, they must also commit to making state education, workforce, and economic policies work for the adult population and the businesses that employ adult workers. Taking these steps does not mean diminishing or deemphasizing current efforts to improve the state's K-12 educational system; instead it means expanding the state's educational

policy focus to include adult workers and the state systems that can help individuals raise their skills and the state to improve its economic prosperity.

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Endnotes

[1] The NGA Center was assisted in implementing the Pathways to Advancement project by FutureWorks Inc., a then Massachusetts-based nonprofit consulting firm, and Davis Jenkins of the Community College Research Center in New York. Two of the authors of this paper, Brandon Roberts and Julie Strawn, also worked on the project as consultants.

[2] Oregon was added to the Path ways to Advancement policy academy as an affiliate state after the first policy academy meeting, and the state was not provided with a $50,000 grant to support its participation.

[3] Amy Blair, Peace Bransberger, and Maureen Conway, "Sector Initiatives and Community Colleges: Working Together to Provide Education for Low-Wage Working Adults," *Workforce Strategies Initiative Update*, Issue 4, April 2007 (published by the Workforce Strategies Institute, Aspen Institute, Washington, D.C.).

[4] Authors' calculations using U.S. Bureau of the Census data from the March 2006 *Current Population Survey* and from Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates 1998 to 2018* (Boulder, Colo.: December 2003).

[5] Paul Osterman, *College for All? The Labor Market for College-Educated Workers* (Washington DC: Center for American Progress (CAP), 2008).

[6] Edward Glaeser and Alberto Saiz**,** *The Rise of the Skilled City*. (Cambridge, Harvard Institute of Economic Research, 2003), Louis Soares and Christopher Mazzeo. *College-Ready Students, Student-Ready Colleges: An Agenda for Improving Degree Completion in Postsecondary Education*. (Washington DC: Center for American Progress (CAP), 2008), pp. 7-9. Available at: <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/08/college_ready.html>.

[7] Brandon Roberts and Deborah Povich, *Still Working Hard, Still Falling Short: New Findings on the Challenges Confronting America's Working Families* (Chevy Chase, Working Poor Families Project, October 2008) Available at: www.workingpoorfamilies.org.

[8] "Capitol Column," *Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2007.

[9] Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, *Integrating Higher Education Financial Aid and Financing Policy: Case Studies from the Changing Direction States* (Boulder, Colo.: 2008).

[10] Chart based on numbers found in "Table 2: Sample Average Undergraduate Budgets, 2005-2006," *Trends in College Pricing* (New York: The College Board, 2006), p. 6 [online] [cited 28 November 2008]. Available at: <http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost05/trends_college_pricing_05.pdf>.

[11] Course articulation is the process by which one educational institution matches its courses or requirements to course work completed at another institution. Articulation agreements can potentially facilitate degree completion for students by enabling students to count credits or coursework earned at one institution towards a degree at another institution.

[12] Other common traits of adult-friendly student financial assistance programs are that students can combine aid with federal Pell Grants up to the total cost of attendance, the aid is not merit-based, and the aid is available for year-round study.

[13] "Table 2.0a of the 2005 ISAC Data Book, Monetary Award Program Historical Awards and Payout Summary FY1991-FY2005," n.d. [online] [cited 28 November 2008]. Available at: <http://www.collegezone.com/media/ 2005_databook_table2_0a(1).pdf>.

[14] Davis Jenkins, *Career Pathways: Aligning Public Resources to Support Individual and Regional Economic Advancement in the Knowledge Economy* (New York: Workforce Strategy Center, April 2006) [online] [cited 28 November 2008]. Available at: <http://www.workforcestrategy.org/ publications/WSC_pathways8.17.06.pdf>.

[15] Southern Regional Education Board, *Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is the Key to State Prosperity* (Atlanta: 2005). Nationally, only 30 percent of adults enrolled in federal adult education or English language programs with a goal of postsecondary education or training enroll after exiting the program, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education. See Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program Year 2002–2003: Report to Congress on State Performance* (Washington, D.C.: 2004).

[16] Nancy Shulock and Colleen Moore, *Rules of the Game: How State Policy Creates Barriers to Degree Completion and Impedes Student Success in the California Community Colleges* (Sacramento, Calif.: Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, California State University/Sacramento, 2007) [online] [cited 28 November 2008]. Available at: <http://www.hewlett.org/NR/rdonlyres/ 830AC3AD-40F0-4D54-870D-AB3E41984788/1056/Rules_of_the_Game.pdf>.

[17] Amy-Ellen Duke and Julie Strawn, *Overcoming Obstacles, Optimizing Opportunities: State Policies to Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Low-Skilled Adults.* (Boston, Jobs for the Future, March 2008).

[18] Duke and Strawn, 2008.

[19] The second cross-state Pathways to Advancement policy academy meeting included a presentation on the Kentucky adult education model.

[20] Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, *To Ensure America's Future: Building a National Opportunity System for Adults* (New York: 2003).

[21] Dennis Jones and Patrick Kelly, *Mounting Pressure Facing the U.S. Workforce and the Increasing Need for Adult Education and Literacy*, prepared by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (New York: National Commission on Adult Literacy, May 21, 2007) [online] [cited 28 November 2008]. Available at: <http://www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org/ content/nchemspresentation.pdf>.

[22] See <http://www.michigan.gov/nwlb>.

[23] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (Memorandum No. TANF-ACF-IM-2006-1), Table 6c, Performance Year 2004, cited in Rutgers Center for Women and Work and New Jersey Policy Perspectives, *Climbing the Ladder: How to Invest in New Jersey's*

Working Families, March 2007 [online] [cited 28 November 2008]. Available at: <http://www.cww.rutgers.edu/News_Articles/ rpt_ladder%5B1%5D.pdf>.

24 Hans L' Orange and Peter Ewell, "P-16 Data Systems: An Alignment Status Report," Data Quality Campaign, Austin, Texas, June 2006.

25 Data Quality Campaign, *Measuring What Matters: Creating Longitudinal Data Systems To Improve Student Achievement* (Washington DC, Data Quality Campaign, 2008). The Data Quality Campaign, a national, collaborative effort to encourage and support state policymakers to improve the collection, availability, and use of high-quality education data, has more details on these issues. The Data Quality Campaign is managed by the National Center for Educational Achievement, and NGA is a managing partner of the campaign. See the Data Quality Campaign Web site [online][cited November 2008]. Available at: <www.DataQualityCampaign.org>.

26 The inability to share data is due to a number of factors, including a lack of political will, turf issues, the challenge of interagency collaboration, and the perceived and real barriers presented by privacy statutes at the federal and state level. A number of states, including Florida and Massachusetts, have been able to overcome these problems; others, including Michigan, are in the process of doing so.

27 The other five states with all 10 essential components of a longitudinal data system are Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana and Utah.

28 These recommendations are based in part on a series of confidential telephone interviews the authors conducted with two to three individuals in each of the nine Pathways to Advancement states who were engaged actively in the project.

Appendix A

Adult Learning in the States:
A Policy Review Framework for State Policy Makers & Educators

Every state wants to figure out the puzzle of how to greatly increase its tax revenue and its economic competitiveness while reducing costs for health care and corrections. Connecting the state's adult population—especially its working adults—to postsecondary educational opportunities must be part of the solution.

A Call for Attention and Action

Most Americans realize that increasing the number of citizens with a postsecondary education is a good thing. Fewer of us realize just how good. The average salary of a college graduate is more than twice that of a high school dropout and the difference is growing. College-educated adults contribute more to—and place less demand upon—a state's tax resources. One relatively small and poor state has shown that increasing the number of college graduates by just 40,000 would grow state tax revenue by more than $90 million over the lifetimes of those graduates. College graduates are about half as likely to smoke, thereby greatly reducing state contributions to the billions of health care dollars spent on smoking related diseases. Male college graduates as a group cost a state's criminal justice system a fraction of what male high school dropouts cost (just 2 percent of the cost in one state that has done the analysis). College graduates contribute to civic life, too: they are much more likely to vote, give to charity, and lead community groups.

Yet in almost every state in this country, state and local workforce, higher education, and financial aid policies not only ignore but also discourage a pool of at least 11,000,000 potential college graduates nationally from attending postsecondary education. **This is the pool of potential adult learners missing from the educational system because of policy barriers**. In fact, that number is probably an underestimation. Within the pool of America's 155 million workers, fifty-eight per cent of those workers between the ages of 25 and 64 do not possess a college education and only 18 percent have ever taken a college-level course. These workers are not a special interest group—they are the backbone of the nation's economic engine and heads of its families and communities. Unlike younger high school and college graduates who might readily exit for distant places, adult learners are "home" students, deeply rooted in their communities and states, rarely traveling more than 50 miles to attend college classes and not likely to migrate as graduates.

Almost without exception, states make it very difficult for the nearly 40 percent of college undergraduates who are adults to stay in school. Yes, more adults are trying college. In 2003 adult learners made up about 39 percent of the US undergraduate enrollments and their numbers are growing. In fact, the demographic realities on most campuses are very different from our stereotypic image of "college students." Today only 1 in 5 college students fit the traditional

profile of an 18-22 year old, living on campus, and attending full time. Yet state policies provide little support to help "non-traditional" adult learners achieve their education goals. Almost two-thirds of low-income adults entering college aspire to earn a college degree but less than ten percent actually do. Each case of an unmet degree goal represents a lost opportunity for strengthening the state's position as well as that of the families of the students who fell short of their goals. Remember: these statistics are about those adults who tried to attend college and were in effect driven away by short-sighted and inadequate policies. Beyond them, millions more are discouraged by state policy from even trying to enter or succeed in postsecondary educational institutions!

The result of the continuing neglect of the educational needs of current and potential adult learners is all too obvious. In the U.S., adults' literacy skills are at best average with respect to their peers from other industrialized countries around the world. According to the Educational Testing Service (ETS) policy information report, "The Twin Challenges of Mediocrity and Inequality: Literacy in the U.S. from an International Perspective", U.S. adults performed at a "mediocre" level on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted between 1994-1998 when compared to adults from twenty other high-income countries. On three tests of core skills needed to meet basic workforce demands, the U.S. adults ranked 14th, 13th, and 12th respectively. Within the United States, states with the lowest levels of literacy and percent of population with a baccalaureate degree are consistently among the poorest and unhealthiest in the nation.

Demographic trends clearly show that in many states simply improving traditional K-12 education will not solve this problem. As one state demographer has noted, "If you want to know what our workforce will look like in ten years just look at it today and imagine everyone ten years older!" Typically states have focused almost all of their resources on improving educational quality through attention on the "traditional pipeline"—that of the graduates emerging from the secondary education system. Yet unless states do a much better job of "recycling" their adult population back into and through the postsecondary system, many states will never see an adequate supply of college-educated people that the workforce demands today for its businesses to become and stay economically competitive. Simply put, most states cannot "grow their own" supply of high-school-to-college graduates fast enough to keep pace with employers' demands. Even for those states with fast growing youth populations, their population of undereducated adults and adults who cannot adjust to changing workplace knowledge and skill requirements through lifelong learning will be a significant drag on economic development and quality of life. Each state urgently needs to begin a state policy conversation that results in mobilizing resources to address the needs of its adult learners. For many states, mobilizing these resources will not require significant new funds but rather the smarter use of funds currently used in a fragmented set of programs scattered across state government, higher education, and the private sector.

Getting Started: Using this Policy Review Framework

This document provides a Policy Review Framework that consists of a comprehensive set of questions that can help a state understand whether its policies do something better than discourage its current and potential adult learners from attending college. It also provides access to data that will help a state to understand the number of adult learners who need its assistance and hence, the size of the opportunity to increase state revenue, reduce demand upon its health, welfare and correctional systems, and improve civic and community life.

As you address the answers that **your** state would provide, the Policy Review Framework provides a baseline and benchmark from which to measure the "adult-friendliness" of your state's policies. It is subdivided into seven categories of questions that can be used to evaluate services and programs that promote adult learning. The seven subdivisions are as follows:

I. Strategic Plans, Accountability

II. Educational Programs & Academic Policy

III. Institutional Finance & Governance

IV. Student Financial Assistance

V. Interagency Cooperation

VI. 'Stakeholder' Involvement

VII. Consumer Information

The questions asked in each of these sections require answers and action if your state is to reap the benefits of increased college participation by adult learners. The discussion around these questions is only a starting point. Effective answers and action cannot be accomplished in isolation—this is not a problem to be left to the state's higher education system to solve by itself.

To start answering the questions posed by this review, the state will need to convene representatives from a diverse set of state agencies that all have an impact—directly or indirectly—upon the needs of adult learners. Recognize that in many states these leaders and agencies rarely meet together! These representatives should include:

- State policy makers
- State agencies responsible for workforce development, traditional adult education, economic development, and vocational education and rehabilitation services
- Postsecondary education leaders (including community/technical colleges and universities)
- Educational foundations and non-profits focused on economic and workforce development and those few specifically centered on the issues and barriers facing adult learners as they pursue educational and career goals
- Business leaders who will benefit directly from an improved workforce if they will do their part to provide workplace education programs and support state efforts.

As just noted, this conversation may be the first time these groups have met to discuss their common interest in promoting adult learning—that will be an accomplishment in itself! This Policy Review Framework will help the state identify what it needs to do to ensure its adult learners have the opportunity to create better lives for themselves and make the state more economically competitive and fiscally strong. It rests upon the state's leadership to ensure that it develops the political will to accomplish these things!

How Should this Policy Review Framework Be Used?

The Policy Review Framework frames questions and issues about adult learning from a state and policy perspective. The framework can provide a useful way of generating key data and metrics

(with a focus on outcomes) related to adult learning and policies that underlie adult learning at the state level. Not every state or agency program or policy that the questions that this framework is

designed to reveal will have specific pre-existing data or metrics available—in those instances, the framework will point to an area where the state may be operating "blindly"—thereby ineffectively or inefficiently as well.

When using the framework, how much effort is enough? Use as much of the framework as will be helpful to move state policies forward. There is no obligation or purpose to slavishly poring over every question and issue if focused attention upon a handful of questions and limited set of data is enough to move people to constructive action.

The primary focus of the Policy Review Framework is on the educational community and those agencies directly engaged in providing educational programs and services, with a secondary focus on workforce and economic development. While most states have linked these efforts, the Policy Review Framework is designed to address state policy from the educational perspective. Depending upon local circumstances, states may wish to develop complementary data collection efforts that focus on the workforce or economic development initiatives.

Questions in the framework address matters of state policy—but in many instances it will be just as fruitful to ask the same questions about matters of **local** and **institutional** policy, too! Do so wherever participants in the process feel that it is appropriate.

The Policy Review Framework is intended for internal assessment and evaluation but can also used to extend comparison to external peers or standards if desired. While the framework is designed to be used by state agencies/organizations for self-assessments, it can easily be adapted for use by a third party acting as a facilitator to address the adult learning issues embedded within it by its questions.

While the Policy Review Framework can be used in a variety of ways, the following suggestions are provided to help ensure the approach will be as successful as possible.

1. Establish the broadest involvement across state agencies/departments at the outset of the process.
2. Define clearly what information can be collected.
3. Make an early determination or assessment about state goals/statements concerning adult learners.
4. Collect state/agency strategic plans, other planning documents, and regulations impacting adult learners.
5. Establish at the outset a process for collecting program and policy data and information.
6. Create an inventory of plans, documents, regulations, and data to be used in the review process.
7. Establish a context for your assessment efforts by defining your state on several key factors, e.g. educational attainment, employment/unemployment, compensation, and other key variables.
8. If possible, disaggregate information on the key variables just mentioned by county/municipality and provide comparisons against state, regional and national averages.

9. Scrutinize state agencies and sub-agencies when collecting data—many smaller programs are housed deep in agencies.
10. Take account of private and public-private activities in support of adult learners (which often are not included in normal or regular state data reporting).

How Can the Results Be Used?

The Policy Review Framework may accomplish two broad outcomes—to start a **process** of engaging diverse groups to collaborate on behalf of the state's adult learners and to create a set of **performance indicators** that state leaders of all kinds can use for the continuous improvement of programs and services.

The information collected and analysis generated from the Policy Review Framework is intended for use by policy makers, those whose work has an impact upon policy, and those agencies, departments and units that implement programs and policies. As such, the results can be used to:

- Establish areas where policy development or adjustments are needed
- Create a legislative agenda for adult learning
- Establish data collection processes to monitor changes over time
- Create benchmarks upon which future efforts can be evaluated
- Ascertain areas of program overlap, lack of coordination, or collaboration.

A Partial List of Additional Resources

These publications and other resources are provided by the organizations that sponsor them (see URL addresses attached to each) to those who are interested in promoting the interests of adult learners in postsecondary education.

Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Project of CAEL (www.cael.org). See also:

- *Best Practices in Adult Learning: A CAEL/APQC Benchmarking Study* (1999). CAEL
- *Best Practices in Adult Learning: A Self-Evaluation Workbook for Colleges and Universities.* (2002). CAEL

Focus on Adults: A Self-Study Guide for Postsecondary Educational Institutions (1991). American Council on Education.

Principles of Good Practice for Alternative and External Degree Programs for Adults (1990). Adult Higher Education Alliance and American Council on Education. (www.ahea.org/pogp.htm).

Appendix B

Policy Review Framework

I. Strategic Plans, Accountability

- Statements of Strategic Importance
  - Has any state agency been charged with coordinating adult learning resources for the state as a whole? If not, how is this responsibility shared?
  - How have higher education state or system boards adopted "adult educational attainment" as an explicit priority?
- Educational Attainment Goals
  - How has the state established its specific goals for the educational attainment of adults?
  - How does adult degree attainment and current enrollment participation in the state compare to other states in the surrounding region and to the nation?
- Demographic & Workforce Analysis
  - How does the state systematically analyze regional and county differences concerning educational and workforce issues?
  - How does the state align educational systems and capacities to address critical skill shortage and workforce/workplace needs?
  - How does the state set its priorities for critical workforce training & education needs if resources are not sufficient to meet all of the state's needs?
- System & Campus Missions and Governance
  - How does the state recognize or encourage systems and/or campuses to have explicit missions to serve adult and/or non-traditional learners?
  - How has the state placed adult-learning-focused programs and institutions within the governance systems that are most effective for serving this population? (Consider the examples of adult education programs or community/technical colleges.)
- Social & Economic Impact
  - How does the state track key social and economic indicators (e.g. income, health, voting) and relate these to educational achievement?
- Evaluation and Assessment
  - How does the state use data systems to tracks adult students moving between institutions, and advancing from one educational milestone to the next?
  - How does the state track, report upon, and benchmark its measures of adult student performance at postsecondary institutions such as retention, graduation, passage rates on licensing exams or other measures of academic achievement?
  - How does the state use national benchmark data to gauge adult student satisfaction with institutional performance? (For example, the "ALFI Assessment Tools" provide such outcomes—See Resources, below)

II. Educational Programs & Academic Policy

- How do state higher education boards support and encourage institutional best practice for adult learners (such as those of CAEL, AHEA, or ACE cited in the Resources section, below); for example:
  - *On Outreach*: Are the programs offered at times, places, and in formats that encourage adult participation?
  - *On Life/Career Planning*: Is advising available to prospective adult students without needing to first enroll in an institution?
  - *On Financing*: Does the state provide legislative authority for deferral of tuition payments at public institutions for students whose employers have tuition assistance programs that reimburse costs only after their courses are completed?
  - *On Assessment of Learning Outcomes*: Does state policy and regulation encourage or proscribe institutions' ability to assess and recognize college-level learning from non-academic experiences?
  - *On Teaching/Learning Process*: Has the state approved and accommodated interdisciplinary, individualized, workplace-based, and accelerated-format degree programs?
  - *On Student Support Systems*: Are institutions encouraged to provide "anytime, anyplace" student services (e.g. in admission, financial aid, bursar's office, registrar's office, and similar functions)?
  - *On Technology*: Is there a common technology infrastructure, or a statewide virtual college/university, that facilitates accessible and efficient e-learning?
  - *On Strategic Partnerships*: Does state policy and regulation encourage or discourage the utilization of external resources such as space, equipment, or instructors from organizations that collaborate with institutions in the delivery of programs?
- Does any public institution act as a "degree-completer" institution (e.g. liberal transfer policies and minimal residency requirements)?
- How does policy support making credits and credentials highly portable among public institutions in the state? What total number and overall percentage of prior college credits (on average) do "receiving" institutions accept from "sending" institutions, based on student transfers?
- How do state policy makers coordinate/align academic and program policies with those of the respective regional accrediting agencies?
- How do state policies have impact upon faculty salary structures, reward systems & workloads support adult learning?
  - Is appropriate recognition given to teaching vs. research?
  - Is there appropriate use of adjunct faculty (who teach as a complement to their full-time professional practice)?

III. Institutional Financing

- How does funding of institutions that serve a predominantly adult population compare to those institutions serving traditional-aged students?
- What specific financial incentives to institutions are targeted at adults?
- How does the state support institutions for remedial educational costs?
- How does the state support institutions for continuing professional education?
- How does the state support institutions for various other forms of 'non-credit' instruction such as adult basic education, adult secondary education, and ESL?

- What is the percentage of matching funds that complement federal appropriations for adult education?
- If the state uses a type of funding that rewards institutional performance, do the rewards tend to encourage or discourage adult recruitment, enrollment, degree completion, and student success?

IV Student Financial Assistance

- What percent of the state's adult learners apply for student financial aid? What percent apply after the expiration of announced financial aid deadlines?
- What is the level of participation of adults in state-based financial aid programs?
- Do state student grant and loan programs accommodate year-round processing of applications for adults whose lives are not set by traditional academic calendars?
- Does the state have any student aid programs targeted specifically at adults?
- Does the state conduct specialized studies of 'independent' student aid applicants (who unlike dependents do not have parental resources for paying education costs)?
- Are part-time students (half-time and less-than-half-time) eligible for the primary merit and need-based programs in the state?
- Does the state provide tax credits to individuals and/or employers for college costs?
- What is the scope of employer assistance to adults in the state?
- Are students attending private and proprietary institutions eligible for state financial aid programs?
- Does the state allow for a differential rate for distance learning, regardless of residency?
- Does the state government provide a tuition assistance benefit for state employees?

V. Interagency Cooperation

- How has the state's higher education system been linked effectively through boards, funding streams, and similar structures to workforce agencies/systems such as Workforce Investment Boards, WIA funds, etc?
- How has the state arranged for collaborative programs between agencies serving adults and postsecondary institutions in such areas as workforce training and literacy?
- How does the state assess views of employers concerning the responsiveness and effectiveness of the state's workforce programs and postsecondary education?
- What is the level of participation of community colleges in adult literacy programs? In Workforce Investment Act programs?
- How has the state assessed the full range of its programmatic resources that can benefit adult students?
    - How has the state assessed funding and resources through its agencies and divisions of: higher education? Student financial assistance? Workforce development? Economic development? Labor? Children & families? Vocational rehabilitation? Social services? Corrections?
    - How has the state assessed programs/funding that are federally supported: Perkins III; TANF; WIA; Even Start; Departments of Education, Labor, Health & Human Services; Housing & Urban Development; others?
    - How often does the state re-assess these resources?
    - How do state agencies outside of the education function account for their impact upon adult learners when they formulate their policies?

- What are the respective roles of the governor's office and the state legislature in shaping the agenda for serving adult college students?

VI. Stakeholder' Involvement

- What is the involvement of various advocacy groups and "third parties" in policy-making and program development for adult learners?
  - Adult learners
  - Employers
  - Trade Groups and/or Professional Associations
  - Local and Regional Economic Development Entities
  - Organized Labor
  - Community-based or Service Organizations

VII. Consumer Information for Prospective Adult Learners

- How do higher education institutions and state agencies cooperate in providing information through community based-organizations, employers, and "one stop" career centers?
- How does the state offer a place of comprehensive information for adult learners (e.g. a website) covering the majority of education providers in the state?
- How does the state higher education agency regularly communicate with adults in other ways (e.g. direct mail brochures) about higher education opportunities?
- How has the state sponsored public service announcements and other marketing efforts aimed at adult populations?
- How has the state taken any special efforts to recruit underserved adult populations—e.g. adults from rural areas, migrants, ethnic and racial minorities)?