

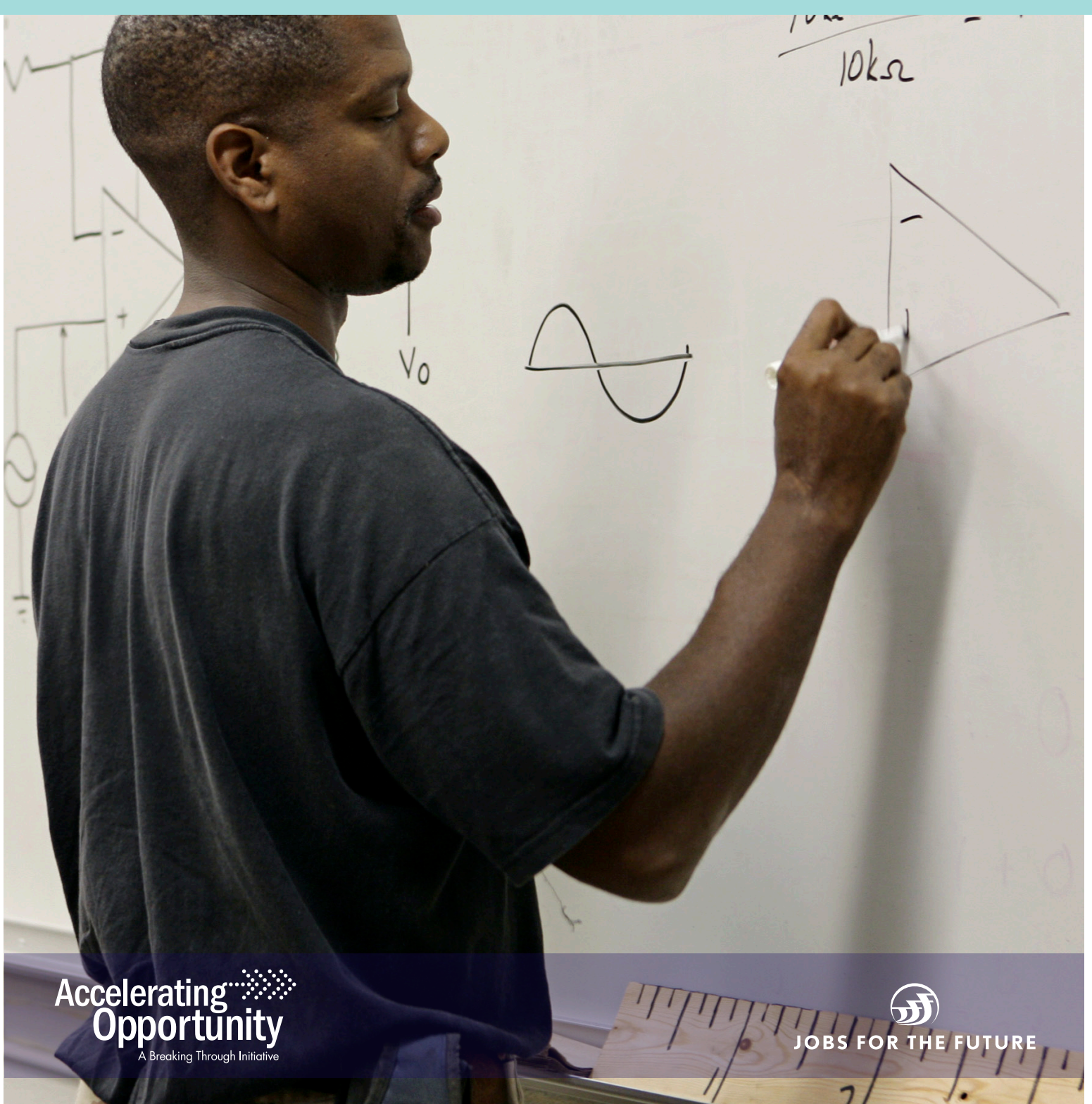
# ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY

## BUILDING INTEGRATED PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

An Introduction to the Accelerating Opportunity Initiative

By Rachel Pleasants

August 2011







## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

JOBS FOR THE FUTURE identifies, develops, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In more than 200 communities across 43 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers.



ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY seeks to fundamentally change the way Adult Basic Education is delivered in 11 states and to ensure that those states' policies encourage dramatically improved student outcomes in terms of completing credentials of value in the labor market.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This paper was developed to provide the field with a deeper understanding of the ambitious goals of *Accelerating Opportunity*. This groundbreaking initiative has the potential to catalyze a national movement of states, colleges, workforce investment boards, and other stakeholders committed to developing integrated pathways for low-skilled adults. Our goal is to spur increased interest and investment in enabling more adults to earn meaningful postsecondary credentials.

*Building Integrated Pathways to Sustainable Careers* was developed with insight and guidance from the *Accelerating Opportunity* team at Jobs for the Future, including Maria Flynn, Barbara Endel, and Randall Wilson. Special thanks to Gloria Mwase and Monique Sheen for developing some of the initial content for this paper. Thanks also to our communication team: Steven Baker, Marc Miller, Jean-Pierre LeGuillou, and Rochelle Hickey.

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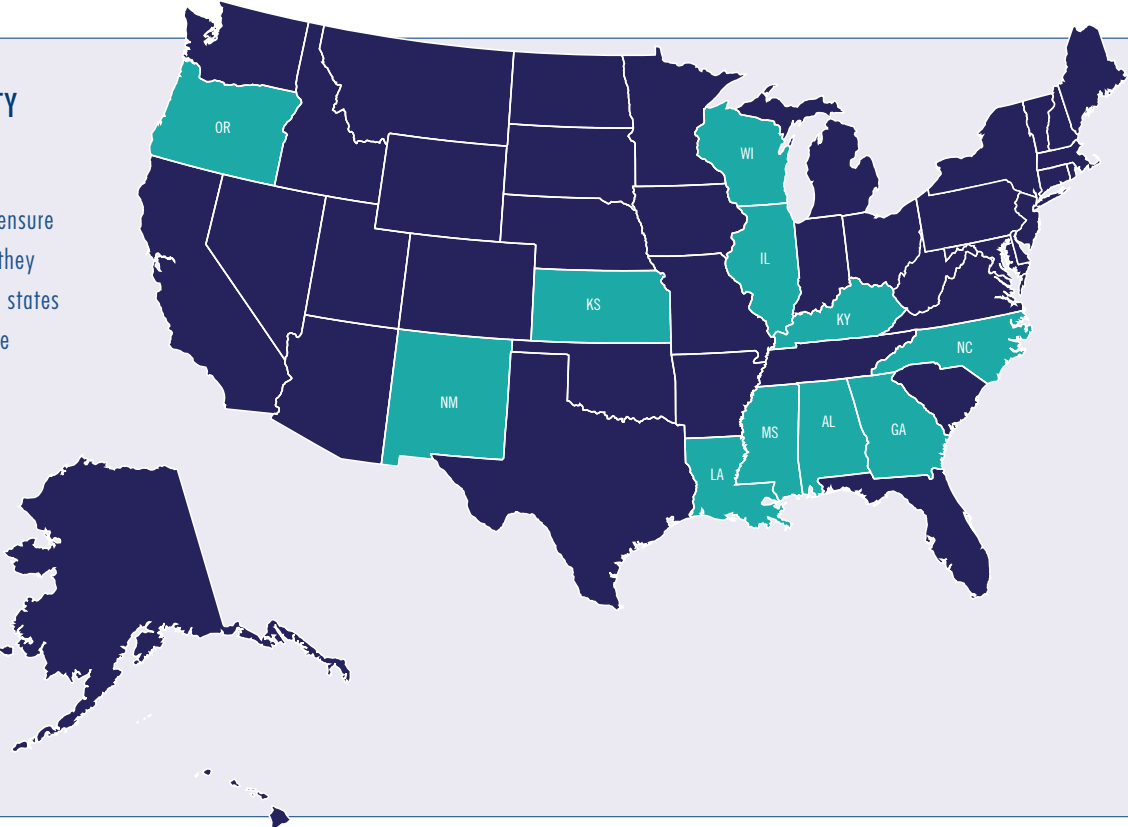


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### ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY DESIGN STATES

*Accelerating Opportunity* seeks to ensure that more workers have the skills they need for today's good jobs. Eleven states received grants to participate in the initiative's design phase.



# THE ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY VISION

The *Accelerating Opportunity* Initiative focuses on three things: jobs; the economy; and improving opportunities for adults. This initiative aims to drive economic recovery for individuals and communities by helping adults earn the credentials and skills they need to get and succeed in family-sustaining jobs.

The core belief of *Accelerating Opportunity* is that postsecondary credentials are the gateway to family-supporting wages—and that those credentials are critical to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty in America. The four-year initiative represents an unprecedented investment in Adult Basic Education (ABE). It will support the efforts of 11 states to ensure that more adults gain the skills they need for today's good jobs through innovative education that leads to a valuable credential.

*Accelerating Opportunity* seeks to fundamentally change the way Adult Basic Education is delivered and to ensure that state policies encourage dramatically improved results for students in terms of completing credentials of value in the labor market. By addressing policy-based, systemic, and programmatic barriers to student success, *Accelerating Opportunity* will enable many more adults to succeed in their quest for postsecondary credentials.

# OVERVIEW

*Accelerating Opportunity* is managed by Jobs for the Future in partnership with the National College Transition Network, the National Council on Workforce Education, and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Five foundations support the initiative: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations.

The initiative consists of two phases:

- > The design phase began in March 2011. Eleven states (Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, and Wisconsin) have received funding to redesign the pathways between ABE and postsecondary education and training.
- > The three-year implementation phase begins at the end of the design phase, in December 2011. Five design phase states will be selected to receive three years of funding to implement *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways in at least eight colleges, with the goal of improving outcomes for at least 3,600 students per state. Non-funded states will be part of a growing affiliate network of states committed to developing integrated pathways for low-skilled adults. These states will continue to be active participants in peer learning events.



# WHY ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY?

*Accelerating Opportunity* responds to the nation's growing need for improved pathways from Adult Basic Education to credentials of value in the labor market. It builds on promising practices developed in *Breaking Through*, an initiative of Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education, and Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST). *Accelerating Opportunity* will take those proven practices to statewide scale. The size of this initiative—up to a total investment of \$19 million over four years—yields a prime opportunity to rethink the role of Adult Basic Education systems in helping adults develop marketable skills and enter viable career paths.

We know that postsecondary credentials are increasingly essential for economic stability. Unfortunately, we also know that ABE enables only a few low-skilled learners to raise their skill levels significantly or transition to postsecondary training programs. There are numerous barriers to advancement for these adults.

That said, innovative practices emerging in recent years are improving outcomes for ABE students. *Accelerating Opportunity* will take what we have learned and move toward large-scale change.

## A NATIONAL NECESSITY

A postsecondary credential is increasingly essential for securing jobs that pay family-supporting wages. According to recent estimates from the National Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2018 over 60 percent of available jobs will require postsecondary education. Projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show high growth in jobs requiring an Associate's degree, as well as those requiring a postsecondary vocational credential. According to a 2011 report by Wider Opportunities for Women, a single person working full time needs to earn at least \$14 per hour to achieve economic security—which encompasses the costs of housing, food, transportation, health care, and saving something for emergencies and retirement. For those with children, and especially single parents, it becomes essential to earn at least \$20 per hour.

Yet the job opportunities available to those without a high school or postsecondary credential rarely offer such wages. Moreover, many of the postsecondary programs that might lead to family-sustaining careers are out of reach for the 26 million adults without a high school credential or the 93 million adults with low literacy levels.\* They are unprepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and training programs.

The Adult Basic Education system is the primary option for adults like these who need to build their skills, yet the system lacks the capacity to serve more than a fraction of its target population. Of those who do enroll, only a few advance their skills and transition to postsecondary credentialing programs in high-demand fields.

Among the many reasons for these low levels of success, four are critical:

- > **Education programs are profoundly disconnected from one another.** Traditional ABE programs are rarely designed to prepare students for postsecondary education and training. Even when ABE is offered by and at community colleges, these programs tend to operate in near isolation from the rest of a college, with their own funding sources, performance goals, data systems, and reporting requirements. In particular, ABE is often disconnected from the “for credit” side of a college, and students often lack access to basic college services.
- > **Inadequate instructional models.** Traditional ABE programs are linear—they offer an inflexible sequence of courses—and lengthy, with little attention to preparing students for a transition to postsecondary education. In addition, the content of most ABE (and other precollege programs as well) is standardized, with minimal customization to address each student’s specific skill gaps or learning styles. This is especially a problem with adult students, who often sit through courses “teaching” them material they already know.
- > **Supports are lacking.** Adult learners tend to be under intense economic pressure and must balance their educational goals with work and family obligations. All too often, students’ academic progress is derailed by such problems as a lack of child care or transportation or a change in work schedule. Few academic and social supports are available to students in ABE programs, the very students who often need the most support.
- > **Labor market payoffs are limited.** While most adult learners return to education to advance their careers, traditional ABE programs lack work-related content, structures that accommodate working people, and modular credentials that link advances in learning to job payoffs. Programs rarely develop relationships with employers and public workforce systems, and instruction tends to be contextualized around life skills and general work readiness, rather than around the skills needed for work in specific fields. In addition, students often must progress to at least the eighth-grade level before entering a certificate program, further delaying any labor market payoff.

\* The National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that 30 million adults have below basic literacy (defined as no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills), and another 63 million have only basic literacy (defined as able to perform simple and everyday literacy activities).

# BUILDING ON WHAT WORKS

Over the past two decades, a variety of state and national initiatives have led to promising program models for developing career pathways and improving outcomes for ABE students. *Accelerating Opportunity* will build on prior initiatives, taking into consideration three primary lessons learned through them:

- > **Scale matters.** While innovative programs have improved outcomes for small numbers of students, only a very few have shown the potential to expand their models to reach a critical mass of students.
- > **The classroom experience is central.** The classroom is where students connect with faculty and instructors, and the classroom experience ultimately affects students' desire and ability to advance.
- > **Practice + Policy = Impact.** Sustainable change in ABE systems requires not only improving classroom experiences but also simultaneously changing the state and institutional policies and structures that support or impede those improvements.

*Accelerating Opportunity* is committed to using evidence-based models for integrated and accelerated Adult Basic Education. In particular, it builds on strategies developed through two groundbreaking initiatives: *Breaking Through*, an initiative of Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education, and Washington State's Integrating Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST). The evidence from these efforts makes a compelling case for a large-scale expansion of *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways. Scaled up, such pathways could reach large numbers of ABE students and enable them to move into and through credit-level programs to credentials and family-supporting careers.

## NON-NEGOTIABLE PROGRAM ELEMENTS

During the design phase, each *Accelerating Opportunity* state will address a set of non-negotiable elements, each of which is essential to the development of a robust career pathways system:

- > Explicit articulation of two or more educational pathways, linked to career pathways, that begin with ABE or ESL and continue to a one-year college-level certificate and beyond
- > Evidence of strong demand for the selected pathways
- > Acceleration strategies, including contextualized learning and the use of hybrid (online and classroom-based) course designs
- > Evidence-based dual enrollment strategies
- > Comprehensive student supports
- > Pathways culminating in college readiness and marketable, stackable, credit-bearing certificates and/or degrees
- > Partnerships with Workforce Investment Boards and employers
- > The ability to collect longitudinal participant data and track student progress through both ABE and college preparatory/career pathways and into employment

An analysis of the essential elements of the I-BEST initiative and the most promising practices developed by *Breaking Through* colleges led to the development of a set of non-negotiable program elements. All states and colleges participating in *Accelerating Opportunity* are expected to address these elements in their program models and implementation plans (see box, “Non-Negotiable Program Elements” on page 5).

## BREAKING THROUGH

*Breaking Through*, which began with research in 2004, identified specific barriers to success for ABE students and developed strategies to address those issues. The initiative then moved into a demonstration phase in 2006, with 25 colleges across the country committed to using those strategies to improve their programs. The colleges developed and piloted a variety of program models to streamline and strengthen pathways from basic skills to postsecondary credentials. Beginning in 2009, seven *Breaking Through* colleges received funding to scale up successful practices. Emerging data from the scaling-up phase of *Breaking Through* indicate that the colleges’ accelerated and integrated pathway designs are improving student outcomes (see box, “*Breaking Through Evaluation Data*”).

## INTEGRATED BASIC EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING (I-BEST)

In developing *Accelerating Opportunity*, Jobs for the Future drew on the programs developed by *Breaking Through* colleges and also integrated many of the promising practices developed through I-BEST. In 2006, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges adopted a strategic goal: to raise the knowledge and skills of the state’s residents by increasing educational attainment. Washington State began I-BEST with small pilots, then grew the program into a robust, scalable model for integrating basic-skills and work-related training. Multiple studies on the impact of I-BEST, conducted by the Community College Research Center at Teacher’s College, Columbia University, indicated that accelerated, integrated instructional models have positive results for lower-skilled learners. The most recent evaluation, from September 2010, validated earlier findings that I-BEST helps low-skilled students move through college-level work further and faster. I-BEST students were more likely than others to continue into credit-

### BREAKING THROUGH EVALUATION DATA

A 2010 evaluation of *Breaking Through* suggests that participating colleges demonstrate higher retention levels for students in *Breaking Through* programs than for students in comparison groups. Based on an analysis of programs at seven community colleges:

- > 75 percent of students enrolled in *Breaking Through* programs at scaling-up colleges were retained from the first to the second term, compared with about 60 percent reported in studies on term-to-term retention rates for all first-time community college students (full time and part time).
- > Students at several scaling-up colleges were reaching key momentum and transition points, as defined by each campus, at higher rates than those in comparison groups.
- > A number of early indicators pointed to academic gains at higher rates among scaling-up students.

bearing coursework, earn occupational certificates, and make point gains on basic-skills tests. I-BEST students also had a higher probability of persisting into a second year of education (see box, “I-BEST Evaluation Data”).

Other promising innovations have emerged as well, such as contextualized GED pathways at LaGuardia Community College in New York City, the ABE transition program in Jefferson County, Kentucky, and Wisconsin’s RISE initiative. These pilots and demonstrations contribute to a better understanding of what works. Moreover, they suggest that it is time to think about systems change rather than pockets of innovation.

*Accelerating Opportunity* focuses on institutional transformation and policy changes to align programs and funding, as well as to promote and sustain instructional and delivery strategies that streamline and shorten the overall ABE sequence. The initiative aims to ensure that students have access to comprehensive supports. And it promotes strong links between program development and labor market demand—for example, by soliciting input from employers in the design of programs.

## I-BEST EVALUATION DATA

2006-2007 I-BEST participants indicated that these students were far more likely to earn college credits and credentials than their counterparts in regular ABE programs (including GED and ESL programs), according to a 2009 longitudinal study by the Community College Research Center:

- > 61 percent of I-BEST ABE/GED students earned 15 college-level credits by the end of the academic year, compared with 32 percent in regular ABE/GED/ESL programs. Research conducted by David Prince of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical College in 2005 found that achievement of this milestone is a powerful “tipping point” indicator of later success in terms of wage gains and earning a college credential.
- > 26 percent of I-BEST students earned 30 college-level credits, compared with 11 percent in regular programs.
- > 54 percent of I-BEST students earned a certificate, compared with 18 percent of students enrolled in non-I-BEST ABE/GED and workforce courses.
- > According to an evaluation by the Community College Research Center, I-BEST students were three times more likely than ABE students in other workforce programs to earn any college-level credits and nine times more likely to earn a postsecondary credential.

# SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

*Accelerating Opportunity* has ambitious goals for both the number of students it will impact and the policies and procedures that states will develop. But our definition of scale goes beyond increasing the number of students enrolled in integrated pathways: we seek to effect large-scale systems change that ultimately improves the lives of all students enrolled in ABE pathways. The partners and funders are not interested in small programs that cannot be expanded, replicated, or sustained. Rather, *Accelerating Opportunity* aims for high-level redesigns that have the potential to reach many more students and that will last beyond the duration of the initiative.

To create large-scale, sustainable transformations requires a systems-change approach that encompasses both policy and practice and promotes action at multiple levels, ultimately changing the way ABE programs are designed, delivered, and experienced by students. At the state level, policy and funding changes will support and promote *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways. At the college level, the initiative will improve institutional policies and institutional culture—for example, the way ABE faculty are integrated into the college and the way faculty and staff view ABE students. The initiative also will improve instructional practices—ensuring that students have access to innovative curricula and delivery approaches that help them meet their own goals.

## INITIATIVE IMPACT

By the end of the third year of the initiative, at least 3,600 students in each implementation state will have earned at least one marketable, stackable, credit-bearing credential and at least one term of college-level credits (15 for a quarter system or 12 for a semester system). These students will be ready to enroll in further college-level programs *without the need to enroll in developmental education*.

By the end of four years, the initiative will directly reach at least 18,000 students through these achievements:

- > At least eight colleges per state will implement *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways in multiple professional/technical areas. Given the goal of gaining traction statewide, Washington’s experience in scaling up the I-BEST model indicates how important it is to have a “critical mass” of colleges implement a new effort like this.
- > At least 40 percent of each college’s target population will be progressing through pathways to marketable, stackable, credit-bearing credentials.
- > States will have in place policies and financing models to help ensure that effective *Accelerating Opportunity* programs are sustained and expanded to help many more adult learners obtain postsecondary credentials.
- > States will engage other community colleges in a learning network to facilitate their adoption and scale up of *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways.

The overall success of *Accelerating Opportunity* will be measured by the ability and will of states to scale up and sustain the new pathways when the initiative ends. States will need to implement programs at a critical mass of colleges, and they will need to build the capacity of these colleges and their programs to serve large numbers of students.

# THE ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY STRATEGY

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Jobs for the Future, along with the *Accelerating Opportunity* leadership team, has developed a “theory of change” for the initiative to illustrate the path from proposed activities to interim and long-term goals. The theory of change specifies stakeholders and levers, activities and interim outcomes, and long-term goals. It clarifies how the initiative will achieve impact and aids in communicating this information consistently to grantees and other stakeholders. It also informs the learning objectives and research questions of the evaluation.

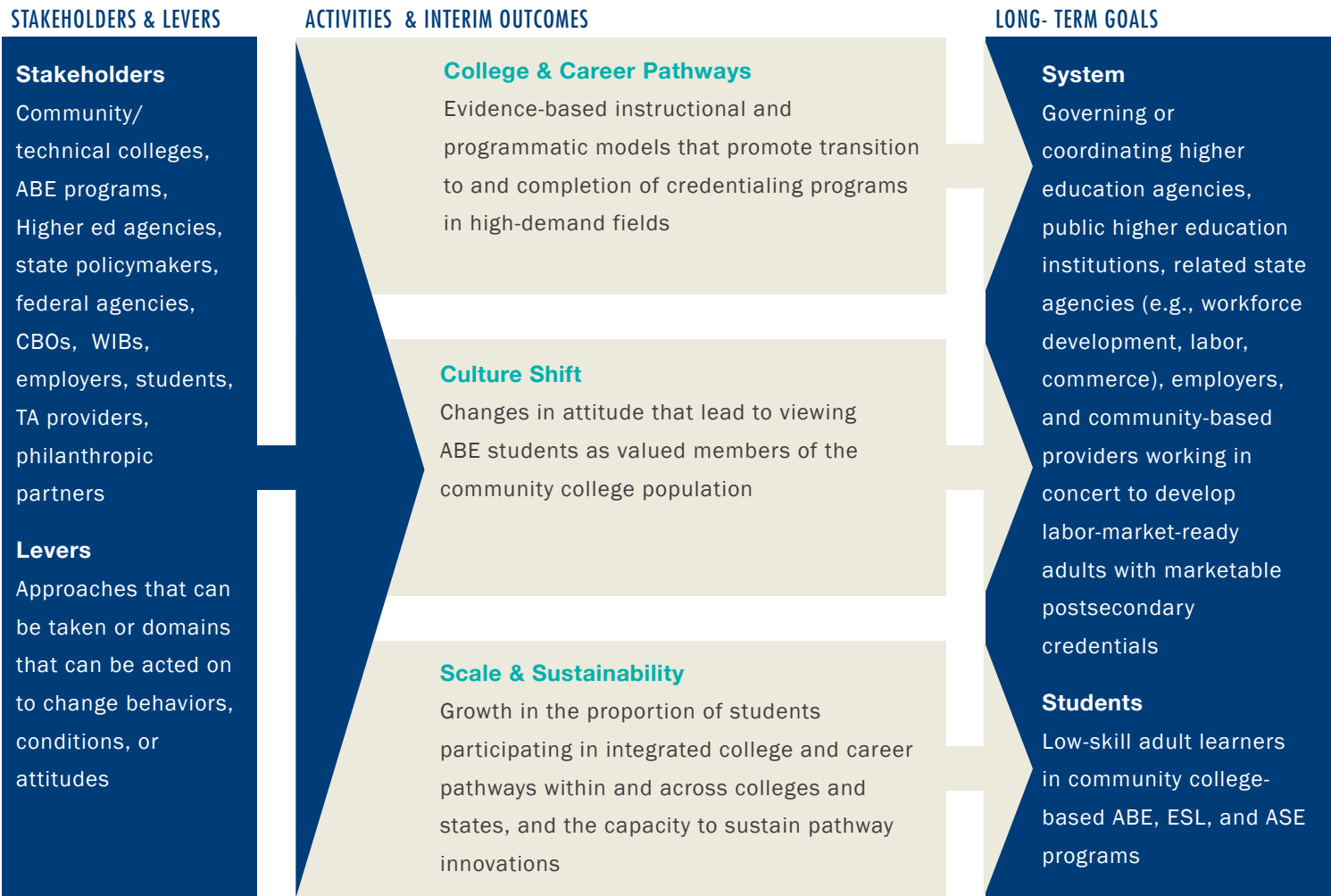
According to the *Accelerating Opportunity* theory of change, the initiative has long-term goals that include both system and student outcomes. At the system level, the long-term goal is deep penetration of the model in multiple colleges that are engaged in continuous, data-driven improvement. System goals also include the development of sustainable funding models. Student outcomes include completion of career pathways, skills and credit accumulation, and improved employment results.

Program stakeholders, including key beneficiaries, supporters, and funders, will employ multiple levers to achieve these outcomes. The primary levers, which are approaches that can be taken or domains that can be acted on to change behaviors, conditions, or attitudes, include:

- > **Program innovation**, including integrated approaches to curriculum and delivery of instruction to ABE students;
- > **Data collection** to support continuous program improvement, including longitudinal, student unit-record level measures;
- > **Policy changes**, such as increasing access to college services for ABE students, changing prerequisites or other entrance requirements for credit-level coursework, altering testing and placement policy, and reorganizing departments to better integrate ABE into the college; and



## ACCELERATING OPPORTUNITY THEORY OF CHANGE—DEFINITIONS



- > **Financing strategies**, including the braiding or repurposing of existing funding sources.

These levers can be applied in three distinct areas, all of which are essential to achieving the overarching goals of the initiative:

- > **College and Career Pathways:** Evidence-based instructional and programmatic models that promote transition to and completion of credentialing programs in high-demand fields;
- > **Culture Shift:** Changes in attitude—among college staff and students, policymakers, and other stakeholders—that lead to viewing ABE students as valued members of the community college population, capable of earning marketable credentials, and worthy of public funding; and

- > **Scale and Sustainability:** Growth in the proportion of students participating in integrated college and career pathways within a set of colleges in multiple states; expansion of pathways to additional colleges and states; and the capacity to sustain pathway innovations, evidenced by viable funding mechanisms and the embedding of innovations in postsecondary systems.

## POLICY AND PRACTICE

Bold programmatic interventions cannot by themselves achieve the goals of *Accelerating Opportunity* at scale and sustain them over time. At the same time, policy efforts alone do not guarantee classroom-level change. As demonstrated by the theory of change, *Accelerating Opportunity* addresses both policy and practice.

**Policy.** Program designers often fashion strategies to circumvent policy barriers; while workarounds can be effective, one goal of *Accelerating Opportunity* is to remove barriers through changes in institutional and state policies. In addition, state policies can encourage the identification, dissemination, and implementation of strategies that improve credential attainment and jobs for our nation’s most underprepared adult learners. Of course, many community colleges seek to support underprepared students, but many also rely on existing approaches to assessment, course sequencing and structure, and instructional methods, largely because funding systems and policies drive these approaches.

Each *Accelerating Opportunity* state will convene a state policy team that dedicates time and effort to the initiative. During the design and implementation phases, *Accelerating Opportunity* coaches will work closely with these teams to identify and address policies that inhibit innovation and to craft new policies that reward the adoption of effective practices. The teams will focus on five policy priority areas: data and analysis; innovation/redesign; aligned expectations; assessment and placement; and finance (see table, “Policy Priorities and Activities” on page 13).

During the design phase of *Accelerating Opportunity*, most policy efforts will focus on the state and system levels. As states move into implementation, they will also tackle institutional policy change to improve credential attainment and build clear pathways for students. Campus-level policies have a profound impact

## THE TARGET POPULATION

*Accelerating Opportunity* seeks to improve education outcomes for low-skilled adults. Specifically, it targets adults who test into Adult Education National Reporting System levels 4, 5, and 6 or English as a Second Language levels 5 or 6. (Adult education is divided into four levels of Adult Basic Education, two levels of Adult Secondary Education, and six levels of ESL.)

With this focus, the initiative has the potential to reach more than half of all ABE enrollees in participating states. While reform of ABE and ESL is needed for students at all levels, starting with those at the sixth-grade level and above will help the initiative build momentum for even broader systems change.

## POLICY PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES FOR STATES AND INSTITUTIONS

### ALIGNING STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ALONG A COMMON FRAMEWORK INCREASES THE ODDS OF ATTAINING IMPACT AND SCALE

<b>DATA AND ANALYSIS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Setting goals and benchmarks for adult learner transitions and tracking individual student progress toward them</li> <li>&gt; Aligning data systems to measure student progress from precollege programs to postsecondary career pathways to employment</li> <li>&gt; Linking data to innovation in order to determine which models best enable adult learners to reach momentum points along with the time required for each</li> </ul>
<b>INNOVATION/REDESIGN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Demonstration grants for accelerated learning options and comprehensive (academic and nonacademic) supports</li> <li>&gt; Incentives to link employers with community college for-credit programs</li> </ul>
<b>ALIGNED EXPECTATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Aligning the standards and curricula of precollege programs to college readiness</li> <li>&gt; Aligning noncredit to credit programs</li> </ul>
<b>ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Dual enrollment for adult education and college programs</li> <li>&gt; Cross-walking assessments for basic skills and college</li> <li>&gt; Making adult education a placement option for some developmental education students</li> </ul>
<b>FINANCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Aligning (“braiding”) funding from various funding streams (e.g., adult education, community college, workforce, employer) to strengthen implementation and outcomes</li> </ul>

on the experiences of students around their learning and support, which will largely dictate success or failure. Even state- or system-level changes may require alterations in institutional policies, structures, and practices.

**Practice.** *Breaking Through* and I-BEST colleges have demonstrated the importance of change at the classroom level. Innovative curricula, such as contextualized lessons, have made learning relevant to students’ long-term goals. Hybrid courses and other flexible delivery methods have helped students balance the demands of school, work, and family. Co-teaching models have provided critical academic support for students in technical programs.

*Accelerating Opportunity* aims to improve students’ overall education experience, from enrollment, to credential/degree completion, to job placement. Students must feel welcome at the college, and the institution must treat them as true college students who have access to the same support services and other amenities available to all students. In general, colleges should make it clear that the ABE population matters to their overarching

goals. In particular, professional development for faculty and other staff and a strong public communications component are key to ensuring that every student has a high-quality learning experience. During the implementation phase, states and colleges will have access to professional development opportunities aimed at faculty, administrators, and support staff. States will also develop capacity-building plans that include ongoing professional development so that more faculty at more colleges are prepared to implement integrated pathway designs.

# INITIATIVE STRUCTURE

*Accelerating Opportunity* begins with a nine-month design phase, followed by a three-year implementation phase.

## THE DESIGN PHASE

Fourteen states received invitations to apply for design grants.\* Each of these states administers Adult Basic Education through its postsecondary system, a governance structure that appears better-suited to developing integrated pathways than having ABE governed by the K-12 system or the Department of Labor.

In spring 2011, eleven states (*see map following the table of contents*) were selected to participate in the design phase. Each state is developing and articulating its vision for the development of *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways at eight or more community colleges. These pathways will align multiple systems, institutions, programs, and stakeholders. The states are also creating multiyear state implementation plans.

To develop a robust implementation plan, the states, in collaboration with *Accelerating Opportunity* coaches, are:

- > Analyzing state labor market trends, with a focus on identifying occupations in the state that pay family-supporting wages and have career advancement ladders starting below the level of a two-year degree;
- > Analyzing baseline student data, including persistence, completion, transition to college, and other interim benchmarks, while ensuring that state and college systems have the capacity to collect and match data from precollege through career pathways and employment;
- > Assessing current instructional practices as well as the capacity of community colleges to implement pathway programs;

\* Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

- > Identifying state and institutional policy barriers and opportunities for developing and promoting policies that better align ABE and postsecondary education toward credential attainment;
- > Developing strategic communications plans to build support for the initiative among a diverse group of stakeholders; and
- > Building the capacity of the state and colleges to collect and use data in preparation for participation in evaluations of the impact of the initiative.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

At the end of the design phase, the design states will be eligible to apply for implementation funding. Four to six states that demonstrate capacity and have a strong implementation plan will receive three-year implementation grants. Each of the selected states will identify at least eight implementation colleges to pilot, expand, and scale up *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways in high-demand sectors.

The colleges will convene pathway planning and implementation teams that include representatives from basic skills, credit-bearing career-technical programs, support services, and administration. Representatives of the college teams will participate in regular meetings of a statewide network to share best practices and what they are learning, address common obstacles, and inform state policy development. Broad participation in a statewide network will also promote the development of many “champions” who are in strong positions to advocate for integrated, accelerated *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways on each campus.

By the end of the implementation phase, each participating college will have fully scaled up its *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways, enrolling at least 40 percent of the target population in them. At least 25 percent of the target population will have earned a marketable credential and at least one term worth of credit (or on track to do so) by the end of the implementation phase.

States will prepare to sustain their programs beyond the implementation phase. To do so, they will identify and adopt innovative policies and financing models for sustaining and expanding effective *Accelerating Opportunity* programs to help many more adults obtain postsecondary credentials. As a first step toward that goal, states will match a portion of their grant funds with either financial or in-kind resources from the start of the implementation phase.

# EVALUATION

JFF, in collaboration with the initiative's funders and national partners, will manage a national third-party evaluation of the impact of *Accelerating Opportunity*. The purpose is to generate evidence for state and federal policymakers, college administrators, funders, and other stakeholders about:

- > The process of implementing integrated college and career pathway designs and taking these designs to scale;
- > Their impact for Adult Basic Education students in college and in the labor market; and
- > Their cost effectiveness and financial sustainability.

The ultimate goal is to inform the field with a comprehensive body of evidence that integrates all components of the research.

The evaluation will examine three key areas:

**Design and Implementation of Integrated Career Pathways.** Documenting the steps necessary to design integrated college and career pathways in community colleges and take them to scale, within and across multiple states and within individual institutions, and monitoring the implementation progress in each participating state, providing feedback through regular formative reports. Documenting thoroughly the pathway designs and their components in each state, noting key variations if relevant. Of particular importance are changes in state policies and administrative practices that facilitated implementation of career pathways.

**Impact on Student Progress and Outcomes.** Determining the impact of integrated college and career pathway designs on student progress and outcomes, including: the completion of key preparatory and academic preparation courses and the acquisition of college-level credits; the completion of career path programs of study, leading to certifications or other credentials; and employment in a related field at family-sustaining wages or on a path leading to such wage levels.

**Cost Effectiveness and Financial Sustainability.** Assessing cost effectiveness and financial sustainability by measuring the full costs of implementing integrated college and career pathway designs and taking them to scale in the states and individual colleges;

determining how these designs were financed; comparing them to the cost and financing methods of traditional community college-based Adult Basic Education programs; establishing whether there is a positive ratio of benefits to costs for these designs; and determining whether the financing can be sustained at scale.

## AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY

*Accelerating Opportunity* seeks to make major improvements to the ways in which Adult Basic Education is governed, funded, and delivered in as many as 11 states. With an emphasis on scale, sustainability, and systems change through policy and practice, the initiative seeks to make a difference for students far beyond its four years. It has the opportunity expand opportunity for adult learners and workers, fuel economic recovery, and help the nation get back to work through new educational pathways that improve the lives of thousands of adult learners across the country.



# APPENDIX 1

## THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

The *Accelerating Opportunity* leadership team brings together funders and national organizations with many years of experience developing and managing large-scale, high-impact initiatives. The team's collective expertise and diversity of perspectives are critical to accomplishing the initiative's ambitious goals.

**The Funder Collaborative:** *Accelerating Opportunity* is an investment of the Bill & Melinda Gates, Joyce, W.K. Kellogg, Kresge, and Open Society foundations. This collaborative funding approach enables more states to participate and directs more funds to states for undertaking the initiative's ambitious work. Funders serve actively on the leadership team, with each having a voice in the development and strategic direction of the work.

This structure contributes to better integration between *Accelerating Opportunity* and related initiatives, such as the Joyce Foundation's *Shifting Gears Initiative*. Since 2006, *Shifting Gears* has helped six Midwest states—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin—reengineer policies governing adult education, workforce development, and postsecondary education in order to support economic growth and expand job opportunities for low-skilled workers. Illinois and Wisconsin will use *Accelerating Opportunity* funding to build on work begun under *Shifting Gears*.

**Partnerships:** *Accelerating Opportunity* is a collaboration among Jobs for the Future, the National College Transition Network, the National Council for Workforce Education, and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. JFF is the managing partner, responsible for the overall initiative. It coordinates the leadership team and oversees a national evaluation and communications. The NCTN, based at World Education, is a specialized technical assistance provider for states and colleges, utilizing its strengths in program development, curriculum redesign, and best practices in instruction. NCWE, a partner in *Breaking Through* since that initiative's inception, is a strategic and design partner. Washington serves as a lead state, drawing upon its success in developing and scaling up I-BEST.

All the partners will provide targeted technical assistance and resources around developing *Accelerating Opportunity* pathways. They will participate in building institutional and state-level support, assessing institutional capacity, and putting in place state-level scale-up strategies.

**Federal Perspective:** Representatives of the U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education serve on the leadership team. This enables the team to align *Accelerating Opportunity* with OVAE's strategic goals around funding, data, and program design, and also promotes integration with OVAE-sponsored initiatives, such as *Policy to Performance* and *Career Pathways*.

## THE LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

The leadership team includes the partner organizations and funders, as well as other experts in the field of adult education pathways.

### **Jobs for the Future**

Maria Flynn, Vice President

Barbara Endel, Program Director

Gloria Mwase, Program Director

### **National College Transition Network**

Silja Kallenbach, Director, U.S. Division, World Education

Ellen Hewett, Director

Cynthia Zafft, Senior Advisor

### **National Council for Workforce Education**

Darlene Miller, Executive Director

### **Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges**

Dixie Simmons, Director of Workforce Education

Louisa Erickson, Program Administrator

### **The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

Steve Patrick, Program Officer

David Goodwin, Senior Officer, Impact Planning & Improvement

Israel Mendoza, Independent Consultant

### **The Joyce Foundation**

Whitney Smith, Program Manager

### **Open Society Foundations**

Mimi Corcoran, Director, Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation

### **Kresge Foundation**

Caroline Altman Smith, Program Officer

**W. K. Kellogg Foundation**

Angelo A. Williams, Program Officer

Kara I. Carlisle, Program Officer

**Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education**

Johan Uvin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Strategic Initiatives

# APPENDIX 2 FOR FURTHER READING

## **Achieving Ambitious Goals:**

### **Case Studies of Scaling-Up Programs for Advancing Low-Skilled Adults**

<http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/resources>

Jobs for the Future, 2011

*Achieving Ambitious Goals* highlights what five *Breaking Through* colleges are doing to not only advance adults' skills and career prospects but also to scale up successful programs across campuses and state systems. By Barbara Endel and Nate Anderson, with Jeremy Kelley.

## **How I-BEST Works:**

### **Findings from a Field Study of Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program**

<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?uid=806>

Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2010

This study examines how 34 community and technical colleges in Washington State are implementing the I-BEST model and how I-BEST programs operate. By John Wachen, Davis Jenkins, and Michelle Van Noy.

## **The Breaking Through Practice Guide**

<http://www.jff.org/publications/education/breaking-through-practice-guide/1059>

Jobs for the Future, 2010

The *Breaking Through Practice Guide* helps practitioners serve adults who have low literacy and math levels and who want to succeed in postsecondary education. The guide highlights innovations from *Breaking Through* community colleges that participated between 2005 and 2009.

### **The Contextualization Toolkit**

[http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/BT\\_toolkit\\_June7.pdf](http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/BT_toolkit_June7.pdf)

Jobs for the Future, 2010

This toolkit is designed to help community colleges and other educators serve low-skilled adults through the use of contextualized learning, an approach that integrates career subject matter with precollege skills development, enabling adult learners to get started more quickly on their chosen career paths.

### **Better Together:**

#### **Realigning Pre-College Skills Development Programs to Achieve Greater Academic Success for Adult Learners**

<http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/BTBetterTogetherUpd2010.pdf>

Jobs for the Future, 2008

How can states help working adults bolster precollege skills and take full advantage of college credit-level career and technical programs? *Better Together* offers examples of a better way to meet this challenge through the alignment of two distinct systems for strengthening precollege skills: adult education and developmental education. By Gloria Cross Mwase.

### **Pushing the Envelope:**

#### **State Policy Innovations in Financing Higher Education for Workers Who Study**

<http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/BTPushingEnvelope.pdf>

Jobs for the Future, 2008

*Pushing the Envelope* profiles 12 states that have amended or created student aid programs to better serve adult students. By Radha Roy Biswas, Vickie Choitz, and Heath Prince.







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